

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

A Publication of the Empire State College Mentoring Institute



EMPIRE STATE
COLLEGE

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Issue 4, Summer 1994

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From the Editors

Lee Herman and Jay Gilbert

Change and Collaboration

This is a time of change within the College; it seems that we must change the processes that have served us for more than two decades. As mentors, we continually experience the conflicting and frustrating pressures set by the College's resource limits and the necessities of serving individual students, meeting enrollment targets, managing workload and (too often neglected) our own learning and growth. Many of us are reexamining and changing how we work; many College procedures, its "marketing" and the mentor role itself have been recently reviewed. Do these movements also mean that we are changing what we are working for, that we are changing the mission of the College?

A remarkable distinction emerges at Mentoring Institute workshops, All College discussions and regional gatherings: We want to change the ways we do our many of our tasks, but we want to preserve the mission of the College, student-centered education, and the profession so well suited to it, mentoring. And in those meetings there is a strong feeling, a hope, that we might be able to change what we must and keep what we're committed to if we work more collaboratively. Consider the following:

- Many faculty have expressed their willingness to provide cross-center tutoring services in their disciplines. A proposal for a structured cross-center mentoring system is currently being amended and revised under the auspices of the Faculty Conference.
- While recognizing that Area-of-Study work continues to be necessary to maintain our registered programs, many faculty have expressed a desire for cross-disciplinary academic collaboration. Different AoS groups have begun to meet together.
- Strong requests are being heard for more and better training for new mentors in ESC methods and culture. The Mentoring Institute has initiated a series of "Faculty Development Learning Contracts," whereby a "newer" faculty member explores a topic or area of ESC interest supported by a more "senior" faculty member. The MI is committed to further develop this approach for as many faculty as wish to participate.
- Several regional faculty meetings have taken place in recent years, with faculty generally appreciating the ability to spend serious and unhurried time focusing on academic and professional issues. Regional meetings can serve as an effective and reasonably low cost method to develop and encourage dialogue, discussion, and resource sharing.

The Mentoring Institute is committed to supporting collaborative professional development as part of the normal, public culture of the College. To accomplish this, the MI must respond to the interests and desires of mentors across the state. We ask, "What do YOU want/need next?" Would more workshops be useful? Should local successes be sent "on the road?" Should mentor-student-graduate symposiums be organized? Should we be working locally or regionally? We need your ideas and suggestions. Speak with your local MI Advisor and the MI Cochairs.

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An Interview with MaryNell Morgan Wayne Ouderkirk, Northeast Center

Mary Neil Morgan came to ESC in September of 1991 after two years as a visiting associate professor of American studies at Skidmore College. Before that, she was a tenured associate professor in political science at Xavier University in New Orleans. She is a full-time mentor at the Saratoga Unit. I was happy that the editors asked me to interview Mary Nell because we have developed a friendship since she came to the College, and I welcomed the opportunity to know her better and to help other colleagues do the same.

WO: You came to ESC after 17 years of teaching at traditional colleges. What was the change to a nontraditional college like?

MNM: In some ways, I have been preparing for this change throughout my career! I have always thought of teaching as a form of mentoring, working closely with students as individuals. I worked for the University Without Walls program at Skidmore, and in my teaching at traditional colleges, I became increasingly interested in interdisciplinary and cross-discipline teaching. Now as a unit mentor at ESC, I do exactly that - I work within my own discipline and across disciplines. Except for the massive volume of paperwork and the tremendous amount of time spent as liaison for students, it has been a somewhat easy transition.

WO: What differences and continuities do you see in your work with students in the two settings?

MNM: I've already spoken of some continuities in terms of cross-disciplinary work. Some of the differences... It is different teaching adult learners. I see that most of my students are about my age, have had a number of years out of high school, often have achieved some level of success either in their profession or personal life or both, and they have a way of relating learning to the experiences they've had. So that's a major difference, the kind of student. And the level of expectation that I have for students now is higher than for students in the traditional college setting. I observed that even in traditional colleges when I was working with returning students and with the students in the UWW program. I still want to give fairly close guidance to students in their learning but at the same time don't want to lecture. I'm also feeling freer with the idea that students have learning that they can share with me. Not that traditional students don't, but I expect it more of the "typical" ESC student. That kind of student should have had something in their life that I will benefit from as well. So I've had the expectation and the experience that I meet students who are engaging for me and sometimes in a similar way that I'm engaging for them.

WO: Would you comment on your transition from a predominantly black institution (Xavier) to predominantly white ones (Skidmore and ESC at Saratoga Springs)?

MNM: I always had some black students in my courses at Skidmore, but since coming to ESC, I can count on two hands the number of African American students I have worked with face-to-face -seven or eight in 2 1/2 years. That has not been a crisis. Yet it is a concern because I want to interact with African Americans to the fullest extent that I can. But at the same time it's important for people of different races to talk about the kind of study content that I talk about, that deals

with race, gender and class. So it's a change that has caused me to evaluate what I'm doing and whether or not I think what I'm doing is worth doing. Am I, should I be helping black students, primarily? Or am I indeed helping black students and white students -black people and white people -by encouraging people to think about and talk about matters that deal with race? My sense is that students who are interested in the topic, even if they are in denial about their own assumptions about race, often feel freer to do some introspection and to talk about what they are thinking and feeling as they encounter materials that are related to race. For me personally it has caused me to value more highly the network of black friends I have nurtured for the last two decades in professional associations. Now I require myself to go to the conferences every year! Sometimes that feels like I'm punishing myself by participating, given my workload at ESC, but I am an active participant in several organizations and an officer of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. But it is so important to me to remain healthy and connected to other African American scholars, there is no way I would not do it. I'm grateful I work with and for people who agree it's OK and important.

WO: You have done extensive scholarly work on the life and work of W .E. B. Du Bois. What are you working on currently?

MNM: Currently I am working on a fairly detailed review of the Pulitzer Prize winning first volume of Du Bois's life written by David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*. It is a very thoroughly researched biography, covering his life from birth to 1919. The second volume will cover from 1919 to Du Bois's death on Aug 27, 1963, the day before the great march on Washington, D.C.

A second thing is an essay, which I hope to publish in *All About Mentoring* and in other places as well, that looks at Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, his first popular publication. This is probably the third of his books, of about 21, depending on how you count them. I have always maintained that Du Bois's life and work is appropriate for study in virtually all of the social sciences and humanities disciplines, and this would include political science, history, economics, psychology, sociology, black studies, women's studies, education, literature. And I recently had the insight-I'll discuss this in the essay -that the whole book is a sorrow song, so it is appropriate for use in music studies! So this essay will be about using Du Bois's book in various kinds of studies.

I'm also revising my own dissertation, which is a look at Du Bois and his concern with women's issues. I titled it "The Souls of Womenfolk in the Political Thought of W .E.B. Du Bois." People at conferences are always interested in it, and now that attention is being brought to Du Bois, particularly by the Lewis biography, I think that it is time for me to get it published.

WO: Perhaps I'm stereotyping, but I would guess that there is not a lot of knowledge of and interest in Du Bois among your Saratoga area students. Are you able to tie your work on Du Bois into your work with students?

MNM: I think your first assumption about lack of knowledge of Du Bois is an accurate one, but once students are introduced to him, their interest is very keen. Because his work can be appropriate for so many disciplines, I find myself in a number of different studies incorporating something by Du Bois. I use his writings in my studies on the African American Political Experience, on African American Political Thought, on Black Women in U.S. Culture, in *The Origin and Nature of Prejudice*, and in African American Autobiography. One student in the Autobiography study used Du Bois's format in examining her own life as a woman. So students do get interested in him once they know something about him. He lived for almost a century, and it was a really magnificent century in the development of economic and political experiences of African Americans and America in general. And many of his thoughts seem prophetic in retrospect and still are instructive to us now.

WO: Many of your colleagues appreciate your willingness to sing and organize informal sing-alongs and performances at faculty retreats and other meetings. Have you always been a performer?

MNM: I have several thoughts about that. As an academic, to also be a performer, in the minds of many people, is quite incongruent, particularly for African American people, given the kind of attitude that the larger society tends to have toward us. We can be listened to as performers but not necessarily listened to as scholars and people with ideas worthy of being listened to, being disseminated and taken note of. I've always been a singer. Growing up, I sang in choirs. But I was

virtually paralyzed by stage fright, so it was such a wrenching experience to sing solo that I mostly sang as a member of a group. Also we used to sing at home -I have four brothers and four sisters and we lived in an extended family household with several generations present, and we used to sing and tell stories together, especially on Sunday evenings. And then every day we'd sing as we did tedious chores around the house. I guess it's a version of work songs, but not in the fields.

It was actually a challenge I set for myself to perform solo publicly, when I moved to Saratoga and discovered Cafe Lena and its open mike night and its kind, encouraging audience. I don't think I could have done this had I attempted it at a place like the Apollo Theater, where a mistake gets you booed off the stage! At Lena's, a mistake is not fatal, and that has allowed me to be more active as a performer, and I use the performing to communicate special meanings. So in introducing songs in a particular way I get to be both a story teller and a singer. Most of the time I can get the audience to experience something similar to what I'm trying to share.

I call music my sanity-keeping activity. I feel a bit depressed when I am not able to do it to the extent that I need. Since becoming a mentor, I am no longer able to be a regular at Lena's open mike night because I'm either working or just too tired. As I change my attitude and habits as a mentor, I'll recapture that important activity.

WO: Is there any connection between your performing and your work as a mentor?

MNM: Yes, there is a connection. When I perform, I make an effort to do songs that have lessons, if you will, in them. When I was a regular at Lena's, I would almost always do a mini-lesson on some topic related to what I was thinking about, or to something in the news, or to a part of a study I was doing with a student -something that connected it to sharing with and stimulating the audience. Also, there is a connection from performing to mentoring: music keeps me fresh and able to do the work of a mentor . I'm one who tries to do everything, but in reality there's no way I can. Part of the appeal of mentoring is that there are so many different things to do - the different tasks, the many different people to deal with. And with the connections between mentoring and singing, all of it feeds on one another.

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Interactions: Out of the Toilet **Lee Herman, Central New York Center**

"I dropped it in the toilet." "You can't show me your paper because you dropped it in the toilet?" "Yes," Bill said, hanging his head a little.

I felt bad for Bill: He was always so busy and now we wouldn't accomplish much academic business. Also, I didn't trust him. Even more, I gloated a little inside. I thought I had him. This wasn't the first time Bill hadn't come through and now he comes up with this excuse. "I dropped it in the toilet" surely beat the "my dog ate it" sort of stuff we used to try in grammar school.

Bill had been a difficult student for me. Now in our second contract, he chronically hovered between academic success and unreadiness. He ran an emergency services program for a community antipoverty agency. Underfunded, understaffed, oversubscribed, his program seemed to be an a chronic state of emergency itself. Skilled and committed to his work, he just didn't seem to have time for college and I was tiring of his spending his time and mine not facing that possibility.

His papers were late; he was not fully prepared for our meetings. His learning was okay, but didn't match the intelligence of his human services work. (Later, I would wonder if I were jealous that he cared more for work than school.) He'd arrive breathlessly, usually late and apologetic and then proclaim that he planned to do better. I'd become irritable and suspicious that he was calculating my good will. I wondered if he felt that way about the people he served.

I wanted to clear the air with Bill -by "catching" him. I wanted his situation at ESC to become unambiguous enough so we could discuss if he were really prepared at this time in his life to be a student here. Now, I thought, the 'toilet' excuse had done it. I doubted he'd worked on it at all, but I decided to play along so that the truth would come out.

"Did you fish it out?" "Yes, but I can't give it to you. It looks awful." "Do you have it? Can you show it to me?" "I do, but I don't want to show it to you." "You wouldn't have to give it me. If you retrieved and brought it here, I guess it's not, uh, soiled, just, you know, wet." "No, no, it's clean, and I dried it with the hair dryer. But I'd really rather not give it to you." "Okay. You could recopy it and leave it here tomorrow morning." "No, I have to start work on this food distribution project."

He's really put himself in a corner, I thought. Now we can have that heart-to-heart. "Well, if you have it and it's dry, you could read it to me." "If you don't mind how it looks, okay."

And from his briefcase, Bill pulled a sheaf of wrinkled legal paper, stained, from top through bottom sheet, with the telltale ovoid. The letters were smudged, but just legible. Bill began to read. It was a good paper! A thoughtful, well-informed discussion of Great Society antipoverty legislation. It was even referenced, as Bill proudly showed me later, in APA style. We had a good talk, once I got over my astonishment.

After that session, I was more relaxed with Bill and he stopped explaining himself to me. We planned appointments with

somewhat flexible starting times. He took incompletes on contracts so that he would have time to think and revise, which he could do perfectly well without my help. Bill never stopped struggling to keep his head above water. But the quality of his academic work steadily improved. He graduated from ESC, eventually got an M.S.W. and continues to help our community.

When his food distribution project was done and I felt unembarrassed enough, I told Bill about my suspicions. I also asked him how the paper got into the toilet.

"I was rushing. And I knew you would come down on me if I didn't have the paper ready. I wanted to check it while I was shaving. I was nervous and knocked it off the counter into the toilet."

I realized that he had felt my doubts about him. We'd been doing a little dance around each other and around the real problem he had with time, which only made it worse. We learned to be more direct with one another and that enabled us to plan his studies to accommodate the fullness of his life. Both of us relaxed, and he began to thrive as a student.

Learning from the toilet? Ridiculous -the more so if you continue to elaborate the possibilities of the image. But it's unlikely, even ridiculous possibilities that at ESC can become fine actualities: students who have failed in school elsewhere become effective learners here; people who are far too busy to go to "regular" college, manage it here. We give them, sometimes against the grain of our authority, the trusting attention they require. I forget sometimes that being an "adult" student doesn't mean being a sophisticated, timely, well-organized academician but, more often, someone who is preoccupied with a rich, complicated life. I need to be more skilled at helping students figure out how to transport that fullness into time for learning.

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Tales of the Mentor **James Robinson, Long Island Center**

PORTIA AT THE PASS

Portia Invictus, education mentor at the Midlothian Regional Center, waits on a rainy afternoon for the arrival of her student, Myra Slatz. Myra, a single parent who is working part-time, arrives late for her appointment, dragging with her a large bundle of books.

Myra: God, you wouldn't believe the expressway. I went around this truck on the right and I thought he was going to kill me.

Portia: Let's see. You were going to write a short description of your experience as a teacher's aide.

Myra: That's right. (Putting bag of books on Portia's desk) I hope I did what you wanted. I got everything the library had on early childhood.

Portia: We won't need all that just yet.

Myra: Well, I hope I can use some of it because it took me a long time to get all this together.

Myra: Listen, before we start, could I ask you how many of these do I have to do? You know if I'm going to get 40 credits this is going to be a lot of writing.

Portia: If we just start with one, maybe you'll get the sense of how to do it. Did you go to the portfolio workshop last night?

Myra: Yes, I thought Mr. Casaubon was wonderful. He had on the most beautiful tie.

Portia: (Irritated) Did you get anything out of what he said?

Myra: (Sighs, produces a list on paper) Well, he told me I could possibly get credit in these areas.

Portia: (Taking the list) Thank you.

Myra: You're welcome. You know, I've been thinking that I might need to go full-time this term. I can't see how I can finish otherwise. Dr. Rabies-- he's the superintendent in the district where I'm getting a job--wants me to finish my degree by August. Do you think I can do that? This is all going so slowly.

Portia: You have to do your field placement before you can get your certification.

Myra: I'm not sure about that. Dr. Rabies had some way I could work as an aide or a substitute or something, and then move into teaching if I had my degree.

Portia: (Staring incredulously at Myra) You can't teach without your degree. You can't get your degree without your placement.

Myra: (Triumphantly) Well, then I need a placement this term so I can get finished on time.

Portia: You can't do a placement until you've finished the courses we outlined in your degree program.

Myra: But my friend Carmen said her mentor told her that you didn't have to take your courses in any particular order. So why can't I do the placement now?

Portia: You're not ready to do the placement until you finish your education courses.

Myra: I don't see why. You should see some of these girls I work with in the school. They don't know anything. I'm miles ahead of them. I just don't see why I need all this. Dr. Rabies had never heard of that book you made me read.

Portia: (Wearing down) Can we get back to the portfolio essay?

Myra: Sure. You just tell me what to do and I'll do it.

Portia: Okay. (Slowly, controlling her rage) Take the essay out and let's go over it together.

Myra: I'm afraid it's not typed. My friend Carmen was going to type it, but...

Portia: She was sick.

Myra: How did you know? Anyway, here it is. I hope you can read my chicken scratching.

Portia: It's fine. (Reads) What is this word here?

Myra: Oh, that's...let me see..."perception..." no, "cognition," I guess. Yes, "cognition."

Portia: (Putting the essay down) Myra, did you write this yourself, or just copy it out of a book?

Myra: (Indignantly) How could you think I was just using one book? Look at all these I brought with me.

Portia: (Head sinking onto desk) Ohhh.

Myra: Listen, do I really have to write an essay about this? My friend Carmen said she got evaluated in Spanish just by talking to some man.

Portia: (Head on desk) Go away.

Myra: Does this mean we're finished? Do you want me to make another appointment? Maybe I should call; I think that would be better.

SUMMERTIME

It is late spring at the Midlothian Center of Empire State College. Bees are humming in the clover and birds are perched in nearby trees. The local utility cannot guarantee power throughout the afternoon, so the windows are open at Burberry House. Faculty, students and administrators ponder the coming summer through a veil of perspiration.

The View from Darien's Window

As a business mentor, Darien Carnegie receives many requests for help at the Midlothian Center. He has a large number of advisees whose portfolio work he supervises. He also teaches economics and some parts of accounting. During this past year the Center got rid of Malcolm Prang, a part-time mentor who smashed his car into the gate house one night after a wild party. Half the students assigned to Malcolm have been given to Darien; he is responsible for cleaning up their incompleting contracts and doing academic planning with them.

Darien feels he has an immediate problem of overload, but he is just as worried about the long-term consequences of Malcolm Prang's departure. Malcolm covered Business Math and Statistics, and Darien does not. Darien will either have to talk Wanda Flitch, the recently hired business mentor into expanding her areas of coverage to include these topics or teach them himself. A third possibility, finding a tutor for these topics, presents its own problem. Last year Darien hired a local college teacher, Professor Dorp, to teach Statistics, but the five students he referred to him never came back. Professor Dorp has an unlisted home phone number and refuses all calls at his office. Darien would like to have more time to work on his latest article, "Pet Food in the Trans-Saharan Market," but he is not sure he should apply for professional release-time when he's picking up Prang's load. Darien puts more seeds in his window birdfeeder and hopes that the blue jay sitting on the picnic table won't drive away the warbler he saw this morning.

The Flitch Perspective

Wanda Flitch, newly arrived business mentor at the Midlothian Center, sits munching at her watercress and tomato sandwich, trying not to stain her new blouse. She looks at her student roster with amazement, realizing that she has twice as many students working with her as she thought she had. There are many names she doesn't recognize, and she has a feeling she may have lost track of something important. Wanda begins reading an article on consumer behavior that she brought with her from home, but her mind won't stay on the subject. She remembers that Jake Hooley, a police officer who is supposed to see her at two o'clock, left his degree program rationale with her yesterday. She promised to read it for today's meeting, but isn't sure what she's supposed to do with it. She also has been asked to preorient five new students for the next orientation. Wanda is planning to take vacation in July, and isn't sure what she should do with the new students, since she will only have a few weeks to work with them. She hopes none of them will need Statistics, because although she knows the field, she doesn't teach it very well. Wanda notices a dribble of tomato on her front and sighs. She hopes some water will help keep it from staining.

DeBland and the Bee

Center Director Winthrop DeBland looks at the mentor roster in front of him on his desk and then glances out at the trees on the horizon. There is a bee on his desk, he notices. He wonders if it will sting him if he tries to shoo it out the window. Winthrop has a dilemma. There are 12 more business students arriving for the next orientation than he expected. He is afraid that if he assigns them to Wanda Flitch, the students will not stay enrolled. He has looked at Wanda's retention ratio, and although it is just as high as that of other business mentors, Winthrop's intuition tells him something is wrong with these figures.

At the same time, since the unfortunate experience with Malcolm Prang, he is short business staff. He isn't sure that Darien Carnegie will be able to cover Business Math, pick up Prang's students, and serve on the president's newly-formed Task Reduction and Supervision Hardware project. DeBland has assured President Megillah that Darien will be happy to serve, and he hopes Darien will be. He is now wondering if that was a good idea, given the recent slump in Center enrollments. Maybe he shouldn't encourage Darien to take on any more outside tasks. Winthrop decides he will not try to persuade the bee to leave his desk. Rolling up his sleeves, he rolls up a back issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and smashes it.

Hooley Hangs On

Jake Hooley sits in the lobby of Burberry House, waiting for his two o'clock appointment with Professor Flitch. While he waits he has a cup of coffee and counts the number of times the telephone rings at the switchboard before it is answered.

Jake hopes Professor Flitch will have had a chance to read his degree program rationale, and that he can hand in the rest of his portfolio. If she tells him it's OK, he can tell the department that he will have his degree by January. Then all he needs to do is find somebody to teach him Statistics. He hopes it can be Professor Flitch, because he seems to get along with her all right. He'd rather not take Statistics with that weirdo Malcolm Prang. It's funny how much of his program he's having to take by cross-registration. Ms. Flitch keeps telling him that's the only way to get through, but Jake's partner Louis says no. He's got this guy Carnegie who seems to teach everything. Jake doesn't want to hurt anybody's feelings, but maybe he should ask if he can switch his advisor. Jake's stomach starts to hurt. He remembers he's not supposed to have coffee in the afternoon.

The Task

1. Should Darien request release-time for his research? If so, should Winthrop support it?
2. Should Jake switch advisors?
3. Should Wanda bone up on statistics?
4. Should Winthrop be reading the *Chronicle*?
5. What would be the greatest good for the greatest number at the Midlothian Center?

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Mother Learning-A Source of College Credit? **Mary Klinger and Pat Pisaneschi, Genesee Valley Center**

"I haven't really done anything since high school." "I haven't done much since I got married and had kids- you know, just taking care of my family and the house." "Now that my family has grown up, I want to finally do something."

When we hear comments like these from our students, the vast majority female, we question how it is possible not to do anything for years and years. Obviously, the answer is that it is highly improbable that a person hasn't done anything. But whether we believe we have done anything worthwhile is determined largely by the acceptance of society of the worth of our efforts and is typically measured by income. Thus, unpaid work is not considered valuable.

Society is gradually beginning to recognize the importance of child rearing and the responsibility and commitment involved in caring for home and family. The public is being educated to understand that not only do women have an important place outside the home, but also that the choice to stay home and be a full-time parent is a socially acceptable option. Many women who have chosen this option, however, fail to see their efforts as a contribution to society or to their own learning and development. So they arrive at Empire and we sit with these students and discuss what "haven't done anything" means.

"Haven't done anything" can mean learning about parenting. Such learning can include principles of child growth, ways of helping children learn, disciplinary techniques, health care, and a variety of problem-solving and decision-making strategies. Answering children's questions is an amazing learning experience, easily verified by the father who told his child that God is everywhere, in everything around us, even in the air and water--and was then asked whether God was in the water in the toilet bowl!

"Haven't done anything" can mean understanding strategies for home and family management. No car- pooling parent is unaware of the complexities of managing time, people and vehicles. Students have described the dimensions of all kinds of activities, from bread baking to coordinating the building of a house, as part of their essays for credit in these areas.

"Haven't done anything" can mean sewing to stretch a household budget and also extending those basic skills to encompass home decorating or advanced tailoring. One student, requesting credit for basic sewing (only at the insistence of her primary mentor), was asked to bring to the interview a few samples of her work. We proceeded to arouse the curiosity of McCrory's waitresses and other breakfasting patrons as we hung her husband's suit and other samples of her work on the clothes hooks by our booth and proceeded to examine each in turn. After an enjoyable discussion of some of the principles, techniques and skills involved in clothing construction, she was told that there was indeed college- level credit available to her. The student was amazed--and proud. Seeing the recognition of self-worth in a student's eyes is one of the rewards of mentoring.

"Haven't done anything" can mean gaining firsthand knowledge of nutrition principles and food preparation and preservation procedures. Although we've not insisted that students bring in samples of home canned fruit or elaborate desserts, that WOULD assist in evaluation! If you're concerned about the legitimacy of credit in these areas, just examine

the courses listed under home economics in a school such as Indiana State University.

And if you have difficulty labeling the learning gained from breast-feeding and participation in the LaLeche League, "human lactation" has an impeccable academic sound.

"Haven't done anything" can mean developing communication skills. The skills of active listening, reading body language, clarifying, negotiating-these are all skills that an effective parent has learned and used, and the importance of these skills is remarkably consistent with skills needed in the business world. Ask a human resource manager what skills are most important for an employee to possess upon hiring and you will hear terms such as communication skills, problem solving, decision making, the ability to work as part of a team, and time management, to name a few.

Society is beginning to realize the importance of home and family management. For emphasis, some career counselors have begun to recommend using the term "self-employed" on resumes rather than leaving a blank to explain time not in the paid workforce or including the label "homemaker." It is time for women to claim their accomplishments.

As the student and primary mentor continue with the discussion of "haven't done anything," the student begins to see the value of her prior learning. In many cases this learning will be worthy of college credit. Even if it is not, the student begins to see that she has done SOMETHING during all those years and has indeed made worthwhile accomplishments. Self-esteem is a factor in college success, and this process of recognizing mother learning is an important step for our students.

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Teaching Science In The Non-Traditional Institution

Lorna McPherson, Central New York Center

It is generally accepted that there are two parts to education. One part relates to the content of education and the other to process. Most nonscientists would agree that even though the content of a science education might not be of much relevance to them, an understanding of the process would be of value. But is that really true? Is the content of science only of relevance to scientists?

Students studying a science subject fall into several broad groups. A student might be a science "major" or a non-science "major." Science majors generally have a background in the sciences, need a lot of factual information and wish to proceed to a career in the sciences. Non-science majors may study in areas which naturally have an interdisciplinary link with the sciences, may have an interest in a specific topic in the sciences, or may merely be studying a science subject to fulfill graduation requirements. These students tend not to have a background in the sciences.

Students whose disciplines link naturally with a pure science tend to study applications of the sciences to their major and vice versa. Such students could be exemplified by the political science major who studies world hunger or environmental issues. Some nonscience majors have an interest in a specific scientific topic which may not be related to their area of concentration. Common topics of interest include nutrition, human biology and botany. The final group, i.e. those who are merely fulfilling a requirement for graduation and have no interest in any specific topic in the sciences, represent more of a challenge and to them I will devote most of this article. This group could, understandably, include a student such as one in business, who sees no reason why time and credits should be devoted to a science subject rather than, say, accounting.

For the last group I propose a methodology by which the study of science can be integrated into other studies in a truly interdisciplinary manner. One way to do this would be to undertake a self study. The student is asked to make a diary of activities undertaken during the course of a normal day. Activities listed might include having a shower, brushing teeth, having breakfast of coffee (or tea) with toast or cereal, dressing for work, driving to work, having lunch and finally going to the gym. The student would then study the scientific basis of a few of these activities. Let us, as an example, trace the history of a slice of toast.

The toast started as a grain of wheat which became a wheat plant which produced more wheat grains. These were harvested prior to being milled into flour from which the bread is made. Each of the steps listed above can be studied in more detail. These would include:

1. Study of structure of the wheat plant and the agronomic practices by which it is cultivated.
2. Structure of the wheat grain; hard wheat and soft wheat; milling of wheat into whole wheat flour and white flour.
3. Utilization of the by-products of flour production.
4. Uses of wheat, e.g. in bakery products, as a filler or thickening agent, and in composite flours.
5. The role of research institutes, particularly international ones, and of international trade agreements such as GATT in the widespread use of wheat.

6. Bread making and the fermentation process.

(For a student interested in religion we can add a study of the significance of bread in the Bible and mythology.) The student could trace the history of any other activity of the day. The clothes for work might be made out of cotton, wool and silk. The student could trace each of these fabrics from its origin on the plant, on the animal or in the laboratory. The path of the whole meal could be traced through the gut and into the cells of the body. The student who is interested in exercise could study the body and exercise physiology.

The study could be made even more personal. Let us suppose that the student works in a plant where aluminum utensils are made. The mining of bauxite, its purification and conversion into aluminum can be studied. The study of the mining of other metals would complement this. These studies would obtain as the base, an understanding of elementary inorganic chemistry.

The point that I hope that is being made clearly is that the study of science does not have to be an independent activity; it can be integrated into other studies and therefore fit comfortably into any degree program. Two other examples will illustrate the point. Africana studies can include a study of African-American scientists AND of the science for which they are famous. A study of 19th century England can include the study of 19th century English scientists and their works.

These are just a few of the infinite number of ways in which a scientific study can be made to fit comfortably and naturally into any degree program in a manner that gives it relevance to the student while increasing his/her level of scientific literacy.

The level of scientific literacy can also be increased by allowing nonscience majors hands-on practical experiences with the sciences in an environment that is nonthreatening. And in this regard the nature of the office occupied by the science mentor could play an important part. I would like to propose a hybrid between an office and a laboratory. It would be an office inasmuch as it would contain the usual office desk, chairs, telephone and computer (with a VGA monitor and monitor card so that scientific software programs, most of which include color and/or graphics, could be used). Certain additional features would make it like a laboratory. These include:

1. Wall and cupboard space for the display of charts, specimens and models. In other words, the space that a social scientist would devote to shelves for books would be used by the science mentor for this purpose.
2. A large slightly raised desk (and stools) for practical work which does not involve the use of chemicals or gas for heating. Here slides could be viewed under the microscope, plant and animal specimens collected in the field could be examined, simple dissections, e.g. of a fish could be done, and simple physics experiments conducted. For example, a student who is studying photography could come into this room and set up a simple experiment to see the focusing of light by a convex lens, or look at reflection and refraction of light.

I feel that this practical exposure is important. I will never forget the first time that I arranged for laboratory space at the local high school for a few SUNY-ESC students. They looked at the amoeba under the microscope and I made them calculate the dimensions of the actual organism. Even now I remember how 'blown away' they were by the fact that such a small animal could have its body divided into parts with each part specialized to carry out a specific function. Another student who was studying genetics experienced similar emotions when she was able to see a slide of mitosis in the root tip of the onion.

The study of science has a wonder and magic of its own which should touch each student. These are only some of the ways which this can be achieved. I am sure that other mentors have ideas of their own; I would love to hear them. Finally, I must state that I am aware that studies such as those I have outlined might involve comentoring students at the undergraduate level and this will have implications for how FTM is calculated. But I am sure that this is a problem to which we at SUNY-ESC could find a solution.

ALL ABOUT
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Issue 4, Summer 1994

The Virtue of Solitude **Marc Cirigliano, Genesee Valley Center**

One of the trends in American society that strikes me as a natural enemy and predator of college level study is the rapid erosion of any serious commitment to individual intellectual and spiritual development in favor of a quick and practical education. In fact, as TM becomes more and more the buzzword in the business world, one of the central elements necessary for genuine college level learning, time, becomes a substance of increasing rarity.

As businesses pare back staffing, students are forced to get a college education both more quickly than ever before and in studies that have been deemed more meritorious than various liberal arts curricula because they are thought to be directly related to increased productivity in the workplace. I speak, of course, of the accelerating practice of getting a business degree as quickly as possible. This is not to blame businesses for wanting to succeed and students wanting to keep their jobs. Nor is it an indictment of students engaging in studies and courses in business. But it is an indictment of the climate of desperation such an opinion generates. "Desperation" is, by the way, the proper word to use when we realize that one of the inventors of TM, W. Edwards Demming, characterizes the plight of the unprepared company in his book *Out of the Crisis* as a problem that "will solve itself. The only survivors will be companies with constancy of purpose for quality, productivity and service." Further along this gloomy characterization is the prognosis of Lester Thurow, who in his latest best-seller, *Head to Head*, declares: "...in the twenty-first century, the education and skills of the workforce will end up being the dominant competitive weapon."

The use of such words as "survivors" and "dominant competitive weapon" indicates a level of stress we normally associate with warfare, a desperate and destructive undertaking even for its winners-who usually win because they were quicker than the losers, And, for sure, I have gone through educational planning with numerous students who have an associate degree, work experience and constantly look for reassurance by asking: "Is there any way I can get my bachelor's in two months?"

Yet, there is alternative we can offer our students to the panic that they feel. We may not be able to effect change in their workplace, but we can help shape the process by which they study and learn so that the experience is both theirs and of benefit to them, regardless of their course of study. It is that element of the liberal arts-both traditional and contemporary-that emphasizes the contemplative over the active life. It is that element that gives each of us time to study, think, ponder, and reflect-which is how we genuinely learn and master something, be it algebra or zoology. We call it solitude, of which there is no better explanation than Rainer Maria Rilke's:

The necessary thing is after all but this: solitude, great inner solitude. Going-into-oneself and for hours meeting no one - this one must be able to attain. To be solitary, the way one was solitary as a child, when grown-ups went around involved with things that seemed important and big...And one day one perceives that their occupations are paltry, their professions petrified and no longer linked with living, why not then continue to look like a child upon all as upon something unfamiliar, from out of the depth of one's own world, out of the expanse of one's own solitude... Why want to exchange a child's wise incomprehension for defensiveness and disdain... What goes on in your innermost being is worthy of your whole love...

We should encourage our students to take their time when they study. We should emphasize that each of them take more than a moment to reflect, in their own way, about the subjects at hand -and not simply go through the motion of completing all the exercises, of just finishing the assignment. Above all, we should stress that there is nothing wrong with thinking, feeling and groping beyond what American education seems hell-bent on enshrining: just go through the process and get that piece of paper. Instead of reinforcing their disdain for anything that is not automatic, we should teach them how to savor the moment as a possibility that seems expansive and endless. In this way, maybe we can help them realize that time is not a commodity that is quantifiable, but is an essential part of the dedicated learning experience .

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Individual Grounds of Time

Forest K. Davis, Mentor Emeritus, Binghamton

Is time linear? Mostly, we have thought so. It gave rise to history conceptualized in a line which, if not quite straight, at least moved directionally and connectedly from-say- Greek times to Roman to early and late medieval, Renaissance, and so to modern times, so-called. Dialectical views accentuated variations in direction, introducing also nonlinear connectedness, a curious interdependence of periods on each other, resulting in a zigzag pattern of history. That is, Greek times were conceived as being the start of an inevitable configuration, giving rise to a succeeding great center of cultural achievement, Roman civilization. Hegel might speak of these as "opposites," meaning perhaps that it was convenient to consider them as connected, but separate and distinctive entities, giving rise in the course of time to Germanic civilization, in his view the summit of European culture, and to imagine that there was not only an inevitability about the progression but also a loss of identity of the first two centers of culture, Greek and Roman, in the identity of the third, Germanic center. How does this progression come about? We do not know. There is something compelling in the dialectic of history which makes the movement inevitable. Civilization just behaves in this way.

Hegel died in 1831. Bismarck had not yet established the Teutonic power, nor Wagner the Teutonic myth. Yet Hegel's philosophy of history (his pattern of how history worked) provided for what happened in Germany and Europe for the next 100-150 years. Hegel was one of the great systematizers of his time; we have skipped the internal intricacies of his pattern; there was a mechanism by which the thesis- antithesis-synthesis movement worked. Never mind that now. What we are after is the implied nature of time in that system. It was, so to speak, a zigzag pattern. Alongside this, the linear pattern has been commonly applicable in general contexts throughout the entire period.

A new pattern of time may now be coming over the horizon. Call it an individualistic pattern for the moment. It implies a consequence of our pluralistic culture: individuals may have in small ways unique views of time and its contents, which is to say, in small ways unique philosophies of history. We repeat "in small ways" because of the problem of solipsism which one would like to avoid; we will return to this in a bit. Some implications of this view are: data of the universe available for systematizing are infinite in number; selectivity patterns are individually grounded; they may be roughly parallel, though this is not required or significant in itself; they may center around quite different foci and encompass quite different fields of interest and data; epistemological methodologies may properly differ among us, and would lead to different patterns and pattern contents.

Notice that solipsism, if it is allowed to exist, makes it not possible for different people to know the same things.

There was a philosophy like this once. Leibniz got into a lot of trouble on account of it. One would prefer to avoid it. If several persons approach a cliff and jump off in succession we would all expect them to land at the foot of the cliff somewhat the worse for wear. Certain data are, therefore, reliably held in common among individuals. It will be best if we allow for this. Individuals may, therefore, hold certain types of data in common, which is to say that certain external data are reliably out there. There is a world external to individuals which is so to speak in the hardware category, as distinct from software.

Differences among individually perceived or constructed systems follow upon selectivity differences rather than compositional differences. If we deal individually with data of certain hard kinds in different systems the behavior of those hard data will appear on their own terms in those different systems. Some persons, of course, do insist on falling off cliffs. There is not much to be done about this. They can falloff cliffs if they like. We may hope that they do not, but in the end the system is after all individually selected and constructed. It allows for individual choice.

What manner of time pattern is allowed for in this approach? The implication is that some variation is provided for in individual systems. Different persons may perceive time differently, or perceive time differently under different circumstances. There may not even be a pattern or patterns. There may be a great number of patterns. If individualism is sufficiently extended-if it is truly individual the patterns could roughly approximate the (numbers of) individuals. Probably not, due to common elements among patterns, but to be sure one would have to go and see.

Some quite practical problems obtain from all this. The probability is that different students perceive time in different ways. They may handle time in different ways. They may fit their responsibilities into available time in different ways. Linear time in and of itself may appear to offer possible solutions to the problem of getting work done. Presumably a college institution will mostly be found working on a linear pattern. If students do not manage to fit this pattern for work purposes they may find themselves "behind" in getting work done. In its turn, the college institution can probably make some adjustments by allowing flexibility in special cases. The likelihood is that it does some of this routinely, though it may not bother to explain it in philosophical terms.

Students may not bother to explain their situations in philosophical terms either. It all may boil down to a routine adjustment on faculty and student parts. That is part of the pluralistic consequence. We do what comes naturally and it works all right without bothering our heads about the theory. There may be some value, however, in experimenting with the theory in case unusual instances arise which are unexpected and do not fit into the practical format by which we go mostly. If that should happen, even occasionally, it may be helpful to hold the theoretical possibilities in mind.

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El Salvador, March 1994

Chris Rounds, Central New York Center

Bumping down the dirt road I think, "Boy, this could be any of a dozen Mexican pueblos." Houses surrounded by a hedge of prickly bushes and cacti...laced with a couple of strands of barbed wire designed to keep the pigs and chickens in rather than to keep anybody in particular out. Yards of pounded earth with carefully tended flowers and fruit trees. Chickens wandering around picking apathetically, skinny dogs lying in the shade. Houses constructed mostly of sticks and mud with thatched or corrugated roofs. Dust everywhere, and people eyeing us from the interior.

I've been in lots of villages like this one, but never under these circumstances. Here I am in a van loaded with gringos, accompanied by a couple of local important people. We're here representing the Binghamton/EI Charcon Sister Cities Project...and we are clearly welcome! As we make our way slowly down the road, one of our sponsors shouts to people in the houses to come to the meeting house to welcome us. Boys in shorts run along behind in the dust, and jump on the back bumper, smiling and pushing each other off. And people do come out, to shake hands and wish us welcome. They bring their kids, lots of kids, and in no time at all there must be a hundred people gathered in the shade of a huge tree with an FMLN banner painted on it. Definitely different! In Mexico I had always slunk into town as a nobody...often walking in from the nearest highway, or riding in a rickety local bus. Older people in the streets usually offered the traditional 'buenos dias,' but never more than that, and kids were more apt to hide behind their mother's skirts or dart into the house than smile and say hello.

As the members of our group settle in to exchange speeches and gifts, I wander off to see the sights and get a sense of the place. Up the road a couple of hundred yards, a family is in the midst of house building. They have constructed a frame of poles...about 12 feet square with walls perhaps five feet high. Within the framework, thinner sticks form a lattice with squares of perhaps ten inches. Within this frame, a mud wall gradually rises, fed from a pool of mud that is being carefully worked by one of two men engaged in the project. A boy lugs plastic jugs of water up from the creek, while his mother prepares lunch over a fire built on a table made of sticks and packed with a 3 inch layer of hardened mud. I ask how long construction will take, and am told about ten days. They say the time consuming problem is finding the wood for framing, which had to be carried from the hills far up the valley. People cook with wood, and there are no substantial woods anywhere in sight.

Wandering back toward the center of town, I encounter a woman watching the festivities from behind her hedge. After exchanging smiles and a "good afternoon," I ask if I might enter the patio to talk to her. It turns out that she is one of the original inhabitants of the village, having spent most of her life here. She has raised six children. Her family farms rented land just east of settlement, and she supplements the family's income by making pots. The fields are parched, awaiting the rainy season in May, but rows of brittle corn stalks advancing up the steep, rocky hillside give an inkling of what's to come. The woman returns to the pot she's been shaping in the sparse shade behind the house. She seems amused that I want to take her picture, and cheerfully obliges. She straightens up ever so slightly, looking directly into the camera.

That pose and look remind me of another woman. She was a Zapatista, which is to say that she had fought with Mexico's rural hero, Emiliano Zapata during the Revolution of 1911. She walked with the aid of a stick, squatted in the market all

day selling radishes, and had a quick tongue and wit. She used to use that stick to keep kids out of her hair. She had children and grandchildren in the town, but lived alone and looked after herself. These are strong women. There isn't anything humble or self-effacing about them. In their looks I see a pride and strength that has nothing to do with wealth or power as we are apt to measure them. They are, for me, the epitome of what I find wonderful in Latin America. Their self-sufficiency, their endurance in the face of real adversity... their character are for me keys to an understanding of the other Latin America.

The next day, while observing the elections in nearby Puerto de la Libertad, I meet another stare...this time from the local ARENA candidate for mayor. ARENA was formed by Roberto D'Aubuisson, whose involvement with the death squads of the 1980s turned off even the American embassy. Its candidate is the odds-on favorite to win the presidential race, and this guy heads the local ticket as candidate for mayor. He's leading a group of about two dozen teenagers sporting the red-white-and-blue vests of their party as they saunter through the polling area chanting support for their leader and ignoring the law which prohibits political demonstrations of any kind on election day. The leader exudes power of a traditional and familiar variety. His glare is contemptuous. His barrel chest and powerful arms contrast sharply with the slight and wiry build of the woman in El Charcon.

I'd seen his face before on electoral posters... sporting the tinted glasses favored by the candidates of Mexico's PRI... the party which has ruled that country for more than 50 years. He passes through the polling area like a ship of state, with the crowds parting at his approach and his chanting cadres tumbling along in his wake.

In trying to make sense of my very brief visit to El Salvador, these two images stick in my mind. And I wonder how they might connect. The man from ARENA has won, one more time. The woman from El Charcon, however she voted, if she voted, is hardly likely to enjoy the fruits of this election. Friends who stayed to prepare for and observe the runoff election in April report the pervasive fear on the left that, with the electoral mandate in hand and the international observers safely out of the way, ARENA will revert with a vengeance to its murderous habits only partially hidden during the electoral campaign. Alternatively, I think, ARENA might learn something from the PRI, balancing the threat of midnight reprisals with the promise of jobs and public works for those who cooperate. This is a game it has successfully played for a very long time.

On our last day in El Salvador we hear that the PRI's presidential candidate has been assassinated. This, coupled with the rebellion in Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas earlier in the year, makes me wonder whether the PR's balancing act might finally be showing signs of wear... All of those unmet promises. All of those hard working people simply left behind by an economy and society which place no value on them and offer no place for their children.

I return home hoping that I have done no harm. Fully aware that I have done little, if any, good. The experience heightens my awareness of the fragility of our democratic and civil facade. It is so very difficult for us to remember that elections, absent a history of compromise, moderation and trust, are little more than an elaborate form of street theater. We speak of our elected officials with fine contempt, and share our perceptions that you really can't tell the Democrats from the Republicans without a score card. Yet we act, in the international arena, as if one free election will solve everything. That and a good dose of free market economics.

I'm back to remind you that it is not so.

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Why Study Literature?

Wendy Goulston, Long Island Center

When I ask students to write about what they most value in the literature study they have just completed, they typically say:

- I can now read with more depth.
- I have discovered that literature can lead me to self- knowledge and understanding of other people and other times and cultures. I am more open now and want to learn more about different kinds of people.
- I feel more confident writing analytically.
- I never knew that I could read literature with pleasure and understand below the surface.
- I used to love writing as a child, but then I did badly in school and have not written since. In this contract I found joy in writing for myself again.
- I have learned that novels are crafted; I have anew appreciation of different styles of writing; I notice more in what I read.

These responses begin to suggest reasons for studying literature. Ask yourselves: why is literature on so many degree programs, and why do faculty usually advise students to do a literature study as part of their general learning, whatever their concentration or major?

Many students wish to avoid literature because they had bad experiences in elementary or high school English classes. They learned to fear poetry, Shakespeare, "the greats," perhaps expecting that they would get the wrong answer when asked what something means. Thanks to whoever criticized or embarrassed them for not giving the "right answer," they learned to think of themselves as "not literature types," and turned instead toward "the real world." Yet literature renders and connects our present reality with our past in a way that is accessible, real and pleasurable.

For literature is story telling about what it is like to be human, story telling that has been written down and kept alive because it has spoken so strongly to so many. Shakespeare's plays, enjoyed for centuries by people from the whole gamut of social classes, depended for their success as much on the uneducated worker as the sophisticated aristocrat. Shakespeare's theater survived financially because the plays pleased those who paid a penny to stand as well as those few who could afford to sit. All the audience, like listeners to stories before and since, wanted first and foremost to be entertained.

Word magicians like Shakespeare give us stories and songs that entertain and engross us because they tell us who they and those of their time were, who they are to us now, and who we are. As Robert Goles, a humanist psychiatrist who teaches literature to medical students, quotes one of his wife's high school students as saying: "I don't know how to say what happens when you read a good story; it's not TV and it's not reading the paper. It's not the movies, because you get into them faster, but you're out real fast: you forget what you've seen, because the next flick has come and you're looking at it. With a novel, if the teacher holds you back and makes sure you take things slowly and you get your head connected to what you're reading, then (How do I say it?) the story becomes yours. No, I don't mean 'your story'; I mean you have

imagined what those people look like, and how they speak the words in the book, and how they move around, and so you and the writer are in cahoots... " (64,68 *The Call of Stories*)

It is this slower, more deeply engaging process of entering the human experience that makes literature equally entertaining yet more satisfying than television and most movies to many people. The reader is active, able to imagine her and his version of the characters, clothing what the novel helps them see in the garb of their own imaginations.

All good literature can be read again and again, yielding more meaning each time. In literature people who have thought and felt and lived deeply speak to us from every age. Their words show us what is unchanging in the human experience and what has changed.

We read literature and literature reads us, enabling us to interpret our own reactions to the words as evidence of what we think and feel. Perhaps, for instance, until we read a poem about it, we have barely realized that we are terrified of disrupting the patterns of our lives, of trying something new, even something little. We read T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and are startled to recognize our own repetitive little rituals in his observation, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." Something inside us shifts as we experience how his reliance on the familiarity of the coffee spoons locks Prufrock into passive acceptance of his limited life, so that the thought of not going through the usual coffee ritual confronts him with the question, "Do I dare/Disturb the universe?" We can easily imagine how Prufrock's universe, his sense of the safely familiar, depends on following his usual, superficial activities, so that the thought of doing something different seems ridiculously threatening.

I have been rereading "Prufrock" for years because it speaks to me of ways I, we, avoid the forward movement we long for, and because I still do not fully understand the poem, and keep finding new meaning and pleasure in it. As with all art, there is mystery in the heart of all good literature. The meaning and significance of the most mundane and the most profound things in our lives are after all, beyond all our grasp. We do not expect to wholly understand a poem, play and novel, even after we have studied it for years. Even apparently simple works can be complex and unplumbable, like life, like people, like the reasons we do not do what we know would be good for us. It can be deeply moving, even riveting, to find expressed in literature what one has known or half known and never been able to express. Because good writing shapes joyous and even shattering experience into art, it releases and honors the human spirit, enabling us to see and feel the nitty gritty and the abstract all at once, and often in our gut. In literature we learn what it is to be human, not through theories, but through imagination felt in our bodies and minds, both.

Therefore, if you are majoring in psychology, history, anthropology, social sciences, art, literature explores the same subjects you will pursue in your concentration. For novels, poetry and plays are about human development and conflict, set in specific periods; literature illuminates the workings of culture, particularly the tensions and interdependence between the individual and society; literature experiments with design, using the arrangements of words to create its effects. Literature does all this, by using language to create the illusion that while reading we can actually participate in an amazing gamut of experiences. Sometimes literature wryly undermines its own successful illusions, helping us to smile and/or grimace at our feeling, while reading, that the fictional world is real. Literature that draws attention to its own dependence on illusion asks us to recognize our yearnings for fiction. Such literature invites us to acknowledge the degree to which we create our own "real" worlds to fit our wishes and expectations.

Illusion making is fundamental in all walks of life. We all use language to both obscure and communicate the truth. Thus, if you wish to further understand the ways that people make and mask meaning, the way our behavior is always colored by unspoken thoughts and feelings, then the study of literature can illuminate what goes wrong and right and why and how, in friendships, families, jobs, politics. Whether you are in business or human services or education or computers, your sympathies and understanding of experience can be enriched by studying in literature the ways that language works on people. As poet Denise Levertov writes, "The obligation of the writer is: to take personal and active responsibility for his words, whatever they are, and to acknowledge their potential influence on the lives of others... When words penetrate deep into us they change the chemistry of the soul, of the imagination..." (90 "The Poet in the World", in *Woman as Writer*, Webber and Grumman)

It is partly because we communicate with words and other symbols that we can never exactly state any truth. The relationship between a word and what it stands for is not one to one. Words can only ever suggest meaning. What is more,

we now know that we cannot even apprehend objective truth because our perceptual apparatus is necessarily subjective. Yet in our technological world we are often accustomed to think that fiction is the opposite to truth that we call "fact." Literature is thought to deal with the imagination (i.e., "not real true reality") while journalism, history, science deal with true reality (i.e., not imagination). These opposites are false. As physicists are now pointing out, all so called "facts," including scientific facts, are shaped by the lens of the perceiver, and always partial. Our preconceptions, our values, our social institutions, our instruments for perceiving, all determine the extent and limits of what we see and how we interpret it.

Many students say they don't read novels because fiction is not important in the real world. In a literature course they discover that fictional worlds can be extraordinarily acute representations of the "real world" and that how we respond as we read can tell us a great deal about how we respond to people and situations and words, in life. Paradoxically, wondrously, the more concrete and uniquely themselves characters or images are, the more easily we see ourselves in them. The more exactly something is described, the more representational or universal it becomes. Even though the voice of the teller of the story, the narrator (who is not the same as the author), seems to be creating a precise idea of a character or place, we know that character and the whole world of the novel is a kind of illusion; and yet that illusion is the vehicle of our real experience of reading the novel and entering into the kind of experiences that the novel explores, experiences that might open the door to understanding people with similar experiences. And what is more, we invest in that fictional world, in the part of it that we know is real because it resonates with our own experience and hearkens to our own questions. That investment and the pleasing tension between unresolved opposite pulls (between fiction and reality, between and within characters, often between different values, and our own mixed response to them) keep us reading. We want to know what will happen, want to continue the satisfaction of our safe position outside the characters' world and the intensity of also sharing what the narrator enables us to enter into with the characters. A good writer plays with these tensions between safety and danger, between fiction and reality, pressures implicit in our connection to the narrator, and in the world she or he seems to create, and in our own everyday experience. It can be illuminating to see the parallels and differences when we compare our responses to narrators in novels with our grasp of interactions with the many narrators in our lives. Studying literature enables us to experience and then study this miracle of our relationship to language and people, and the settings and plots that form lives. Such learning is useful in our personal, family, professional and community lives.

Many students remark that simply having read well-known writers and quotations makes them feel deliciously in-the-know when they hear references to them in interviews, newspapers, cocktail parties. It is a kind of birthright to gain the intellectual and aesthetic heritage that makes us feel comfortable rather than alienated and stupid when someone quotes Shakespeare or refers to James Baldwin or Emily Dickinson. To acquire this heritage and sense of belonging to the world of the educated, you may well want to study the great English and U. S. writers that universities have chosen to regard as "the canon," the works that, until the last 15 years or so, professors have thought all students of literature must know. Then you would choose some of the courses that all students preparing for graduate study in literature will probably want to take. These include writers, works and literary periods such as the fourteenth century and Chaucer, through the Elizabethan poets like Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespeare and other Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists; metaphysical poets like Donne; Milton and the eighteenth century poets, Pope and Dryden, to the rise of the novel at the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen, and then the Bronte sisters, Dickens, George Eliot, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others were writing, to the great writers of our own century: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Yeats, and so on down to fine writers of our own times. For many college literature departments the canon has now expanded to include great writers from many more cultures. A person well educated in literature is expected to be acquainted with fine literature from Russia, India, Czechoslovakia, China and so on, as well as writers from the ethnic diversity of North American.

Students who do not need a thorough background in the canonical literary tradition can more freely choose writings that appeal to them most. Do not be afraid of the English and American classics. Despite their length, most students love the nineteenth century novels, with their powerful love stories and marvelous renderings of family and village power struggles; and anyone who takes the time to study Shakespeare's plays finds they not only discover where countless familiar sayings come from, but they also embrace a whole new world of timeless family and political tensions, vividly, viscerally brought to life. If you do not take whole courses on the great writers, you can always ask to include them amongst your readings in any other literature study. Or, for that matter, they and other plays and novels could be read in non-literature courses. It is illuminating, for instance, and fun, to compare a psychology text's discussion of family

dynamics, father/son problems, or drug addiction with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* or Eugene O'Neil's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Or to study Shakespeare's *Richard III* in an English history or political science course, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in *American History*.

Non-literature majors and those majoring in literature, can also study literature selected according to a broad common theme, rather than a particular writer or genre or period. My students' favorite thematic studies include: Literature and... the Family; Aging, Death and Dying; Creativity; Friendship; Love; Social Problems; Leadership; Religion and Spirituality; Immigration; Afro-American Experience; Women; Children; Mythology; Handicaps. Starting with an extensive bibliography of works bearing on the chosen theme, often novels, poems and/or plays from different periods and different ethnic groups and nationalities, the students choose a number of works to study in depth, often alongside a text from another discipline on the same theme.

Writing reactions to the literature they read, students record their first impressions, go back to study the work some more, and write further on what they observe and how they interpret what they notice. They look for turning points in the novel, for instance, and look carefully at what has changed. They reread sections, often fascinated by what they discover they missed the first time, or interpret differently depending on what they know about what happens later in the novel. They discuss the novel, often with friends and family they have persuaded to read the book. They discover the essential ambiguity of words and of human behavior, the limits and permutations of possible interpretations, the ways words are played with. They discover that the questions they ask lead them to notice different things from what other persons, with their range of questions, ask. They discover there is common ground, and yet each person is able to see something another reader does not see, because each person's unique psyche, social experience, and language associations light up often subtly different parts of the text and its potential meanings. In my view, there is no one right, complete interpretation. If readers can trace where in the text and in personal experience their interpretation comes from, they can legitimately make a case for their reading. Our understandings of a work thus expand through discussion of it with others, and through our own rereadings.

Many professors and critics would agree with my openness to different critical approaches and interpretations; many would disagree. Fierce battles have been waged in English departments past and present, over which writers, which books, what questions, and what answers should be taught and viewed as valid. What one finds worth noticing and discussing in a literary work reveals one's assumptions about what literature and its purposes are. And those assumptions tie in with one's views of society and the nature and value of knowledge generally. One's values and philosophical assumptions, conscious or unconscious, will determine what one has to say about literature, and how it should be studied. Literary theorists and critics argue about and study the assumptions underlying different points of view about what is valid interpretation.

If you take a course in literary theory and criticism, you will probably look at how such assumptions have changed through the ages, each period's critical approaches reflecting the values of those in power in literary or academic circles. Mirroring today's clashes between cultures and ways of thinking, many approaches to literature vie for ascendancy; their names indicate the body of assumptions that lead them to what they pay attention to in literature. There are Marxist approaches, feminist, structuralist, post-structuralist, post-colonial, psychological, historical approaches, and many more. Each school of criticism, when applied to a particular novel, poem, or play, illuminates something about that work of art. I am revealing my own psychology and values in my willingness to accept the partiality and value of the range of literary critical approaches I find interesting. Others will want to argue for the greater validity of one school over another. Certainly in these times there is a plurality of often opposing, often enriching approaches, partly because we now sometimes hear, in academic battles, the voices of women, Blacks and others who have not in the past had the authority to decide what is to be studied and how.

This is not to say anything goes. All literary approaches require rigorous study of the literature, and reasoned, well supported interpretations. They simply ask different questions, and so notice different aspects of the text. A literature essay can analyze any aspect of a literary work and illuminate something about the work that a different essay, asking different questions, would not explore or reveal. What is important is that you choose an essay question that takes you back to the literature to look more closely and understand more fully, what interests you about the work. The questions you find most interesting will suggest to you the schools of criticism whose assumptions you are most likely to share.

Studying literature, one goes much further than one's first impressions, one's opening questions, one's initial journey into the imaginary, yet real world of the work. Let us not, however, underestimate the pleasure and surprise that that first contact with the text offers. If there is something that "hooks" us in the work of literature (even when the hook is irritation, especially when the hook is the lure of beauty and illumination), if we go on reading, it is because the child and the adult in us love to play with words, and escape from life by luxuriating in a representation of it. However seriously we later study the work's language and meanings, our study will always be tinged with the initial and deepening joy of the sharp feelings and thoughts of a first reading. Arnold Adoff's little poem will show what I mean:

Chocolate

Chocolate

love

want

marry

of your

brown

i

you so

i

to

you
and live

forever

in the

flavor

In what other academic discipline can one's mouth water as one seeks to understand how these specific words, arranged in this particular way, with their particular sounds and associations, can evoke the bliss of a young old chocolate lover?

Note: This essay was written for a book being edited by Ed Saueracker and Jane Shipton, *An Introduction to the Disciplines*. Many other ESC mentors have written pieces introducing their fields. I am still working on the manuscript and would welcome comments and suggestions.

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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MI News

Chris Rounds has accepted the position of MI cochair, effective July, 1994. He will replace Lee Herman and join Jay Gilbert.

"My hopes for my role in the Mentoring Institute can be summed up pretty simply," says Chris. "My role model is Charles Osgood, who replaced Charles Kuralt on Sunday Morning this spring... Ideally, you won't even notice the change! Miriam, Lee and Jay have established a style and tone in everything the MI has done that I can only hope to continue."

"In its first couple of years of operation, the MI co-chairs have worked extraordinarily hard... they've been everywhere and done everything. To be quite honest, I'd like to see that change! As the organization matures a bit, I hope the MI emerges as a clearinghouse and a place to share ideas and opportunities... I hope Jay and I can work to get more people involved in every aspect of the Institute's activities. Without the extraordinary commitment of Miriam and Lee, the MI could not have achieved what it already has. It's time, now, to share the burdens and rewards, so that the MI can continue to play its role in sustaining mentoring."