All About Mentoring

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Experiential Learning: Are We Really Committed?

Experiential learning has been central to the academic philosophy of Empire State College and the assessment of prior learning (PLA) has been key to that educational orientation.

The commitment to PLA has multiple origins.

The first is practical; it's about access. Colleges become more accessible to adult learners to the extent to which they recognize that students deserve credit for what they have learned outside of the academy. Students are welcomed not as naïve beginners, but as those who deserve credit – academic credit – for what they already know. This credit makes a student's college stay shorter and his/her college degree more attainable. Equally practical, offering credit for experiential learning helps colleges market themselves and prosper.

But this practical dimension is intimately connected to a deeper epistemological principle: that adults are already experts in myriad realms of knowledge. That is, PLA legitimizes an expertise whose source is not in the university but in the home, the community and in the workplace. PLA is inherently destabilizing. Through its acceptance, the university loses its monopoly on both the definition and the sources of knowledge. But in so doing, the university gains an opportunity to wonder about just what applied and theoretical knowledge are.

Finally, these practical and epistemological dimensions are grounded in a broader "call," a demand for greater social justice. Prior learning assessment reflects a commitment to making the university more diverse, more fair, more democratic. With PLA, the university extends authority to students: to the important learning people have acquired in their lives and to ways and topics of learning, both known and still unknown. This political dimension is at the very heart of our college and of hundreds of adult-friendly institutions that have challenged the basic assumptions of the conventional university system.

There is no doubt that the evaluation of prior experiential learning has made a powerful contribution to what is, in effect, a worldwide educational-social movement. Especially at a time of standardization, of obsessive testing, and of a clamor for perfect lists of what every student at every educational level must know – at a time when anything "different" is vulnerable and controlling how and what students learn is the norm – we need to honor and act on our commitment to the inherently critical nature of PLA.

But in thinking about this commitment, we are pushed to confront a more basic question: Are we *really* committed to experiential learning? First, are we really committed to *prior* experiential learning? Second, do we really use it well in *current* student learning? And finally, do we sufficiently recognize experiential learning among ourselves?

First, what assumptions do we make about learning itself when we ask a student to describe and document his/her experiential learning or are called upon to evaluate that learning? Even in the system of PLA that we have – one that *frees* us from the safer rigidities of a course-match model – have we internalized a set of course outlines to which we

expect a student's learning to fit? For example, can we imagine that as a result of reflection on family, community, or work life, a student could have gained important ideas, skills and a repertoire of information, some of which might even be unknown to us? Do we believe that a student can demonstrate meaningful academic learning based on experience without support of the book lists or knowledge of the key writers that guide conventional study of a topic? And what if "the topic" is one whose form or content is not yet on any published list? Do we take that experiential learning seriously?

Second, even if we were to strengthen our PLA-related activities, have we so equated experiential learning with *prior* learning that we have lost the richness of what experiential learning can bring to an adult student's *new* studies? Do we, for example, take for granted that what our students need is the kind of learning that *distances* them from their time on the job, from their daily family lives, and from their work in the community? And, even if we assume that it is knowledge of concepts that our students lack, what tacit judgments do we make when we construct a contract's learning activities around helping them take in and grapple with these concepts? Do any of these activities have an experiential base? If not, have we, perhaps unwittingly, perpetuated the gulf between the supposed vagueness of what we might learn from experience and the supposed clarity that comes from more conventional book learning and essay writing? Have we, in effect, given credence to the argument of those who are already suspicious of the academic value of *any* experiential learning, even "prior" experiential learning?

And finally, there is the question of the status of our own mentoring experiences.

Do we, for example, reflect upon and use the vast repository of experiential learning that mentors have gained over more than 30 years to help us do our collective work? Have we taken the time to gather and share what we know and to treat it as a serious body of knowledge that has depth and impressive complexity? And, even if we assume that mentors and professionals have developed imaginative practices and fine-tuned strategies, do we still view that information as only weakly academic, if scholarly at all? How can we take seriously the experiential learning of our students when we often fail to do the same for ourselves?

We need to strengthen our commitment to creative and effective practices of prior learning assessment. But in so doing, we have an important opportunity to open up the larger question of the value we place on the experiential in *all* learning, whether past or present, whether our students' or our own.

The Impact and Meaning of the Globalization of Hollywood

Peggy Tally

Note: Peggy Tally, the 2002 recipient of the Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship, delivered this talk at the All College Conference in March, 2003.

Peggy Tally

As I was thinking about how to prepare a talk for my colleagues on my sociological research on media, I came across a piece in *The New Yorker* by Ian Frazier, titled "Researchers Say." In it, Mr. Frazier wrote the following:

"According to a study just released by scientists at Duke University, life is too hard. Although their findings mainly concern life as experienced by human beings, the study also applies to other animate forms, the scientists claim. Years of tests, experiments, and complex computer simulations now provide solid statistical evidence in support of old folk sayings that described life as 'a vale of sorrows,' 'a woeful trial,' 'a kick in the teeth,' 'not worth living,' and so on. Like much common wisdom, these sayings turn out to contain more than a little truth … Authors of the twelve-hundred page study were hesitant to single out any particular factors responsible for making life tough. A surprise, they say, is that they found so many. Before the study was undertaken, researchers had assumed, by positive logic, that life could not be that bad. As the data accumulated, however, they provided incontrovertible proof that life is actually worse than most living things can stand. Human endurance equals just a tiny fraction of what it should be, given everything it must put up with" (*The New Yorker,* December 9, 2002).

I found this piece by Frazier not only very funny but useful, both as a corrective to overblown theorizing as well as a cautionary note that, at their best, sociological insights often tell us what we already know. What sociological research can

do, and this is a modest goal, is to offer a way of looking at things, a perspective, that might allow individuals to make sense of the events that are happening around them, right now. It can also, if we are open to it, offer data to contradict what we thought was happening.

Today I want to tell you about my current research agenda – really an agenda-in-the-making, since I'm still in the phase of shaping a researchable question. In the course of my remarks I hope you'll get a sense of where my research has been in the past, and some of the reasons for the turn it's taking now. Rather than present conclusive findings from completed research, then, I'll share with you how I'm thinking about a new domain of study for me.

One of the events that I have had an enduring interest in studying is what is sometimes referred to as "the role of the media in our lives." As Todd Gitlin has noted, we commonly refer to "the media" as if this were a singular term instead of a plural term; yet this common grammatical error speaks to an important truth about how we experience "the media." For we often experience media not as disparate acts of cultural engagement, but as a totality, a way of life. We're accustomed to saying we live in "the modern world;" but sometimes we also say we live in "the media world," and oddly, it's almost as if they're the same thing. Every time we stroll through a mall, pass a magazine rack, stand in an elevator that's playing muzac, shower with the radio on, drive down a highway – we are awash in "the media." This is not to mention our nearly constant interactions with video, TV, popular music, computers, and so on. Todd Gitlin has tried to describe the unity at work through the seamless torrent of back to back stories, talk show banter, fragments of ads, soundtracks of musical snippets:

"Even as we click around," he says, "something feels uniform – a relentless pace, a pattern of interruption, a pressure toward unseriousness, a readiness for sensation, an anticipation of the next new thing. What the media largely share is a texture, even if it is maddeningly difficult to describe – real and unreal, present and absent, disposable and essential, distracting and absorbing, sensational and tedious, emotional and numbing" (Gitlin, p. 7).

One of the things it is tempting to do as someone who studies the media, then, is to try and make sense of this torrent by looking at how it functions in our lives. Another way of putting this is to say that the study of media in sociology is often concerned with its effects. Does watching violence on television cause children to act more aggressively? What is the effect on teenage girls of being exposed to images of anorexic or surgically enhanced models?

In my dissertation research, which was an audience study of the television show "thirtysomething," I was trying to understand the ways in which this television show affected its legion of loyal female viewers, some of whom were so bonded to the program that they spoke of it as an extension of their own lives. As you may remember, "thirtysomething" was a television show that came out during a period in American history when women of childbearing age were entering the workforce in record numbers. The show portrayed the struggles of a group of very self-absorbed babyboomers who were trying to balance the often competing demands of work and family. The show did a wonderful job of raising the political issues posed by feminism, and in talking to female viewers, I wanted to see how they used the show to make sense of some of their own struggles. Though it was clear that the show was having some kind of meaningful impact on their lives, it was enormously difficult to identify some cause and effect relationship between the two. For much of what the female viewers whom I interviewed ended up telling me was part of a larger media "buzz" surrounding the so-called "changing roles of women," which was circulating at the time.

So, while I thought I had succeeded in understanding how the female viewers were using the show to voice their own ambivalence about their changing roles, I was not able to grasp the ways these meanings were themselves part of the undertow of "the media" in general. What I ultimately discovered, but didn't have the language to formulate at the time, was that, as Marshall McLuhan told us long ago, "the medium is the message." The women were treating the show "thirtysomething," as a kind of event in their lives. It was not, in other words, simply delivering a particular message to them; nor was it simply a vehicle for them to work out issues in their lives that occurred "elsewhere." Rather, the TV show was **itself** an experience, an event in their lives which occurred on a weekly basis and which actually helped them to reflect, and to entertain themselves and to get a kind of break from exactly the kinds of pressures in their lives that the show was struggling to represent. Gitlin has described the way media functions as this:

"In the presence of media, we may be attentive or inattentive, aroused or deadened, but it is in symbiotic relation to them, their pictures, texts and sounds, in the time we spend with them, the trouble we take to obtain, absorb, repel, and discuss

them, that much of the world happens for us. Media are occasions for experiences – experiences that are themselves the main products, the main transactions, the main 'effects' of media. This is the big story; the rest is details" (Gitlin, p. 10).

Transition

One of the "details" that I have found to be of increasing interest in this larger story is the way in which American media, particularly American films and their ancillary products, have come to dominate world media markets and thus the experiences of a foreign movie-going public. I'm interested in both sides of this – the way that globalization is changing American media, and the way that U.S. media are exporting particular visions of American life to the rest of the world. We have become the global leaders in entertainment, and I am interested in understanding the kinds of experiences that foreign audiences are having as a result of consuming American media products. This seems especially important to me in the aftermath of September 11, as people throughout the world are becoming newly conscious of America's economic, military and political dominance, and react variously, with acceptance, anger and bitterness, or ambivalence.

Just to give you a picture of how widely the world is "reading" America via American film: in 1985, 41 percent of film tickets bought in Western Europe were for Hollywood films. By 1995, the proportion was 75 percent. In addition, 70 percent of the films on European television come from the United States. In fact, if one measures sales in terms of box office receipts, Europe is now considered Hollywood's most valuable territory (Miller, p. 7). In 2002, the four major studios each passed the $1 billion mark in overseas box office sales, and the international arms of Warner Bros. and SONY posted all-time records (*Variety,* January 6-12, 2003, p. 11).

And the market dominance of U.S. films is by no means limited to Europe. Africa is now the largest proportional importer of Hollywood films (Miller, p. 8). In fact, it is now easier to find an African-made film screened in Europe or the United States than it is on home territory. Other countries note the same kind of increasing growth of U.S. films in their markets. And, even with severe restrictions on film imports into China and the thriving Hollywood industry in India, Hollywood is reasonably optimistic about the market potential of these countries. In 1998, the most popular 39 films across the world came from the U.S. Hollywood's proportion of the world market is now double what it was in 1990, while the European film industry is one-ninth of the size it was in 1945. The incredible success of U.S. film since the First World War has become a kind of model for the export of other media products, including music, television, advertising, the Internet and sports (Miller, p. 4). American media in general, and films in particular, now flow from country to country, ignoring national boundaries, and Hollywood has itself become a kind of global cultural capital.

Now for me the dominance of American films in so many countries raises some intriguing questions. Just what is being exported when the products being manufactured and sent abroad for mass consumption are Hollywood films instead of semi-conductors or sneakers? Certainly we are exporting values – but what values? Are such things as "the American way of life," or "romantic individualism" or "capitalist democracy" being exported along with celluloid, celebrity faces and explosive special effects? If so, how are these values being received, reacted to, and negotiated by audiences in other places? Are they embraced aspirationally? Viewed as dystopic warnings? Denounced and rejected? Or creatively mixed with local cultural elements in knowing pastiche?

In my own research I am beginning to explore what genres of films are most popular for foreign audiences, what cultural themes, if any, might emerge from an analysis of these films, and how foreign audiences are making sense of these films – particularly in the context of America's new political, economic and military dominance.

In the rest of this talk, I'll try to give you a sense of how I'm approaching this work. I'll tell you where I sit in some of the theoretical debates in media studies, then briefly outline some of the economic and institutional trends that have led to the globalization of Hollywood, and some consequences of these trends. Then I'll turn to the question of how audiences are experiencing these products, both locally and globally, and tell you how I'm planning to study foreign audience response.

First – the debates in media studies. Foremost among them is the "cultural imperialism" thesis. "Cultural imperialism" is the indictment often leveled against the U.S. culture industries – the idea that the products of global Hollywood are smothering other world cultures under the weight of American ideology. The notion is that media products are ideologically loaded, and send a message or "bullet" to unsuspecting audiences to try and convert them to a belief in the American way of life. This theory of the way media function is part of a longer tradition in media studies, one that offered

a deeply pessimistic view of mass culture in general and Hollywood movies in particular. Writers such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of social theorists focused on the way Hollywood movies offer a kind of escapist entertainment, which panders to our basest instincts. They went so far as to liken it to a kind of extension of the capitalist system in worker's private time. In the 1940s they wrote that:

> What Radway found were women who were active readers who constructed all kinds of dynamic, often liberatory readings of those novels with Fabio on the cover.

"Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. … Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and, therefore. moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from audiences: the product prescribes every reaction … any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided" (in Maltby, 1995). More recently, writers such as Herbert Schiller have also spoken about mass communication as a form of domination, not so much of the worker, as of audiences from other countries, or the "have nots" of the world. In Schiller's view, images of America that are seen across the globe form a kind of extension of American power abroad. What these studies have in common with earlier media studies is the notion that the media have specific messages, carried by their form as well as their content, that induce specific effects in mostly unsuspecting audiences. Oddly enough, studio executives share a similar view, for they believe, or hope, that their products will be received in a certain way, thus, enormous amounts of money are spent on researching audiences to try and get at what they will or won't like. Speaking of this view of the audience as a kind of receptacle for the products of media, Harold Garfinkel, in 1964, coined the phrase, "the cultural dope," who was seen as a mythic figure, one who "produces the stable features of the society by acting in compliance with pre-established and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides" (cited in Miller, p. 172).

Audience research has more recently moved from the direction of seeing texts as offering one dominant theme to a passive public to trying instead to understand how audiences make sense of these cultural products, how they could be said to be active rather than passive. This perspective owes its intellectual lineage to literary theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss and Umberto Eco, who helped to develop models of reading as a process of encoding-decoding, or the idea that the text is an open book whose meaning is interpreted by active readers. These perspectives on the active reader were later picked up by sociologists such as Frank Parkin and Stuart Hall, as well as by gratification or functionalist theorists as Elihu Katz (Miller, 2001, p. 174). In this framework, the reader or viewer, while not creating the media product, is nevertheless active in interpreting it.

My own earlier work on audiences arose within the context of this newer emphasis on the viewer as an active reader of their cultural texts. For example, earlier feminist critiques of film and television often focused on these texts as implicitly and explicitly affirming the patriarchal order. As such, viewers' capacities to create their own meanings was seen as secondary to the misogynistic messages in the texts themselves. Trying to account for the interpretive capacities of readers, however, such writers as Janice Radway undertook to study actual female readers of romance fiction, a genre explicitly directed to women. What she found were women who were active readers who constructed all kinds of dynamic, often liberatory readings of those novels with Fabio on the cover. Other studies by Andrea Press looked at how social class affected female viewership. She found that middle class women had a very different reading of the same television shows than working class women.

When I looked at how women viewers actively read the show "thirtysomething," and used it as a tool for figuring out problematic aspects of their lives, I was part of this shift to audience research. There were two moves here. The first was to see content differently: films and TV weren't singular texts that contained all their meanings – they were a "cultural forum," – they referenced the social world outside. A show like "thirtysomething" was self-consciously trying to tap into the historical and social changes of its viewers' lives. The second move was to see viewers differently – no longer as cultural dopes or "black boxes," but as people who read media actively, who talked about them with friends and

coworkers, who made meanings from TV programs that weren't necessarily the meanings the producers had in mind.

Though the perspective on audience responses, then, allowed me to rehabilitate the common sense notion that audiences are not simply cultural dopes, I still wasn't able to contextualize these responses within the totality or "torrent" or media images overall. I take Gitlin's point seriously that viewers are making meanings not only in reference to the particular show, but to other media constructs as well, forming a kind of circularity in the system of cultural meanings. Secondly, at the time, I paid relatively little attention to the conditions of production of the television show. I downplayed, in other words, the institutional, economic and distributional aspects of media.

In my work now I'm trying to address this gap by paying attention to the economics, technology and institutional politics surrounding cultural production. I've done a lot of reading about how globalization has transformed the way Hollywood films are made and distributed, and I find it helps me understand the pressures that shape the content and messages of films going abroad. Here's what I've found, in brief:

Globalized Hollywood

First, in the 1980s, the overall worldwide demand for films increased at an unprecedented rate, for several reasons: economic growth in areas like Western Europe, the Pacific Rim and Latin America; the end of the Cold War; the commercialization of state broadcasting systems; and the rise of new distribution technologies – especially the VCR. Because of these things – and what some people see as a long pentup demand for entertainment of all types – people across the globe now want to watch many more films than they did before. To capitalize on these conditions, Hollywood entered the age of "globalization."

As a sidebar: the role of the VCR in this is especially intriguing to me – because it indicates how changes in technology get wrapped up in social changes, like the fragmentation of the media audience. The single largest source of revenue for Hollywood overseas is now from home video; people are "programming for themselves" more and more – not just in the U.S. and Europe, but across the globe.

The second big factor is the merger trend. The major Hollywood studios are now part of much larger media corporations, and the new culture of Hollywood, as a business, has become far more directed toward addressing the bottom-line needs of these corporate entities.

The bottom-line mentality, and the foreign viewership together put pressure on the kinds of films that get made. For example, star power comes to trump all other elements that go into a movie – story line, characters, script, etc. A star is more important than all the other material because the media corporation and its foreign financial partners need a known quantity to allay their fears about putting up so much money. Michael Cieply, a writer for the *Wall Street Journal,* explains it this way:

"As the foreign markets became more and more controlling in the 1990s, you realized that in order to pre-sell a movie, in order to convince somebody in Germany or somebody in France that they should put enormous amounts of money on the line to take a share of the risks of the film, that the script was not what mattered. It's very difficult to bet on a script. They *could* bet on a star. And studios began to think the same way. When they started to get half or more than half of their own money back from abroad rather than from the United States, they also shifted into very serious star-oriented thinking" (Cieply, p. 4).

Richard Natale, a media analyst, wryly observes: "A bad movie with Bruce Willis will make more money than a bad movie without Bruce Willis. And a good movie with Bruce Willis will make a lot more money than a good movie without Bruce Willis" (Natale, p. 5).

The same global corporate mentality leads to pressures for making blockbuster, or "high concept" films, that is, films that can be summarized in one sentence, with highly definable features, stars, simple storylines, and lots of visual or special effects. And the films that have performed well in the past are the films that are most likely to be produced in the future. So that is why sequels have become so prevalent, as well as popcorn flicks that rely less on narrative than on action and special effects.

Finally, in this environment there's a pressure for "synergy," where films are expected to make money for other divisions of the parent corporation – book publishing, TV, toys, software, etc. – whether or not they make money at the box office. You should also be able to make a video spin-off from the movie, a video game, a book and then the McDonald's toy. All these features make many movie projects "ultra high budget" pictures, because they now require huge marketing budgets, special effects and stars to sell both domestically and abroad.

So – whether we *like* the products being distributed worldwide or not, it is clear that the new Hollywood has a different relationship to its audience than the Hollywood of previous generations. In short, globalization has meant for Hollywood a new set of pressures and demands:

- A wider, more fragmented audience

- New technologies (e.g., the VCR) that have transformed where and how consumption happens

- Greater pressure for profits

- Foreign investors who recognize some values (e.g., celebrity stars) and not others

- Ownership by big conglomerates who seek "synergy" through cross marketing of toys, books, etc.

And, Hollywood has responded to these pressures and demands by:

- Creating blockbuster, high-concept, star-driven movies that are "synergy" driven

- Seeking success in foreign markets using all the new distribution and marketing avenues open to them

What does this new structure of film production have to do with my evolving research project?

To me, three things follow from my analysis so far: First, for the study of how foreign audiences respond to American films, it's legitimate for me to focus on the blockbuster or high concept film – this is the type of film that Hollywood has coalesced around making, and the kind of film that is being pushed out with the greatest energy and having the deepest penetration in foreign markets. Second, I need a way to see the Hollywood blockbuster as encoding ideas about "America;" for example, America as the paradigmatic modern society, or as the possibility of limitless selftransformation; or as an ideological argument about the inevitability of American power. Some kind of matrix like this must guide my choice of a few films to focus on with foreign audience members, in order to gauge their reading of these ideas from within their own national contexts. Third, because technologies like the VCR shape how people consume films abroad, I need to pay attention to how viewers watch these films not just from their national contexts, but from their domestic contexts as well. In other words, the local and the global interpenetrate.

The idea that "America" as a symbol is encoded in Hollywood films gains weight from the convergence of different kinds of U.S. hegemony – military, economic and cultural. Historian Eric Hobsbawm has described this historical moment as "the global triumph of the United States and its way of life" (cited in Miller, p. 17). Our influence is indeed global compared with other world regimes, and our military and popular culture are part of that influence.

But the notion that this hegemony is a form of "cultural imperialism" imposed by the U.S. on other peoples is more questionable. As the analysis of industry changes shows, Hollywood is no longer a specifically American industry, but is itself part of a larger, trans-national phenomenon, financed by players around the world. Hollywood from this perspective is more a vehicle for global capitalism and its diffuse interests than simply a vehicle for specifically U.S. imperialism.

Indeed, it may be that the foremost thing the industry exports is the 'democracy' of the marketplace – even if this only means having the wider choice about what to spend your time and money watching. American film executive, Rick Sands, the chairman of worldwide distribution for Miramax Films, reflects this belief that market choice and democracy

are linked when he says: "There are a lot of indigenous movies being made and distributed theatrically, and the public votes for what's successful and what's not. You can't force people to see a movie. If they see a Hollywood film, it's because they want to. It's a question of the free marketplace, not cultural imperialism" (in *Hollywood Reporter,* international edition, June 20, 2000, Vol. 363, Issue 29, pS-4).

> *But none of these views – the cultural imperialist view, the free marketplace view, or the notion of a mono-culture – comes close to capturing the complexity of the transactions underway in the foreign consumption of Hollywood films, and the negotiation of ethnic and national identities that viewers engage in when they watch and talk about these films at home.*

Of course, it's not hard to critique this view that the free-market promotes diversity and democracy. Benjamin Barber has pointed out that globally distributed culture is more and more a mono-culture. "With a few global conglomerates controlling what is created, who distributes it, where it is shown, and how it is subsequently licensed for further use, the very idea of a genuinely competitive market in ideas or images disappears and the singular virtue that markets indisputably have over democratic command structures – the virtue of that cohort of values associated with pluralism and variety, contingency and accident, diversity and spontaneity – is vitiated" (Barber, p. 89).

But none of these views – the cultural imperialist view, the free marketplace view, or the notion of a mono-culture – comes close to capturing the complexity of the transactions underway in the foreign consumption of Hollywood films, and the negotiation of ethnic and national identities that viewers engage in when they watch and talk about these films at home. America *as a symbol* looms large in foreign audiences' minds now, for all the reasons I have mentioned. Watching Hollywood films, audiences may see this symbolic "America" as the source of the narratives even if the actual inputs are more diffuse.

The following quote from a 12-year old Palestinian boy, Rifat Jabarin, captures the kinds of negotiations of national and personal identity I think are interesting. Rifat says:

"I like the Americans. I know there was an attack … I watched on Al Jazaeera. I cannot forget what I saw – an airplane hitting the tower, then fire, then someone flying through the air, and then the building falling down … When America supports us I like them. When Colin Powell came here he saw Arafat and the problems we are living in. He said something about a Palestinian state – and then he did nothing. It's a beautiful country. I see movies on TV. It's a better life there. There is no occupation. I like Michael Jackson. I know someone called 'The Rock.' He's very strong. I know Hulk Hogan. I want to be an architect" (*The New York Times,* July 14, 2002).

This young man is not just ambivalent about America. He appears to distinguish between the political America and the cultural America. He rejects or embraces the political America depending on whether or not 'they support us.' But he embraces the cultural America wholeheartedly and aspirationally – as the source of personal career dreams – *and* as the source of images of strength and might that he finds in our popular culture. I wish I could probe his understanding to find out if those images of strength actually informed his understanding of politics, of violence, its necessity, and so on

This is what I want to do in my research, as I move to identify audience members abroad – in Europe, Latin America and ultimately, I hope, in India and the Middle East – and interview them, in person and electronically, about their readings of America via Hollywood blockbusters. If we are to understand better how to wield power in a more uni-polar world –

democratically and safely I hope – it will be, in part, through a better assessment of how we are engaging the imaginations, fears, resentments and hopes of peoples who see America, in part, at the movies.

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Prospectus for a New University College: Objectives, Process, Structure and Establishment

In February of 1971, a "prospectus" was developed for the establishment of a "new university college" of the State University of New York. Included below are thus some of the initial writings on what was to become Empire State College, a "new, nonresidential University College with an unqualified commitment to test and experiment with new, flexible and individualized modes of learning, including new approaches to delivery of services, residency, certification and transfer." The "Purposes and Goals" of this institution are described below. Thanks to our college historian, Richard Bonnabeau for his ongoing interest and willingness to search the archives for such important historical documentation.

PURPOSES AND GOALS

The new University College at _____, a new commitment to higher education, is to be an institution which transcends constraints of space, place and time. It will represent an expression of faith in a more hopeful future, not yet shaped or perceived, in which higher education can open new paths of learning and fulfillment to every individual within the State of New York. It will be a commitment to the people that the educational process shall serve the variety of individuals of all ages, throughout society, according to their own life styles and educational needs. It will seek to transcend conventional academic structure which imposes required courses, set periods of time, and residential constraints of place upon the individual student. The college will utilize the variety of state resources available to higher education for students of all ages, according to their desires, interests and capacities.

Emphasis on the Learning Process

The University College at _____ will rely on a process, rather than a structure, of education to shape and give it substance as well as purpose. This emphasis will place the central focus upon the individual student learning at his own pace with the guidance and counseling of master teachers.

In serving the educational process, the central research mission of the college will be to investigate and reflect in the education process the ways in which learning happens and understanding occurs, from both a behavioral point of view and a normative one.

Full Use of Resources

This new approach is possible at this time with the rich variety and quality of the resources for education available in the State of New York. The college will bring these resources to students rather than continuing

the more costly method of bringing students to a particular university campus.

The current emphasis in most universities is upon classroom learning. The educational responsibility is borne by the faculty in lectures or seminars. The student is expected to perform within this structure. The University College at _____ will make the educational resources accessible to the student and guide and assist him in achieving an open process of learning. This process will place the responsibility for learning on the student in return for his freedom to pursue his education according to his individual needs and interests.

Some aspects of this educational pattern are not new. An external examination system has existed at the University of London for nearly a hundred years. That system permits the student to use any available resources in preparing for examinations but marshals none for him. Moreover, the resources are not brought together conveniently or efficiently for individual needs. When the student is examined, the likelihood of his failure is great. The new British Open University is attempting to move beyond this and, thus far, appears to have succeeded in its attempt. The new British system, however, is a structured and a relatively closed system of delivery where all media applicable to instruction are balanced within a space/time frame. Although there are some opportunities for flexibility, the disadvantage of that system is that it requires each student to go through the same general structure of learning.

The process of the University College at _____ goes beyond that of the Open University. *It will provide the resources both for structure, if necessary, and for individual creative learning, if desirable.*

An Open Community of Learning

The rate and pace of learning will vary, the substantive content will be open, and the exciting possibility exists for the creative structuring of new substantive areas of study. The faculty will be responsible for ensuring rigor and quality. One of the key elements will be their evaluation of accomplishment, of experimental skills, and of skills derived from the mastery (perhaps privately) of one of the creative or nonverbal arts. Each of these skills can be related to a particular life area of work, and academic credit will be given for such skills. An intelligent person from the ghetto or urban area or isolated community who is currently at a disadvantage in learning the predominant cultural symbol system in our society will not be excluded because he cannot communicate within that symbol system or reflect its cultural expectations. He will learn for his own purposes and at his own pace within a community of his own choosing. The ultimate evaluation of a student's performance will still rest with the faculty. But the student's own needs will shape the process within which the judgment will take place.

Singing Together

Sylvain Nagler and Sarah Springer

We came together as mentor and student, both seeking to learn more about our social conscience. Through coincidence, we learned of our common passion for folk music, especially as it is a vehicle for the expression of our political energy. What follows is our account of the impact the study's final project, compiling a musical CD, had on each of us. My description of the experience is followed by Sarah's.

Sylvain Nagler and Sarah Springer

Sylvain Nagler

I recall with some nostalgia sitting in an undergraduate advanced psychology course being awed once again by one of my very favorite teachers. He would frequently digress from the formal syllabus and engage us in animated discussions about more personally relevant topics, a pattern that, no doubt, contributed to his popularity and which introduced me to an approach that I embrace today with considerable enthusiasm. On this particular occasion, he asked how many of us sitting in the class were considering a career in clinical psychology, and particularly preparing to be trained as psychotherapists. I joined the overwhelming majority of my fellow students and raised my hand. He announced after the count that the survey results had served to confirm his prediction. He then proceeded to challenge us to inquire into the motives that may have shaped our decisions. What emerged was, not surprisingly, a general consensus that our interest in clinical psychology was in no small way fueled by a personally compelling interest we shared to learn more about ourselves. Presumably, the hope was that our clinical psychology studies would not only train us to be psychotherapists but also indulge our wishes for self-exploration.

Sitting with a student and planning a study, I find myself returning to memories of those wonderfully illuminating classroom interludes, now more than 40 years ago. Is there something to be learned from those

discussions that can inform my work with students? Of course, the answer is yes. I share with you a recent encounter with a student, which I believe illustrates the connection that was, for me, such an important topic of conversation in that psychology class – the question of the extent to which our personal needs/wants find their way into decisions affecting our work with patients or, in our case, students. I invite you to substitute your own stories.

For much of my adult life I have struggled with what it means to develop a social conscience. I suspect there are many of you who might make a similar claim. For me, there are many facets to the question. Among the most compelling for me is: How do you go about joining feelings and theory with behavior and praxis? This is not the place to engage in greater detail about the subject. Instead, I propose to inquire into how my own personal struggle with this issue may affect the role I assume in planning learning contracts and working with my students. Given the centrality of the topic to my identity, it ought not be surprising that at times I have taken the occasion to share different aspects of that internal debate with students, sometimes in response to a point they raise, and sometimes as a point of departure to chart a direction for us to pursue. I am wary of my motives at times like this and also sensitive to what I began to learn in that psychology class. I harbor the wish that my decision to extend myself in this way is born out of a pedagogical assessment that the student will benefit. While I recognize it may be quite easy to fool oneself in arriving at such a selfserving conclusion, I remain fairly secure, contending that the feedback typically has been quite positive. On the one hand, students appreciate hearing about the experiences of others, especially their teachers; and, secondly my sharing establishes a precedent for them to follow, a license, if you will, for them to probe and surface their own personal history. Given the strong emphasis I place on inviting students to find ways to join what they are studying with their own personal histories and life circumstances, this encouragement certainly serves that objective.

So, here I am meeting with Sarah. She has been referred to me because of her interest in doing a study on "Developing a Social Conscience." It is a particular treat to have students express an interest in pursuing a subject, which has a strong personal relevance for me. From my perspective, it presents an opportunity to advance my own learning, both by teaching the student and by being taught by her. Sarah has enjoyed considerable success at the college and comes highly recommended. It does not take long for me to feel comfortable with her once we begin a general conversation about what we mean by social justice and what she might wish to learn from the study. Our early discussion turns to talking about heroes and what roles they play in the framing of social values. To my delight, we shared one from the world of folk music – Pete Seeger.

Music for me, particularly political folk music, is a growing passion. I have a rather substantial collection of such music and, like I am sure is the case with many of you, have been inspired by the likes of Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, Sweet Honey and the Rock, Tommy Sands, The Weavers and, of course, my only real hero, Pete Seeger. Most recently, I have developed a hobby of sorts making compilations of such political music, having finally acquired sufficient computer skills to burn my own CDs. It is an exciting and intriguing way for me to search into my personal politics while enjoying the lovely melodies and being stirred by the powerful lyrics that spell out a social justice agenda with which I can easily resonate. I am not a musicologist and can say very little about the music theory and the like. My connection is nearly exclusively visceral – the music makes me feel really good and inspired.

Sarah and I begin working on designing what will be her final college study before graduation. This fact alone makes the study something special, as does her obvious commitment to making it into something personally meaningful. Other than expressing her general interest in the topic, Sarah does not propose any specific learning activities. She leaves that to me. So, I set about the process of designing an Empire State College learning contract. I reflect on my own past readings on the subject matter. I consult with colleagues who might provide additional resources. I search the Internet. These are fairly routine activities for me. In this case, my goal is to provide her with a set of readings that will familiarize her with the classic literature

on moral development in works by Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, and personal accounts of social activism in works by Laurent Daloz and Robert Coles.

> *It is a particular treat to have students express an interest in pursuing a subject, which has a strong personal relevance for me. From my perspective, it presents an opportunity to advance my own learning, both by teaching the student and by being taught by her.*

Whatever Sarah might be able to derive from the readings about the *theories* of moral development and social conscience building, I believe the study would be less successful if it did not in some way get linked to some sort of individual, autobiographical analysis as well. What can Sarah learn about Sarah's social conscience? How does she define it? How did this definition evolve? Where might it take her? In the course of our early conversation, I refer to my own history as one instance for her to examine in considering her own. In telling my story, I hope to encourage her to probe her own. I am aware of the danger in pursuing this approach because it does serve to *lead* the student, to focus her compass in a direction that falls into place for the teacher, but perhaps not necessarily for the student. As noted above, choosing to be trained as a clinical psychologist was not only a route to learn how to help others, but an avenue to learn more about myself. Is there a parallel in my encouraging Sarah to narrow her interests to ones that fit in comfortably with my own?

In the course of a subsequent conversation, I tell Sarah about my new passion for burning CDs, my love of folk music and what it represents, and how it has moved and excited me. I imagine out loud to her what it is like for me to burn a CD that captures some core feelings about matters of social justice and activism. I keep reminding myself to remain conscious of the power and authority I have in this engagement and how easily I can exploit Sarah into doing what I would like to do, were I in her place.

In fact, this dilemma is not really all that different from the one confronting classroom instructors who must also ask themselves whether the materials and assignments they have set in front of their students are not only what they believe are the essential contents of the subject matter but nuanced to integrate their values and the place they would like their students to end up. So at least I am not alone.

With these issues in my mind, I invite Sarah to contemplate undertaking a final project that she might find personally meaningful and informative. How about burning your own CD, Sarah? I now had some direct experience with such a project myself. I share with her how in compiling my favorites, I weighed the relative power of the lyrics and the pull of the melodies. Beyond the aesthetic pleasures I derived, the process of making the selections brought with it a rekindling of personal memories, as I worked to make the connection to the first time I heard the piece or to a particular period or events with which I associated it.

When I share the prospect of undertaking a similar venture with Sarah, she seems quite excited. I lend her several of my collections to provide a model for what I have in mind. I choose not to engage in any personal analysis of the individual selections or the nostalgia that I associate with them. We agree that she will have the freedom to select her own criteria to determine the selections, and that a significant component of her work will be to surface the reasoning that shaped her decisions.

I leave it to Sarah to share her recollections of the project. For me, the activity was a wonderfully rewarding one. As I retrospectively assess the experience, I feel a bit exploitative in that I derived so much pleasure from her project. I wonder whether that can legitimately be a reasonable and justifiable outcome of our professional work. I am reminded of the star athletes who wonder why they are being paid for doing what they so enjoy and which they would gladly do for no compensation save the personal satisfaction.

Sarah's project has emboldened me to continue making such collections and I remain more open to encouraging other students with similar interests to undertake a comparable adventure. Music, for me, is a powerful expression in its poetry and in the force of its melodies, which get you to sing along. I feel extremely fortunate that I had the opportunity to apply it in working with Sarah and I am grateful for having this opportunity to thank her for the partnership.

Sarah Springer

Throughout my studies at Empire State College, I have utilized a variety of instructional approaches. My degree is a Bachelor's of Science in human services with a concentration that I called families and children's services. Study groups were, initially, my instruction of choice because I always enjoyed having other students with whom to discuss the issues of the study. I did take several courses through the SUNY Learning Network when my home schedule demanded the presence of two parents on a consistent basis. Prior to signing my learning contract for the independent study titled "Developing a Social Conscience," I had only one other experience in an independent study and I did not enjoy it. This independent study was my final course of my degree plan. I was eager to be finished. Of course, I had no way of realizing that this study was going to have such a powerful impact on me.

For an opening discussion topic, Sylvain chose the concept of heroes. To be asked who my hero was (and why), and then to be told to go home and take a survey of family members and friends and ask them who *their* heroes were, was quite an eye opener. After only a moment of contemplation, I said my hero was my father. Sylvain mentioned Pete Seeger as someone he respected. This led to the subject of music and then to the idea of having as a final project a musical compilation. Because I grew up with music as a central part of my life, I was very excited to have a musical collection as a final project. But to continue to explain the powerful impact this study had on me, I need to digress and explain my background.

Growing up Catholic and in a very large family in the '70s were two major influences that shaped my personality. Being a Catholic was not just a religion; it was a way of life for us. As children, we were instilled with a deep sense of right and wrong. As we were being brought up, being "Christ-like" was the goal for all of us. Music also played a central part in our household. Folk music, mixed with some Irish and religious music, made for an eclectic mix. The Chad Mitchell Trio, The Kingston Trio, and the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makum were my personal favorites. The importance of music to my parents was linked to the time they came of age. They were raising a family during the Vietnam era and the time of the civil rights movement. I know these issues shaped their choices and consequently shaped ours. We have always been a close family, and despite the physical miles between my parents and I, we still remain close. As my husband and I go through the daily process of raising three middle-school aged children, we are trying to instill in them the same values and moral/social conscience that was instilled in us.

As I look back on this tutorial and the impact it had on me, I think of several parallel lines running together. The initial concept of heroes and what they mean to me and to my family was timely in the wake of 9/11. Forefront in the media and, therefore, in our minds are the heroes, both dead and alive, of 9/11. I see the topic of heroes addressed in classroom assignments within the school system. I hear the term heroes used songs on the radio. We all see the latest books on heroes in the bookstores. Thus, when Sylvain introduced the topic of heroes, I couldn't help but think of the parallel lines to current social issues. It was during my initial discussion with him that I realized that I held my father as my hero. My father is a kind and generous

man, totally unselfish, with a very dry wit. He is well educated and instilled in us a deep belief in education, pushing all six of his children to get a college education. He has democratic ideals combined with stiff Catholic values. I admire his political savvy, and throughout working with Sylvain, I spoke with my father frequently and discussed many of my readings and assignments. During the entire time frame that I was meeting with Sylvain, my father was going through an intensive ten-week rehabilitation for the blind through the Veterans Hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida (my father suffers from macular degeneration and is totally blind). Being without my mother for that length of time as well as suffering the limitations of his disability was a discouraging time for him. We both agreed that our weekly political and social discussions were meaningful as well as delightful.

Another strong connection was the fact that when I asked my father who his hero was, he replied that the word "hero" was not in his lexicon. However, he greatly admires Dorothy Day. Having never heard of Dorothy Day, I received quite the education about her when my first text assignment for "social development" was to read Robert Coles' book, *The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism.* Coles describes his father's and, consequently, his own relationship with Dorothy Day and the concept of social conscience and of good deeds.

As Sylvain and I met and discussed the concept of developing a social conscience, he assigned the next reading, *Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* by Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks. Through this reading, attending the Northeast Center's teach-in, "Commitment, Compassion and Community," and speaking with both of my parents, I came to realize (or perhaps remember) that the concept of commitment to your community comes to me quite naturally. Listening to Mentor Karen Pass speak at the teach-in on "Developing a Social Conscience: The Need to be Involved," brought to the surface the memories of my parents volunteering at the soup kitchens in downtown Cleveland. Another memory I uncovered was the fact that it was my mother and the Baptist minister who started the food pantry in our hometown. It was a purely volunteer effort that started with my mother as a representative from the Catholic parish and the Baptist minister working to collect food and some monetary donations to feed the people in need within our community. I was a teenager poised on leaving home when my mother first started this endeavor. Listening to her tell of the efforts and time involved with this commitment made me realize that my social conscience was not taught to me by the schools or by my church, but was nurtured by my parents. Their words and action provided me with a good base for having a strong social conscience. Working with Sylvain was tapping that base and bringing it to the forefront.

The final connection with this study was the timing of the final project, which occurred at the same time as the war in Iraq. Social activism and social conscience were not just words anymore. They were the news on a daily basis. Protests against the war and against the government were becoming very common. The music of my youth was coming full circle. It was *all* pertinent to today's political situation. I retrieved some old albums from my parents and my siblings and began listening to all the anti-war and protest songs I had known. I spoke with relatives and friends, taking polls and hearing opinions on anti-war songs, then and now.

It took me months to listen, gather, sort through and choose the final music for my CD. It was intense and emotional work. The original list of songs for this project numbered 43. They included songs about the Cuban uprising, the Mexican revolution, strife in Australia and the Cold War. I had enough music for two CDs! I learned that many contemporary artists have been inspired, and indeed, learned their trade from the likes of Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. The main topics of these songs, new or old, revolve around politics and human suffering. Political instability and human suffering are old issues that are, unfortunately, revisited time and again. The artists are reacting to these issues and using music to speak out. When push came to shove and I had to make my decisions on what songs to include, I used a combination of new and old to reflect my favorites and to communicate the moral energy I thought the artist was trying to convey. To make the cut and be on the CD, I felt the music and the words had to make a connection to me and to my

thoughts about social activism and what it means to have a social conscience. I came to realize that the music I listened to as a child was grounded in political and social activism and was pertinent today! The majority of the songs were anti-war/anti- Vietnam songs and some were freedom songs. This was certainly a labor of love because music was and is such a large part of my life.

> *For a professor of undergraduates to use music may be a novel idea, but it certainly was a learning and remembering experience for me.*

Music cuts across all generations and lifestyles. It has the ability to reach both children and adults. It has long been a favorite of preschool and primary teachers as a medium for teaching. For a professor of undergraduates to use music may be a novel idea, but it certainly was a learning and remembering experience for me. History has a way of repeating itself. The political events of the past year and half are coming full circle to another grand scale global event. I wanted the listeners of my CD to feel the sorrow, the anger, and perhaps the guilt associated with the past and to try not to let history repeat itself through the actions of our current president and his administration.

Will other students feel the same as I did about music and its connection to social conscience? I think the answer is yes. Political songs and social conscience have gone hand in hand for years. African Americans have their roots in songs about freedom from slavery. High profile artists have used their talents for years to get their message out to the common man. Take the Dixie Chicks as a case in point. What Natalie said was disrespectful to the president, but it was what she *felt.* It wasn't about being from Texas. It was about her stance on the impending war and the reaction from the group's European audiences about America and the impending war.

This musical project, along with this whole tutorial, was for me, an awakening to my past and an inspiration to my future. It brought full circle all my previous readings on families and children and how they apply to the broad area of the human services. I intend to use what I have learned and remembered and pass it along to my children. Shaping their social conscience and making them aware of the world outside East Nassau and New York is my goal. Sylvain happened to hit a nerve with me with music. I encourage him and all mentors to use this method of teaching. Do I feel exploited or influenced by Sylvain's choice of music and methods of teaching? Absolutely not! I feel all professors, to a degree, use their own favorite methods or mediums of learning in their course work. But the beauty of learning lies in the diversity of the teachings.

The Day Daddy Went Out to Get Another Job
Robert Congemi

Robert Congemi

The day Daddy went out to get another job was the day after Mother's best friend came to visit her. Mother's best friend was named Roxanne, and they had been roommates all through college. In college, Mother fell in love with Daddy, of course, and married him, and said that she would stay with him no matter what while he worked hard to become a great poet. But Roxanne married an ophthalmologist, who had an office on Fifth Avenue in New York City, so Mother and Roxanne didn't get to see each other for five years, until Roxanne had her husband drive her upstate in their Mercedes. When the Mercedes pulled up in front of the house we rented on the outskirts of the town where Daddy was teaching high school for the time being, Daddy was on the porch steps reading a book by a man named Dostoevsky. My little sister Rosie and I were playing with our dolls on a patch of dirt on the front lawn, and Mother was just sitting beside Daddy, resting.

At first, we weren't sure what was happening, but after a moment or two this chubby boy got out of the car, and then a fancy-dressed woman, and then a tall, skinny man with a bag over his shoulder. Mother took a long look at the three of them, who were taking a not-too-sure look at us, until Mother just about leaped off the porch steps, smiling so happy.

"Roxanne? Roxanne, is that you? Is that really you?" she said.

The woman continued with her not-too-sure look for another moment or so, and then, taking a deep breath,

smiled back at my mother a little and waved.

"Yes, Jane, it's really me. It's really your little ol' Roxanne."

The next thing we knew Mother and this lady Roxanne were hugging each other, and Mother kept saying, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it's you, and that you're here."

After a while, we all went inside and everybody got introduced. The chubby boy was named Arthur, after his father the lady told us, but he didn't pay much attention to me and Rosie. While we watched him, Arthur just whined at his mother that it was too small inside our house, and when she told him that he would have to bear it, they weren't staying that long anyway, he took some toys out from the bag his father was carrying and played with them by running all over the first floor hollering, until he got bored with that and started jumping up and down on our couch. Mother and Roxanne talked about old times and then about new times, as fast as they could, while the man and Daddy just looked at each other not knowing quite what to say or do. Finally, Roxanne said they had to keep going on their way, they were building a big house about two hours away from our house, and they wanted to keep an eye on the workers so that she and her family didn't get cheated. Mother said of course she understood and hoped everything went well, and Roxanne said it would. As the man started up the Mercedes and inched it away, Mother said she hoped we would all see each other again soon, and the lady said of course. The chubby boy Arthur just leaned over toward his father and said, "Come on, let's get out of **here.** I don't want to visit poor people."

The next morning was when Daddy told Mother he was going to find another job. We were all in the kitchen. Mother was pouring coffee for Daddy and making herself some tea. She was real surprised.

"John, what do you mean? You already have a job."

"No. No, I don't, Jane," Daddy announced, pointing his finger up into the air. It seemed he was just furious with himself. He had his books and papers for school on the table beside him – as always on weekday mornings before going off to work. "You don't have to be nice. I don't have a **real** job."

Mother sipped her tea, studying Daddy's face.

"Not a real job? I don't understand, John."

"What is there to understand? I don't have a real job. I don't work in the real world. I work with kids. I teach them a little bit about literature. I give them whatever it is that I've got, and they like me for it, and then I get paid my little salary. Everybody is nice to me, everybody loves me, and then I come back here and write my poems. Jane, I don't have a real job."

Mother glanced at me and Rosie. I wasn't saying anything, and Rosie was too young to understand much about what was going on. She kept working in her coloring book, the crayons all over around the orange juice and our bowls of cereal. Rosie was big on coloring in those days.

"I'm not going into work today," Daddy said some more. "I'll tell the high school I'm taking personal leave. I've never done that once in the three years we've been here. And then I'm getting into the car – your uncle said it was all right to drive it long distances; he said he gave us the best car he had on the lot – and I'm going to drive around this state and find me some real work."

Mother stood up and walked around the table to Daddy. Standing over him, she put her hand on his head and leaned down and kissed him. Mother was very pretty. I'm not the only person who would say that; everybody did. She had long dark hair that sometimes she left down and sometimes she pinned back, and

people said she could be a model in the magazines.

"John, does this have anything to do with Roxanne's visit yesterday? I hope not, because if so, you'd be all wrong."

Daddy shook his head. "No, of course not, Jane," he told her. There's absolutely no connection at all. None whatever. I've been thinking this for a long time now."

"Have you?" my mother said, not at all convinced.

"Yes, I have." Daddy stood up. He was a tall man, always in jeans and boots, and with long hair that my grandmother always fussed with him about.

"Yes, I have. And I know exactly what kind of job I'm going to look for. I've thought about myself and the kind of real work I'd be good for."

"And what is that, John?" Mother asked.

"Well, think about it, Jane," Daddy told her. "It couldn't be easier. It's a perfect fit. Anybody could guess."

Mother made a face, like she couldn't guess in a hundred years.

"Jane. Jane, my darling, I'm going to be a natural."

" … yes?"

"Jane, I'm going to be … a newspaper reporter! That's right. A newspaper reporter. What do you think about that?"

"Oh, John," Mother said, sitting down again, a concerned look on her face.

About an hour later, Daddy got into the car Mother's uncle Harlan gave us and drove away. There was no stopping him. Mother had just enough time to pack him a lunch, which he didn't want to take. He said he had more important things to think about than food. But Mother insisted, and in the end, Daddy did what she said.

Once he got out of our town, Daddy drove as fast as he could, but not too fast, because he wasn't that good a driver – Mother always said Daddy daydreamed about poems and literature when he drove. He got himself to the town next to ours, and then to the towns after that, making his way higher and higher up the state. Each time he got to a town, Daddy asked for directions to where the newspaper office in the town was, found it, parked our car, and went inside the building. Also, each time, he was told by someone, usually a secretary, that there were no jobs to be had for him, that the newspaper wasn't doing any hiring, and that he just couldn't walk into a building and ask for a job just like that. The best they could do, one lady told him, was for him to fill out an application for a job and they'd let him know if anything came along.

Daddy asked this lady who did the hiring. She told him it was a Mr. Wexler. Daddy asked to speak with Mr. Wexler. The lady told him that he couldn't speak to Mr. Wexler, not without an appointment. Daddy said, how did he get an appointment, and the lady said Mr. Wexler took care of that himself, and, besides, Mr. Wexler wasn't available because he was in Europe and wasn't expected back for a month or two. Daddy muttered something to the lady he maybe shouldn't have, and then told her he hoped Mr. Wexler's plane fell into the ocean when he was on his way back from Europe. At this, the lady said to Daddy, "Do I have to ring

for security, sir?"

Well, after that and after another couple of newspaper offices, Daddy decided he really had to take matters into his own hands. He was trying to be reasonable about everything, and go about this business of getting another job, a **real** job, as courteously as he could, but he could also see that reason and courtesy weren't getting him very far. So he decided to pull out all the stops – which was more like his normal nature – and do everything he could to get this business of getting himself another job done.

At the newspaper office of the largest city in our part of the state, Daddy once again parked our car in the building's lot, walked into the building, and announced to the secretary in the reception area of the building that he wanted to get a job as a newspaper reporter. Once again, he was told that he couldn't just have a job, even if they were hiring, but that he could fill out an application.

"I'm tired of filling out applications," Daddy told the secretary, who got pretty startled. "And anyway you know that is not going to do me any good." "I don't know that," the secretary said dryly.

"But you do. You're just going to throw it away when I leave here. Or give it to somebody else, who's going to throw it away."

"We don't work that way, sir. This is the newspaper of the third largest city in the state."

Daddy ignored her. "What I want to do is to see the editor-in-chief of this newspaper. Yes. That's right. I want to see the editor-in-chief."

Once again, a lady of a newspaper was alarmed.

"I want to go right to the top," Daddy explained, wagging his finger. Daddy always wagged his finger when he was excited. "I can't waste time. I've been wasting time all day. I left my job teaching at the high school today to do this thing, but I've been turned away every place without getting anywhere. Miss, don't you understand? I want a **real** job. In the **real** world. I don't want to just teach school, or write poems. I want a real job. Don't you? Not just for the money, but for … for authenticity! So I can feel like somebody. So I can use my God-given gifts with words to good advantage. Not only for myself, but also for the people I work for. Wouldn't you do that, if you were me? Wouldn't you, Miss? Miss … by the way, what is your name?"

"Jones."

"Wouldn't you, Miss Jones?"

Miss Jones looked at Daddy. As I said, he was a tall man, nice looking, who didn't really put people off by the way he dressed or how he talked. People could see he was a good soul; maybe just a little different, or just a little crazy – which I think they probably mostly liked. When he got excited his face would get all flushed, and he'd look so cute, going on and on about whatever it was that was so important to him, and people would decide that they liked that. They might not know why they liked that, or didn't bother to analyze why they did, being so busy with their own lives, but without putting into words they knew they liked this man and his ways.

Miss Jones studied Daddy for a few moments more. Then she said to him. "All right. I must be as crazy as you. But wait here."

Daddy did as he was told, standing in front of her desk, when she left the reception area and went through a door. Several minutes passed. Daddy, understandably, wondered what was going on. Then Miss Jones

came back. She told Daddy to take a seat. Daddy did. And then she said, "I told our editor-in-chief, Mr. Dalton, about you. He has a meeting now that will last for about half an hour. But after that he said … Mr? … "

"Mr. Ayers, Miss Jones." Daddy stuck out his hand, but Miss Jones didn't take it.

"Well, Mr. Ayers, Mr. Dalton said that after his meeting that … that … he would see you."

Miss Jones smiled a little, to herself. "Mr. Dalton said that anyone who could get to me … was someone he'd want to see. He said that anyone who could do that, as well as say the things you told me, might make a … damn good reporter, as he put it."

"He said that?" Daddy said.

"He did."

"Well, I'll be," Daddy said further, thinking about this turn of events, pleased that he had gotten somewhere after all, and feeling a little good about himself for the first time since Roxanne and her family had showed up at our house in their Mercedes.

For several minutes after Ms. Jones told Daddy that Mr. Dalton would see him, Daddy walked around the reception area, sort of in circles, greatly agitated and unable to sit still in a chair. He wasn't going to lose his chance, he told himself, and therefore he had to be ready for anything Mr. Dalton asked. Once he thought that perhaps he would make a poem out of this experience he was having, right there on the spot. But on second thought he decided he would think about the poem another time, and settled for only smiling in a kind of goofy way at Miss Jones, who was trying to get her work done. Then the phone rang, Miss Jones talked into it briefly, and after that told Daddy to go right in Mr. Dalton's office, through the door behind her. Mr. Dalton was ready to see Daddy.

When Daddy was inside Mr. Dalton's office, which was very big, the editor-in-chief was behind his desk, looking terribly busy and even in a bad mood, but when he saw Daddy he smiled a little and motioned for Daddy to sit down in a chair alongside the desk. On the walls of Mr. Dalton's office were awards and photographs of people that Daddy assumed were famous. In the photographs, Mr. Dalton looked younger, but still much like himself. He was a large man, with a red face, bigger even than Daddy, and was distinguished in a rough sort of way, his long gray hair combed back so that he looked like a president.

"So, you're Mr. Ayers, and you want to work for this newspaper. Is that right, young man?" Behind Mr. Dalton was a huge window, and Daddy could see a good part of the city through it.

"That's right, sir," Daddy said, trying to be polite.

"And Miss Jones tells me you want to work in the real world."

Daddy nodded.

"Hmm," Mr. Dalton said.

Mr. Dalton's phone rang, but he ignored it.

"You are a teacher now?"

"I'm a high school teacher now, Mr. Dalton. But I'm also a poet."

"I see. And you managed to get to me, and through Miss Jones?"

"Yes, sir. I had to."

Mr. Dalton looked over some papers on his desk and checked the time on his watch.

"That's quite an accomplishment, Mr. Ayers. Did you ever work on a newspaper before?"

"No."

"Did you ever study newspaper work in college?"

"No."

"Have you been thinking about writing for a newspaper, for a little bit of time at least?"

Daddy was cagey. "For a little bit of time, maybe."

Mr. Dalton stood up, moved out from behind his desk, and stood in front of Daddy.

"Well, then why, Mr. Ayers, would I want to hire you?"

Daddy didn't have any problem with that one. "Because I will do a good job. I will probably do a great job. I have a way with words."

"Hmm," Mr. Dalton said again. "Miss Jones *said* there was something about you."

Then Mr. Dalton's face furrowed up, as if he wanted Daddy to understand him, to see his point of view. He wanted Daddy to be reasonable. "You know, Mr. Ayers, I can't offer you a job just like that, just because about an hour ago you decided to come into this building. I may be the editor-in-chief, but I'd like you to know that I don't decide everything around here." His red face was getting a little redder. "I'm not even sure we have a job for another reporter, that we have anything available. Even for someone who has a way with words."

Daddy stayed real quiet at that.

"I have bureau chiefs to answer to. Personnel people. A board of directors." Mr. Dalton really wanted Daddy to understand. "You can well imagine the situation I'm in, can't you?"

Daddy didn't want to be too difficult. "Oh, I can, Mr. Dalton. I certainly can."

"I can't tell you right this moment about a possible job. I can't hire you on the spot."

"Of course," Daddy said. "But when can you, sir?"

Mr. Dalton sighed, and thought about Daddy's question for a moment. He was firm. "The best I can do is to let you know in a couple of days."

"A couple of *days*, Mr. Dalton?" Daddy said.

"Yes, that's right."

"You can't do better than that?"

Mr. Dalton was truly sorry. "I'm afraid I can't."

Daddy was disappointed. He made a counter offer. "I can wait around, until you make calls and talk to the people you have to talk to."

"No, no, you can't, Mr. Ayers," Mr. Dalton said. He could see that he was not going to be fully understood. "Besides, I have an awful lot of work to do right now. An awful lot of business. You know how it is in the newspaper business. Especially for an editor-in- chief."

Daddy went a little easy on him. ""Oh, okay, Mr. Dalton, I guess I do. But I have to know something soon. I have to have a job. Soon."

Mr. Dalton nodded. "In the real world?"

Daddy nodded. "In the real world."

Mr. Dalton went around and sat down at his desk again. "I'll do the very best I can, Mr. Ayers. I'll let you know in two days, for sure. One way or the other. How's that?"

Now Daddy sighed. "I guess you take what you can get, in the real world, Mr. Dalton."

At this, Mr. Dalton smiled. Standing in front of his huge window on the city, he was so big he almost filled it up. "I swear, young man," he told Daddy. "You remind me a lot of myself when I was your age."

"Do I?" Daddy said.

"Yes, you do. Now, let me go and be about my work. I run a newspaper, you know. For the third largest city in the state."

A few minutes later Daddy left the newspaper building, cheerily waving goodbye to Miss Jones, and drove home. On the way, he decided he felt very good, very proud of what he had accomplished, especially in a big city. Once again, for a moment, he thought now it was a good time to write a poem about his trip. But this time he realized that he was feeling really pretty tired, and probably should get to the poem later, maybe on the weekend when he was free from his responsibilities at school. That was always the way, he didn't overlook thinking – art came last. So instead he just drove to our house, told Mother what had happened to him, and went to bed early that night. The next morning, he got up at just about the crack of dawn and threw himself into the work at school that had piled up because he had been absent the day before. All day long, he took care of business. One student was stuck on what to write about on his next composition. Another student needed a recommendation for college. Daddy had to prepare for his senior class on Shakespeare, and meet with his aide about how to teach a boy so handicapped that he came to school in a wheelchair, along with a respirator and a nurse. The following day was more of the same, and so was the day that followed that one.

It wasn't until the night of that third day that Daddy had a chance to think about Mr. Dalton again and the newspaper job. Actually, he was so busy at school, doing everything he had to do for his students, he hadn't even thought about Mr. Dalton at all. Suddenly, Mother went upstairs to their bedroom, where Daddy had a

little corner of the room to do his school work and poetry writing in, and told him that Mr. Dalton was on the phone.

For a second or two, Daddy couldn't remember who Mr. Dalton was, but then of course he did. He put aside the freshman essays he was correcting, took the phone from Mother after following her downstairs, and said hello into it.

Mr. Dalton said, "Hi, Mr. Ayers, remember me? Tom Dalton? You came to the newspaper? I told you I'd get back to you in a couple of days?"

"Oh? Oh, yes," Daddy said. "Mr. Dalton. From the newspaper."

"That's right."

Daddy tried to focus on something other than dangling modifiers and split infinitives.

"That's right, Mr. Ayers, and, boy, do I have good news for you."

"What's that?" Daddy said, vaguely. In part, he was still trying to figure out how to get 14 year olds interested in grammar.

"Mr. Ayers, you … you have the job! You have a job being a newspaper reporter for one of the largest newspapers in the state. Even without expertise. What do you think about that?"

Daddy tried to think of what he thought about that. He tried hard, real hard. But, then, he said to Mr. Dalton, as nicely, as kindly as he could, "Mr. Dalton, I can't think of anything to think about that. You see, Mr. Dalton, I've … I've changed my mind. Yes, I've changed my mind. I'm going to stay being a teacher. At least, for now."

Daddy tried to explain. "You see, Mr. Dalton, I think I've gotten over whatever it was that made me go to your office the other day. As a matter of fact, now that I think about it, I think I must have been nuts. Temporarily. That happens to me sometimes. Sir, what I'm trying to say is that I'm going to stay right where I am, stay being a teacher – until I become a poet, that is."

"Oh," said Mr. Dalton.

"Thanks anyway, though," Daddy said. "You and Miss Jones were really nice to me. But, don't worry, I'll write a poem about everything that happened. If you don't mind. Someday."

Mentors at Work
Mel Rosenthal

Professor Bob Rogers, chair of the photography department at Queensborough Community College, talking with our students about "perspective" at the Photojournalism Workshop in June 2003 at the Metropolitan Center. The program is enriched by presentations of photographers, critics, editors and educators. In the background are photos done by Empire State College students as part of their final projects.

Charmain Reading, a self-taught free-lance photographer (and grandmother of 11) talking with our students about the wonderful pictures she did as a participant in the civil rights movements in the South.

Rooted in Relationship: A Conversation with Mayra Bloom
Anne Breznau, Office of Academi Affairs

"I never thought I would leave Empire State College – I've been committed to progressive education all my life, and I've identified passionately with the college for nearly 20 years, but there were things that I couldn't do in this job that I wanted to try."

Mayra Bloom

With these words, the exit conversation with Mayra Bloom (December, 2002) was off and running. Retirement both pulls Mayra towards new life opportunities and tears her away from work that she had become increasingly conflicted about. She believes that stress over workload and the college's lack of support played decisive roles in her decision.

"What could we have done to help?" I ask.

"Acknowledge the stresses in the mentor role," she says "and then see what can be done to relieve it. Mentors are responsible for both quality and keeping up the numbers. They have to create a deep personal connection to the student and also serve as gatekeepers and bookkeepers. There are tensions and contradictions built into the role that make it difficult."

She also suggests the college consider a new role, mentor assistant, which would provide support for mentors in both paperwork and mentoring. She asks, "Does the college really want to pay mentors to do major Xeroxing, for example. What about administrative details like finding, training, paying, doing the vouchers, for all tutors?" She doubts that these things should be mentor work.

She expresses how disappointed she is about "intrusions into academic policy decisions from the outside world – student academic progress policies, general education and so on." She believes, "Academic decisions and discussions are increasingly driven by technology or outside sources." Although mentors have always had to struggle to keep up with their jobs, she hoped that the new administration would bring more respect to the effort. She now believes, however, that "mentoring is more endangered than ever." She thinks mentoring is being marginalized, and she mourns the "loss of so many freedoms that we once had

and the fact that no one is talking about what the freedoms should be in the new reality. Mentoring is a shadow of its former self."

I ask for her definition of mentoring. She says, "A mentor is more than a facilitator of the degree planning process, more than someone who makes sure it meets requirements. A mentor is a person who enters into conversation with a student and evolves a degree plan that is a true reflection of his or her knowledge and interests. A mentor embodies that notion that learning is rooted in relationship."

She believes deeply in individualized work with students and thinks that we have let "sheer numbers keep us from individualized attention as it should be." She suggests that "the college has never faced the economic realities of good mentoring. People thought it would be cheaper (less overhead)," she says, "but it's actually the most expensive pedagogy possible and we're not willing to face that. We don't recognize either its value or its cost."

Mentors themselves may have contributed to the eroding of its value, she admits, by "flying under the radar in order to hang on to our way of doing things." However, she doesn't believe that mentors have always been encouraged by the college to be proud of what they do. She wishes mentors had time to do more research on mentoring and adult learning. She thinks, "People in higher education need us to hear what we have learned about mentoring; we need to become a research institution looking closely at what we do." She'd like to see Empire State College faculty renowned for pioneering research in this pedagogical approach.

She believes mentoring could still be viable for the college today. "The college could allow for the mentoring position itself to become more highly individualized by taking the differences in individualized mentoring, group studies, and distance learning or program development into account."

Regarding program development, Mayra cites a personal example: I tried to develop a program with Head Start teachers from the Chassidic community who needed to earn associate degrees in early childhood. She adds that she didn't feel she received effective support or resources. She wanted to develop a high quality early childhood program to serve this group, but there came a point when she believed "that wasn't going to happen." I ask, "How so?" She feels we had an obligation to these academically and financially needy students. She knows that it would have required a special effort to bridge the gaps between their notion of education and ours, and regrets that we did not have – or were not willing to invest – the resources to do so. On a related point, she thinks educational studies should be less focused on meeting the mold of teacher certification; instead it should focus on working with students, like these from the Chassidic community, who "seek alternative paths."

In the area of curriculum, Mayra thinks, "It *should* emerge from the students, and here was a chance to do that in a big way. Translating credits from Jewish education to Empire State College education was a fascinating assessment challenge, one that would have been good for us," she laughs. "At a time when more and more students are coming from fundamentalist backgrounds, I felt it was important and stimulating to discuss and address basic philosophical, ethical and pedagogical issues."
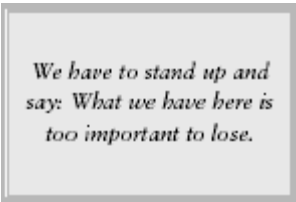
She leaves feeling "terribly responsible for my inability, in spite of nearly 20 years of trying, to get on top of the paperwork and organizational issues that went with the job." She goes on to say, "Record keeping is really not an easy job. I've tried a million ways to manage my time and paperwork, but I was never able to get on top of it for long. I remember sitting at a meeting with some of the most brilliant and dedicated mentors in the college and thinking that if they couldn't do it after all these years, something had to be wrong with the job description." She laughs again. "You should be picking the brains of those who've succeeded in doing this – we need them to mentor the rest of us!"

She laments that administrators and faculty "can't really talk together because of their theoretical adherence to one model or another." She thinks the college needs multiple models, equally respected, side-by-side, "with not everyone having to do everything." Not opposed to distance education, Mayra would like to see how it could be developed at Empire State College in a way that more fully embodies student-centeredness and individualization, her own "core values."

She speculates about the proportion of students who "really want and can benefit from the 'old' model of mentoring, and believes they should be able to get that." She frets that some mentors themselves are "unwilling to give up one particular model." She muses, "Perhaps we're hanging on to old ways at the cost of academic quality, but we're also letting outside influences force us toward narrowly defined concepts of academic quality, instead of having internal conversations to bring this about. Standardized forms of assessment are rising in importance *because* we aren't transforming ourselves internally."

Mayra is also frustrated that the college is relying more and more on group studies in spite of the fact that most students can't really grasp a subject effectively in six meetings or so. "For a variety of reasons, we're often reluctant to look at what other institutions are doing. The Sarah Lawrence seminar/conference model might, for example, be helpful to some of our students." Bottom line, she thinks the college is not willing to define what it believes and then act on those values with adequate funding.

Another issue for her is that there doesn't seem to be any chance for advancement for mentors. They can't grow to the next level of the job because there is no next level.

> We have to stand up and say: What we have here is too important to lose.

"I've done 15 years of mentoring and group work," she says. "Where should I have gone next in terms of my development and the institution's needs?"

She thinks there ought to be "mentoring for the mentors." She expands on this: "How can I take what I'm interested in and make it of use to others? I thought I had found such an avenue with the Head Start students, but ultimately I wasn't able to get the help that I needed to grow a real program. I needed a mentor who could help me develop and implement the idea."

Other thoughts she shared in parting:

- How about a certificate for general education – making it the best, most demanding, most holistic, most wonderful program possible so that an Empire State College Certificate of General Learning would be a meaningful credential?

- How about a certificate in writing – a writing program using imputed credit monies would improve our academic quality quickly and significantly?

- How about a religious studies assessment project?

- How about offering Head Start teachers and teacher assistants a nontraditional, progressive educational track that could influence what they take back into their systems?

She states unequivocally, "We have to stand up and say: 'What we have here is too important to lose. We must stop for a minute and admit that the culture of overwork is not a healthy basis for decision making and figure out some other way to make our core values work for students.' "

In spite of her concerns, she concludes: "It's a tremendous privilege to have had this job – the freedom and the trust and the flexibility that the college has offered is tremendous. I have had the rare opportunity to work with these colleagues and these students. Where else could I have designed a writing class that went on for 14 years? Where else could I have done the research for my dissertation by designing a group study in adult learning? I'm a progressive educator and to be/have been part of this whole enterprise was wonderful."

So, what kinds of things will she be doing after her work with Empire State College?

"I've been developing a private practice where I can work with high school, college and adult learners on their writing – without all the paperwork! I finally have the time to turn my dissertation into something that might be read with interest by the general public. And I've been taking on some very interesting free lance educational projects that are beginning to develop in fascinating ways." *We have to stand up and say: What we have here is too important to lose.*

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Empire State College and the Challenge of Innovation During Troubled Times
Annette Kolodny, University of Arizona, Tucson

Annette Kolodny

Annette Kolodny is the author of many books and essays, including The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 *and* Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century. *She has received numerous awards for her teaching, mentoring and writing. From 1988 through 1993, Dr. Kolodny was dean of the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona. She is currently professor of comparative cultural and literary studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson. We were honored to welcome Annette Kolodny to the All College Conference in March, 2003, where she gave this talk.*

First, some personal background: When I became dean of the College of Humanities at the University of Arizona in 1988, I made a radical transition from faculty status to administrator. In that process, I went from

thinking about my personal scholarship and the needs of my immediate students to thinking about higher education as an institution and the needs of students in general. As I took on the deanship in July 1988, I carried with me two significant disadvantages: I had had no prior experience of any kind in administration (I had never even been a department chair); and I was new to the University of Arizona (which meant that I didn't have any sense of how the place really worked).

(To be sure, I was given the *Faculty Handbook* and an administrative flow chart indicating who reported to whom. But as most folks in academe well know, these give only a partial picture of how decisions get made and who really influences whom. Informal networks and interconnections are often as important as the formal ones.) That said, over time, I came to appreciate my ignorance of administrative protocols and my lack of acquaintance with how things were always done previously at this university as genuine *advantages.* My ignorance turned out to be a kind of liberation. Because I didn't know how things "were always done," I was free to ask "how things might best be done." I could even pose that most daring of questions, "what *should* we be doing?"

I have written about all that, as honestly as I know how – warts and all – in my most recent book, *Failing the Future: A Dean Looks at Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century.* So I won't waste your time by repeating any of it here. Instead, I want to focus briefly on two seemingly unrelated events that helped me better to focus that second question, "What should we be doing?" Both events pertained to student constituencies we discovered we weren't serving – or, at least, not serving very well.

Given the large Native American populations in the state, with six different tribes living in southern Arizona alone, Indian students were noticeably absent on campus. And when they did enroll, their attrition rates were unusually high – despite specialized student services, financial aid packages from the institution, and generous tribal scholarships. So the English department experimented by sending out faculty and graduate student teaching assistants to the reservations in mobile trailers equipped with as many desks and computer stations as we could cram in. The results were remarkable. Students who were shy of speaking up or raising their hands in the traditional classroom eagerly engaged assignments, their teachers, and one another online. Instead of functioning as a gatekeeping device that defeated Native American students, required first-year literature and composition courses had been transformed into a learning situation where these students excelled and thrived. The new format included online instruction coupled with regularly scheduled one-to-one conferences between students and instructors, held in the reservation community center or tribal offices. What we had inadvertently tapped into, of course, was a cultural predisposition for hands-on learning (the students *liked* figuring out the intricacies of the computer by mimicking what their instructors showed them). And we had also overcome a culturally- conditioned resistance to what Native Peoples perceive as public shaming. In other words, many Native American students won't raise their hands in the traditional classroom – even when they know the answer – because this can be construed as a means of publicly shaming those who **don't** raise their hands (presumably because they don't know the right answer). But online, students felt they could freely answer questions and ask questions of their own, without any risk of shaming either others or themselves. They also enjoyed the added advantage of meeting with instructors in the comfort zone of the reservation.

The other unconnected incident is similarly anecdotal. During the years that I was dean, the University of Arizona first started tracking a national demographic trend: our undergraduate student body was no longer almost exclusively 18-22 year-olds but, rather, increasingly made up of older, nontraditional students, many of them women trying to juggle home, family, and work responsibilities along with their schoolwork. Not surprisingly, random interviews with such students made clear that, for them, unlike their younger classmates, schoolwork and campus activities were not their sole or primary focus. Still, faculty members routinely reported that this cohort were often their smartest and most committed students. Unfortunately, despite this group's evident devotion to their courses, they were also a cohort with an alarmingly high attrition rate.

By the time illness overtook me, and I had to step down from the deanship in the summer of 1993, I had amassed a wealth of such anecdotal material. And I had come to the conclusion that, despite its many successes, higher education in the coming twenty-first century would have to enlarge itself into very different kinds of models and institutions lest – as the title of my book ominously suggests – we *fail* the future and fail in our obligations to the future generations of students. These future generations will look and act very different and have needs very different from those of the students most faculty had prepared themselves to teach. As I explained to one government-sponsored conclave on the future of higher education, I had no blueprint to propose, only the prediction that higher education institutions in the twenty-first century would define a host of very different missions for themselves and develop very differently from one another.

> *… despite its many successes, higher education in the coming twenty-first century would have to enlarge itself into very different kinds of models and institutions lest – as the title of my book ominously suggests – we fail the future and fail in our obligations to the future generations of students.*

That is why, when I sought models of change and innovation while composing *Failing the Future,* I cited Empire State College as an example of an educational institution that fulfilled a real need for a largely unserved population: that is, adult students with family and full- or part-time work responsibilities, or other students for whom a regular schedule of classes on a traditional brick-and-mortar campus was difficult or impossible. Nonetheless, this was clearly a cohort of potential undergraduates with serious educational goals and the will to succeed.

A number of factors are now converging to make that student population even larger than had previously been predicted. The children of the baby boomers – the baby boomlet – are now coming of age and swelling the first-year classes of campuses that have neither the faculty numbers nor the physical classroom space to accommodate them. President George Bush's proposed budget and costly war plans cut federal supports for higher education; and the states' inability to make up the shortfall means that, for these students over the next few years, the financial squeeze will only get worse. Many will not be able to afford tuition or a full-time school schedule; they will also need to be gainfully employed. The single most notable demographic feature of this boomlet is its ethnic, cultural, and economic diversity. Not just for economic reasons, therefore, but for the kinds of cultural reasons that allowed Navajo and Apache students to succeed in our freshman composition courses located on the reservations, so too at least some portion of the boomlet (and their parents) will seek out online and other more flexible and personalized degree-granting educational opportunities.

But the primary engine behind the unprecedented demand for the kind of education that Empire State College offers is what former President Clinton and his staff understood so well: "It's the economy, stupid!" In other words, as the leading economic indicators and the stock market remain in freefall, and as the job market continues to contract, a growing number of unemployed and underemployed adult workers will seek low-cost individualized public higher education as a means to improving their saleable skills or even radically altering their entire career trajectory.

I don't have to tell this audience how, with dollar signs dancing before their eyes, a number of administrators at major traditional campuses rushed to exploit some of these trends in the 1990s by developing both degree-granting and non-degree online programs. And I don't have to remind you that, to date, the results have been very mixed. To their dismay, many administrators discovered that there were no substantial cost savings if online instruction was to be of high quality. It wasn't a cheap fix for overcrowded classrooms nor was it a cash cow for remedying deficits in the operating budget.

What most administrators also learned in their failed rush to go online was that successful online instruction demands very different structuring of course materials. The transition from the traditional classroom to an online format requires a great deal of faculty time and a high level of both technical and pedagogic sophistication, in addition to intensive technical support from the institution. And, perhaps even more important, many a naive administrator was forced to acknowledge what Empire State College had been demonstrating all along: That is, that a truly innovative approach to education for nontraditional learners requires an array of alternative learning situations, from residencies combined with distance learning to group studies and guided independent studies. And it requires dedicated, qualified faculty mentors invested in this kind of instructional format.

Because Empire State College is one of the few accredited institutions with a significant track record in individualized degree-granting adult instruction; and because your students generally speak positively about their Empire State College experience when interviewed in national media, whether you like it or not, this innovative and experimental institution is going to be scrutinized as a possible model that others may copy or adapt.

This puts you in both a difficult *and* an enviable position. Among all your other many challenges – the challenge to stay solvent during precarious budget times, the challenge to meet the ever-changing needs of your ever-changing student body, the challenge to maintain quality while student numbers rise – this institution shoulders three rather special and unique additional challenges:

1) As you repeatedly demonstrate that nontraditional education can be designed to fulfill specific student needs and be of high quality in fulfilling those needs, you run the risk of falling into the same trap that now plagues so many single-site brick and mortar institutions: In other words, because it works, you do the same thing over and over again until it becomes so routinized that nobody ever questions whether it could or should be done differently. And you thus become the victim of your own success.

2) Because your students are adults who come to you with definite ideas about what they want or need to learn, your institution necessarily enters the ever-vexing national debate about core curricula and required general education courses from a very different place. Let me pose that as a question: Given your student body's maturity and clear goal orientations, what is Empire State College's ethical and pedagogical responsibility to offer students material or subject matter that the students themselves don't think they need to know? And how do you reconcile this with the SUNY Board of Trustees' required "comprehensive core general education curriculum," as adopted in December 1998?

3) Given the fact that the general public tends to see anything nontraditional – and especially higher education without a single fixed campus or fixed discipline-based curriculum – as somehow inferior (or at

least suspicious), how does an institution like Empire State College secure appropriate professional respect for nontraditional instructional formats? Or, as Rodney Dangerfield might put it, how do the faculty, staff, and administrators of Empire State College overcome the "I can't get no respect" syndrome in order to assert the real value of what you do?

I do not pretend to have answers for these questions. But I do want to suggest some approaches for at least framing responses. So let me take the three challenges in order:

First, how do you avoid becoming routinized by the sheer accretions of your own success? My answer – follow Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson wrote that in order to avoid stale custom, established hierarchies, and moribund institutions, a truly democratic republic needed to have a revolution every 12 years. When I was dean, my version of Jefferson's dictum was to take the entire faculty, support staff and elected graduate student representatives to a two-day retreat and pose the following questions to them: If we were to invent the College of Humanities from scratch today, what would its mission be? What would it look like? Who would make up its faculty? What would we be teaching? How would it function? After a variety of work groups came to some consensus on the answers to those questions, I then asked how we could get ourselves from where we were to where we had just agreed we ought to be. As a direct result of the specific questions posed at the retreat, in a word, we reinvented ourselves. As I outline in my book, in the years following the retreat, we overhauled our curriculum, developed new forms of outreach to the barrios and reservations, revised tenure and promotion procedures, introduced real shared governance and team decision making, and dramatically altered how we recruited new faculty so as to make affirmative action hiring a realizable priority.

I highly recommend this exercise to *you,* too – and I recommend it as an exercise that should be repeated every decade. The decanal timetable gives you the chance to really consolidate change while not becoming so bound to new arrangements that they are impossible to refine or alter. And ten years between such retreats gives you ample time to assess both the pace and the nature of change in the society as a whole.

Second, given the determination of your student body to pursue their chosen career or educational goals, and given the presumed maturity and life experience behind those choices, what role should a core or general education curriculum play at Empire State College? And how do you deal with the difficult political reality that, like so many other governing boards around the country, the SUNY system board has its own definite ideas about what should constitute every student's shared body of general knowledge? T

The very notion of a prescribed "body of knowledge" puts faculty members in a perplexing situation. On the one hand, prescriptions appear to undermine traditional faculty responsibilities for curricular design. And, on the other hand, in almost every discipline, the past quarter century of research and scholarship has challenged the very notion of a single identifiable "body of knowledge" that is appropriate for all students in all situations. When I was dean, therefore, I tried to respond to these kinds of curricular demands by trying to reframe the entire debate. I did this by posing the question of general education requirements within two larger questions: What kind of world will our graduates be entering, and how well do our current curricular strategies prepare students for that world? The answers toward which I tried to move people sounded something like this:

According to Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist, Lester Thurow, "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, six new technologies – microelectronics, computers, telecommunications, new man-made materials, robotics, and biotechnology – are interacting to create a new and very different" global economy (Thurow xiv-xv). In this new economic landscape, neither the possession of natural resources nor the ownership of factories or industrial processes, and even less the control of force (like standing armies) – *by themselves* – constitute any stable or dependable basis for personal or national wealth. Instead, as Thurow argues, "knowledge is the new basis for wealth," and the entire planet is now being restructured

around what he calls "a knowledge-based economy" (xv). Empire State College faculty members have heard and said all of this before, of course.

But legislators and members of higher education governing boards need to be made to understand that this is only part of the picture. The technologies that Thurow highlights require only a certain kind of knowledge – knowledge that is skill-based and essentially technical. The technologies are tools – powerful tools, to be sure – but tools that demand other kinds of knowledge to guide their development and implementation. What, for example, constitute ethical applications of these technologies? And how will the introduction of these technologies alter the many different cultures and societies that make up our global human family? These are questions whose answers demand knowledge of arts, humanities, and social sciences disciplines. And the need for these very different kinds of knowledge becomes even more apparent when we consider the rest of the global picture.

The world that today's college and university graduates will enter is also a world in which the once recognizable political alignments of the Cold War have been replaced by ethnic rivalries and unstable realignments around religion and nationalism; a world in which the economic competition between a communist east and a capitalist west has been superseded by transnational conglomerates that threaten once cherished notions of sovereignty and national autonomy; a world in which resource development has also meant cascading species extinction and global environmental disaster; a world where, in some societies, food shortages result in much higher starvation rates for girls and women than for boys and men; a world where, in some areas, human breast milk contains more toxic substances than is permissible in commercial cow's milk; a world where high rates of breast cancer cluster around sites of nuclear power plants; and a world in which the shrinking availability of potable water, clean air, and uncontaminated soil daily widens the gap between "haves" and "have nots."

Unfortunately, despite all good intentions, the shape of many current undergraduate general education curricula – from Plato to T.S. Eliot with a mathematics or earth sciences course thrown in for good measure – poorly prepares students to anticipate, let alone to act effectively within that world. Let's face it: Today's average undergraduates know a great deal about popular entertainment figures, and they often command impressive technical skills; but few ever question the sources of their information or guiding beliefs. Too rarely are today's young people aware of the impact of media messages on their perceptions and ideas, and even less often do our students consider how public views on everything from politics to the impact of global warming – including their own views on these subjects – are daily mediated by private interests like Disney or Viacom. As a result, we must return in new ways to the time-worn cliché that our goal is to educate students for independent thinking and ongoing critical analysis.

In terms of the question I posed earlier regarding Empire State College's ethical and pedagogical responsibilities in the area of general education, I want to expand on that argument.

No single discipline or predetermined course of study, no matter how wise or valuable, can, by itself, provide an adequate organizational principle for understanding the world I have just described. To quote Carol Geary Schneider and Robert Schoenberg of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, "The point to be made here is that the rhetoric and curricular organization associated with inherited concepts of 'the discipline' invite students to think of themselves as pursuing a specific, well-defined competence when the entire ethos of the contemporary world calls for the capacity to cross boundaries, explore connections, and move in uncharted directions" (31).

> *No single discipline or predetermined course of study, no matter how wise or valuable, can, by itself, provide an adequate organizational principle for understanding the world I have just described.*

Because of its flexible curricular offerings, Empire State College already makes this happen for most of its students. And the college can make this happen within the prescribed general education core, as well. As I looked over the "general education requirement" adopted in December 1998, I saw ample opportunities for developing the kinds of creative and innovative courses that have always characterized this institution. For example, in the "knowledge and skills areas" under "mathematics," students are asked to demonstrate competence in a number of areas including "data analysis" and "quantitative reasoning." Wouldn't it be useful, therefore, to develop a mathematics course on "The Real Costs of War," inviting students to create quantitative formulae for distinguishing between short and long-term costs as well as data bases that include specific factors? After we've factored in the costs of military salaries, material and armaments, we might ask students how do we also factor in the costs of death and maiming? What data do we need in order to estimate the costs to a family of losing a son or daughter, a father or a mother? Are the costs simply to be figured as a loss of future earnings or are there also emotional and psychic costs? If so, then how do we quantify these? Surely, this constitutes a timely and important application of the general education requirement for competence in data analysis and quantitative reasoning.

Similarly, the "American history" requirements ask that students "demonstrate knowledge of a basic narrative of American history . . . including knowledge of unity and diversity in American society." Why not go the requirement one better and develop a course around the several competing narratives of American history? My own personal choices for such a reading list would include (but not be limited to) Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States,* Ronald Takaki's *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America,* Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West,* Peter Matthiessen's magisterial *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse,* and Frederick Douglass's three autobiographical narratives, each reconstructing his life for a different and changing historical context: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845); *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1893). Together, these texts surely point to both "unity and diversity in American society."

I noted also that the "basic communication" component of the required general education curriculum asked students to "produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms." In response to that requirement, I ask you to consider a writing exercise that I've assigned to my own students in a course titled "United States Ecocriticism in the Age of Globalization." This semester, my students are researching some current environmental issue of their choice (local, national or global) and composing a publishable op-ed piece that argues a position on their chosen issue. In so doing, they fulfill the SUNY general education requirements to produce a coherent text and, as well, to "research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details." They also learn how to design a persuasive argument for a diverse audience, an audience that may not necessarily share their point of view.

My point is a simple one: It's not some arbitrary body of knowledge that general education should convey (even though that was clearly the intention of some on the SUNY board) but, rather, a body of attitudes and intellectual predispositions.

To put it another way, in a variety of different formats and through assemblages of different kinds of courses, students must be taught to fully comprehend the fact that a world interconnected by commerce and its by-products (pollution, resource depletion, political alliances, and information) will require international perspectives for identifying problems and sensitive understandings of local languages, cultures, economies, histories, belief systems, gender hierarchies, and governance patterns for solving those problems. Clearly, in order to face the complexly interwoven challenges that confront us – from racial and ethnic hatreds to quickening destruction of biological habitats – the students we educate for responsible national and global citizenship in the twenty-first century must be taught to comprehend systems, patterns and interconnections.

That is what general education should be about, nothing more and nothing less. And that goal can be met even within what appear to be the prescriptive rigidities of the 30-credit-hours general education core requirement. Be creative with those prescriptions. Turn them into courses that respond to the larger questions I posed previously. Turn them into courses that really prepare students for the world I just outlined, the world they inhabit.

Finally, let me try to address what I earlier referred to as "the Rodney Dangerfield Ican't- get-no-respect syndrome." Faculty at an experimental and innovative institution like Empire State College – with distance learning and online components – are always confronting a generalized suspicion – as technology critic David F. Noble put it in his recent book, *Digital Diploma Mills: The Automation of Higher Education* – a suspicion that you represent "a dismal new era in higher education," an era in which the "automation of higher education" leads ineluctably to the demise "of our once great democratic higher education system" (qtd. in Brier and Rosenzweig 29).

As we all know, our higher education system is still far from democratic; and for too many students from economically disadvantaged circumstances, higher education isn't really even accessible. Therefore, this body needs to mount a public informational campaign that makes clear how you serve real social needs. You serve a variety of student constituencies whom no one else serves or serves as well. Among other things, you make it possible for adults who must continue to work fulltime in order to support a family to simultaneously seek education and, by that route, economic betterment. And, as part of your campaign, you need to alert the general public to the myriad ways in which federal financial aid – like the Pell grants program – discriminates against your particular student body. (Now is a particularly opportune moment to mount such an informational campaign because, as most of you are probably even more aware than I am, Congress has been considering several competing bills that would ease restrictions "under which colleges that enroll more than half of their students through distance education cannot offer federal student aid" [Carnevale, "Congress" A27].)

You need to alleviate public anxiety that guided independent study or distance education is always inferior to face-to-face classroom instruction, and you need to respond to genuinely concerned critics like David Noble. Those of you who teach courses with web-based and online components might, for example, remind people that the cutting edge technology of the ancient world – writing – was also initially scorned and reviled by famous educators. So fearful was Socrates that writing would replace spoken discourse and thus destroy the student-teacher relationship, he left us no texts by which we might discover him in his own words. Instead, we rely on the texts composed by his student, Plato, who himself shared his teacher's distrust of writing as an educational tool, but who nonetheless *did* write (and wrote about the pedagogical dangers of writing, among other topics). That said, the more important task may be to confront head-on Noble's

assertion that "genuine, interpersonal interaction" between teacher and student can *only* take place in the traditional classroom (quoted in Brier and Rosenzweig 31).

But with students at so many public universities now finding themselves in huge lecture halls along with two or three hundred other students, and no real chance to talk at any length with the overscheduled instructor, how can we any longer pretend that brick-and-mortar campuses always provide meaningful "personal interaction" between student and professor? Sadly, that scenario is increasingly becoming the case at wealthy private colleges only. And what you offer is what people like David Noble really want: a truly personalized educational experience, tailored to a student's specific needs, with ample opportunities for meaningful personal interactions, both online *and* in person with a mentor. And for that, a community center, a faculty member's home, or any one of your 40 centers across the state may prove a far more useful venue than a crowded lecture hall.

So what kind of public informational campaign am I talking about? Simply this: If you really believe that you are serving a vital educational function, and if you believe, further, that you're doing a damned good job of it, then you need to start writing articles for popular magazines and op-ed pieces for the nation's newspapers. You've got to appear on local radio and tv shows. You've got to become public intellectuals. In other words, you've got to educate the general public – and, along with them, boards of trustees and government officials – about what you do, how and why you do it, and the very real skills and talents involved in doing it well.

In recent years, the professoriate has been its own worst enemy, allowing pundits and political operatives to shape the public's largely distorted images of who we are. We now need to speak in our own voices – *all* our many different voices – in order to reassert our importance and our centrality to the nation's future. If we don't do it, no one else will do it for us. And if we don't do it soon, the Bush budget will surely cripple our already severely wounded public institutions.

As that great American philosopher, Yogi Berra, once astutely observed, what we have before us is "an insurmountable opportunity."

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"Sites of Passage"
Betty Wilde-Biasiny, Metropolitan Center

Within these pages, I have made a selection of Hudson River sites and gardens, in both watercolor and oil, which form the core of my work from the past ten years. Through field studies in the form of photographs, watercolors and drawings, I respond to a specific site, then further develop its psychological and autobiographical aspects into paintings or digital prints. My interest in the use of specific sites began in graduate school through my thesis on the "site-specific" interventions onto the landscape by postminimalist artist Robert Smithson.

The series, "Sites of Passage," begins with a group of watercolors made in response to my visit to Olana, the historic estate of Hudson River School painter Frederic Church. Amidst the eclectic architecture and eccentricities of his life, the gardens and views across the Hudson River seem unchanged. In fact, I imagine that the view of the "Oxbow" looked the same to Church as he gazed across the river to the home of his teacher, Thomas Cole (see "View From Olana," watercolor/dyes, 22" x 18", 1992, below).
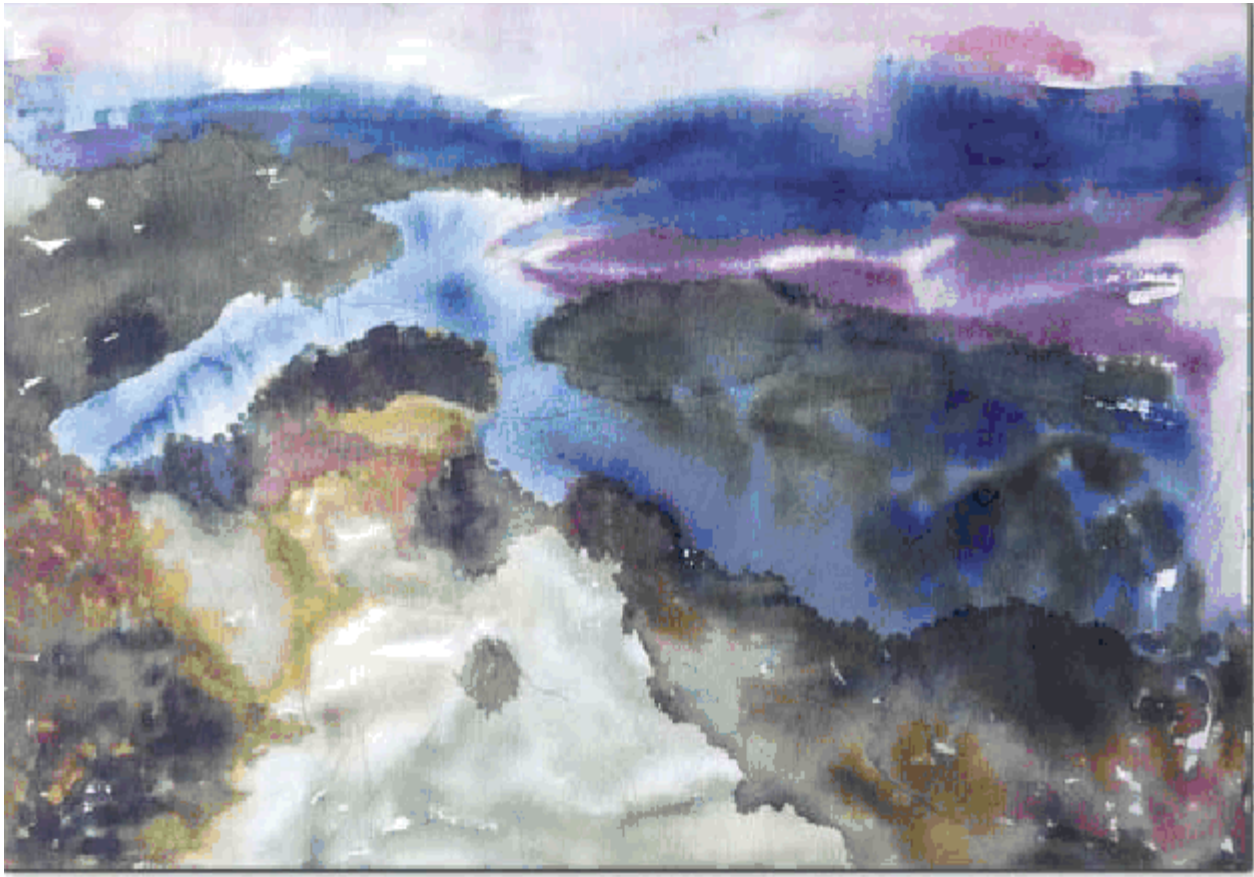
"View From Olana"

"Garden at Olana (2)"

In "Garden at Olana (2)" (22" x 30", watercolor/dyes, 1992), the fluidity of the watercolor medium creates an abstract color field suggesting a dream state. "Hermenea's Walk" (watercolor/dyes, 22" x 18", 1992, Collection Madelaine and Jonathan Piel), is an atmospheric representation of a mystical scene inspired by a ghost tale of a woman walking through the garden behind Church's house. Several of these watercolors have been translated into the medium of digital printmaking, which I had the opportunity to explore through my recent United University Professions (UUP) Professional Development Grant (July/August 2002).

"Hermenea's Walk"

" I continued the theme of sites to my immediate environment in the gardens of my own upstate studio, this time involving more personal content. "Amelia's Garden" (30" x 24", oil on canvas, 2001), named after my daughter, is a joyful picture of a zucchini flower emerging from the twisting leaves of the vegetable garden.

"Amelia's Garden"

"La Familia"

" The zucchini itself is featured above in "La Familia" (30" x 36", oil on linen, 2001).

"Through the Trees"

"Summer Garden"

"Sites of Passage" is a way for me to convey mood, tranquility, nostalgia, and my own passage through space and time. My new digital prints become a kind of "carte de visite" (precursor to the postcard), which disseminate these views to a wider audience. I enjoy the tension between traditional landscape imagery and the myriad possibilities of expanding it through digital imaging and large scale murals, two of my current projects.

![ALL ABOUT MENTORING — A Publication of Empire State College]

The Habit of Mind
Jack Mezirow on Transformative Learning

Jack Mezirow

On 29 May, Jack Mezirow, emeritus professor of adult education, Teachers College, Columbia University, led a discussion of his work on "transformative learning" at Empire State College's New York City office. About 30 Empire State College colleagues were a part of this Mentoring Institute-sponsored gathering, in which we used Mezirow's recent essay, "Transformative Learning as Discourse" as a take-off point for a conversation about the many connections between his theory and our mentoring practices.

Perhaps at the heart of our day together was Jack Mezirow's basic argument about the distinctive role of the adult educator. As he described it in our common reading:

"To foster the ability to reason in adulthood, the adult educator must help learners acquire the skills, sensitivities, and understandings essential to become critically reflective of assumptions and to participate more fully and freely in critical-dialectical discourse. Although the educator helps the learner assess and

achieve the learner's objective, the professional goal of the educator is to foster the learner's skills, habit of mind, disposition, and will to become a more active and rational learner."

Central New York Stories
Lee Herman, Central New York Center
Frances Mercer, Central New York Center

At the 2003 All College meeting of the Mentoring Institute Advisory Board, members shared Empire State College experiences which alerted them to what mentoring and the college are "all about." We realized that this exercise could help all employees of the college remember, recognize, refresh, communicate and sustain the meanings of their work.

The college is changing; it has always been changing. Nonetheless, Empire State College remains proud that it's unusual. In recent years, new programs, policies, procedures, personnel and requirements have arrived. People who have been here since the beginning have retired or are planning to do so. They know important things: Why we have "learning contracts" and "contract evaluations," and why both students and faculty had to sign them before they became "legal." Why and how we identify prior and intended learning "wherever and however it occurs," no matter its correspondence to cataloged course descriptions. Why faculty are called "mentors" and not "teachers" or "professors." They luxuriated in the diversity and malleability of the institution, even while they complained, often with good reason, about its inefficiency, incoherence and workload. But, they knew that, although you can't step into the same river twice (or maybe even once), water is not the same as mud and rock. Some things abide, and it's important to understand the difference between what's worth preserving and what's worth changing.

Storytelling is one way a community learns who it is and who it ought to be. So, during this spring, the people working at the Central New York Center decided to share their stories of "significant moments." Faculty, professional and clerical employees participated. Their stories appear in the following sections. We have left them largely unedited. At the request of the contributors, we have removed the names of the authors. Also, so that readers can more easily find their way, we have grouped them according to three general themes (academic practices, the student-mentor relationship and becoming a mentor); and, we've given each story a title, for which effrontery we beg the pardon of the authors.

We believe that writing the stories and sharing them was a good learning activity for our center. We hope that other centers, programs and offices of the college will give it a try. We also believe that the way in which we conducted/structured our discussion of the stories was productive. All members of the center were asked to write and share their stories by e-mail prior to our June center retreat. At the retreat everyone (faculty, support staff and administrators) was asked to review the entire packet of stories, select one that was particularly interesting, identify questions that the story stimulated and think about what they had learned from reading the story, what they wanted to remember and what they wanted to hold on to. Then each person was given an opportunity to speak without comments from the others. This meant that

everyone had input and the discussion did not get sidetrack or time get consumed by only one topic. All agreed that writing and reading the stories themselves was an enriching experience. However, thinking about and sharing our responses to the stories as an entire center further enriched our learning. The engagement was so intense that we readily agreed to extend our discussion for an extra hour.

Lee Herman,
Frances Mercer

ACADEMIC PRACTICES

Musical Math

"What's your interest in math?" I ask George, who was sent to me by one of the other mentors in the unit. From what I can see, his primary interest is in the arts – particularly music.

"None whatsoever," he said. "My mentor told me that my degree program would never be approved without a math course, so here I am to take, what? I don't know – probably algebra, which I'm sure I'll hate with a passion."

"Well … ," I say. "Some students like courses such as algebra because it doesn't involve writing long papers and it provides them with a temporary escape from usual academic heavy-duty reflections – I mean, like, do you enjoy doing puzzles and stuff like that?"

"Are you kidding?" he asks me incredulously. "I'm getting married in six weeks. I have a job in the bank. My jazz group has at least one gig a week, and I'm trying to graduate within this next term. You want to know whether I'd enjoy doing puzzles? Give me a break! I don't want to take math – it seems like a complete waste of time to me – but I said I would do it, and here I am. Let's just get it over with!"

George has now earned an entry in the Hall of Unique Students. In 18 years of mentoring adult students, no one has so explicitly told me how uninterested he (or she) was in working with me. (Later, he would apologize). And yet, I was sympathetic. I was broken into the teaching of mathematics to adult students many years before when I "taught" algebra to a 55-year-old Sicilian immigrant (who only had a 10th grade education). It was an agonizing experience for both us. Although he gave vocational instruction in upholstering to delinquent youth, he did not have the most basic knowledge of even volume even though the calculation of square yardage would seem (at least to me) to be important in his work. Moving beyond that to learning how to divide a polynomial by a polynomial was not only incomprehensible to him, but for someone interested in pursuing social justice and a human service career, utterly without relevance or value. And in my previous life in the arts, I remember many young people begrudging every single minute that they had to "waste" on study away from music or painting or writing.

"I don't see that you must necessarily take algebra," I remarked. "How are your numerical skills? Are you anxious about working with numbers?"

"Well," he admitted, "that's not really a problem. I remember liking my math courses in high school – but of course, I'm long past high school now and I need to focus on what's really important today."

"How about studying something like, well, say, the mathematics of music?" I asked. "Given your commitment to a career as a musician, a study like that might be fun – and also important, yes?" Since I had just made up that course title as I spoke – I had never seen nor guided such a study before – it was perhaps not entirely surprising that he looked blank – but curious. So I began to improvise:

"Lots of musicians use probability theory in composition – and statistical concepts in the development of electronic music. Also, there's a lot of mathematics involved in understanding the differences between instrumental sounds and their combination. And then too, there's acoustics – how sound moves through space is all figured out through math. Oh … and there's musical analysis – that's quite quantitative – to say nothing of the basic concepts of musical notation … indeed, there's research showing that young children with musical instruction are considerably better in understanding mathematical concepts such as fractions and so forth than children without such instruction … ." As I rambled on, I searched my bookshelves and files for various books and articles I've collected over the years – one on the physics of music, several from the Mathematical Association of America on the application of music to the arts; a recent report on the importance of instruction in music and the arts in the development of academic skills in children. And George, now truly intrigued, began to contribute to this conversation his own suggestions – such as whether he might use some part of this course to help him learn how to read music.

For me, this rather spontaneous conversation, out of which a learning contract was ultimately constructed, exemplifies the kind of learning that mentoring is more apt to stimulate than traditional classroom instruction. Mentoring, which includes one-to-one conversations with students and great course flexibility, allowed me, in this case, to match or integrate or fit a student's particular needs and interests to my own belief in the importance of a broad education. No matter what George ended up studying about mathematics, this particular mentoring moment helped him to better understand that his own preconception of mathematical study was quite limited, that academic disciplines are not unrelated islands or irrelevant to each other, and that learning need never be something to be gotten over with. Even if such lessons are of general, even universal importance, the uniqueness of this moment – that it was the unplanned product of a particular time and place with a particular combination of mentor and student – is what made the learning especially meaningful and potentially transformational for the student.

> *No matter what George ended up studying about mathematics, this particular mentoring moment helped him to better understand that his own preconception of mathematical study was quite limited, that academic disciplines are not unrelated islands or irrelevant to each other, and that learning need never be something to be gotten over with.*

Planning and Distances

Dick is a very capable student who started at Empire State College in the '70s. He thought he wanted a business degree, but quickly decided he really wanted one in cultural studies. After he obtained 47 credits, he left the state, left Empire State College, and pursued a successful career in computer technology in

business. Sixteen years later he resumed his studies in CDL to get his degree in history. Initially he seemed uncertain about whether he wanted to make a major career change. But he definitely wanted to study history and hoped to be able to find a way to write on historical topics.

Educational Planning gave Dick the opportunity for career exploration so he could see whether job possibilities existed that would let him pursue his interest in writing history. I referred him to the career resources section of the historical studies web page and told him to explore from there. When he did, he discovered public history. He followed references to many web sites and articles and contacted people in the field. He was very excited – said he never knew such opportunities existed. These are roles that he can fill with a master's degree, which he definitely plans to pursue. He may well go on for a Ph.D. He now talks about using his degree to make a major life change.

Dick is an ideal Empire State College student. He is self-directed and has good study and writing skills. But he needed some guidance about the field he is interested in. Educational Planning provided the framework for the exploration he needed to do, and I was able to point him to resources to help him reach the next phase of his work. As he learned to incorporate his new learning in the articulation of his goals, he was able to design a program that should take him far in his chosen direction.

Constraints and Possibilities

A couple of years ago, I heard from a student who had withdrawn from the college in 1995, with 16 credits left to complete his approved degree program. He had withdrawn while going through a difficult divorce and becoming a single parent. After taking his daughter to college that fall, he realized that it was his turn to finish what he had started.

Our unit had since moved from an old elementary classroom to the fifth floor of the State Office Building. But the student tracked me down and contacted me to see if he could pick up his degree program where he had left off.

We scheduled a meeting and began to talk about how he might resume his studies. In the course of our discussion, I began to realize how much the college had changed in the intervening years. There were now more structured distance courses available and some of those had been moved to a web interface. There were better methods of tracking the studies undertaken and completed in relation to the approved degree program. And there were new academic policies to consider. However, I also realized that the student expected me to "know" him – and to explain processes and consider alternatives that were likely to fit his situation and learning style.

I suddenly became more aware of the tension between the college (resources, policies, processes) and the individual student (abilities, interests, needs). In a way, what the college provides is a space for constrained optimization. And the role of the mentor is to mediate the variables so each student is able to understand the relevant constraints but also recognize the possibilities to define and reach individual goals within this setting.

Learning to Wait

The most important thing I've learned both from and about learning here is "waiting:"

- I'm noodging Deborah to complete her dp plan (she's completed a lot of credits; I'm anxious about getting her into assessment). She says, "I haven't had my vision yet. When I have, I'll have a degree plan. I do understand all that you've told me about assessment and getting the portfolio done. Now, I

think you should trust me and wait." I do – I don't exactly have much choice. And in a month or six weeks, Deborah returns with a complete, superb dp. She says, "See, I had my vision. Thanks for waiting."

- Len is one essay shy of completing a bachelor's degree. Then, his normal life falls apart. We discuss finishing the degree. I take the "you're so close, why don't you just stick it out" approach. He says he needs to take time; he believes that much important learning will emerge, somehow, someday, from what he's now going through. He can't give an estimated completion date: "How can you set a time on really important life learning?" he asks. Six years later, I receive an essay from him, from Arizona. It's profound, informed, personal, full of wonder and unquestionably authentic. After lots of advocacy to and help from the administrative powers, Len gets his credit and the degree. (I like this example because it's so extreme; naturally, the same thing occurs much more often with shorter time intervals.)

- Diane tells me that she prefers to discuss her essays with me via e-mail rather than in person. She lives close to my office and has a flexible schedule. I ask why. "Because I can think better when you're not looking at me and waiting right there and then for my answers to your questions." We try out Diane's idea. I have to wait longer, but her responses are indeed clearer and more thorough. Most important, when she gets stuck (and this does happen), she no longer says, "I can't tell what you're looking for." So, I'm happy to wait longer in time by creating more distance in space.

- I know and care a lot about ancient Greek philosophy. Every now and then, I have a student who wants to learn about this subject. Christina has read some Plato, doesn't engage, and is eager to move on to Aristotle. I'm concerned that her learning might be too superficial to move on so quickly. She indicates that she knows Plato is important but says that she will learn more by considering Aristotle's criticisms of his work. I want to argue with her, drawing my expertise. But, a "little voice" (this is a Socratic thing) tells me to wait. I do, for several days. I discover that I don't know my way will be helpful to Christina and I remember that what really matters is that she gain experience in philosophical discourse. We go her way. Christina learns a lot about both Aristotle and Plato; I learn, thanks to waiting until I can examine my own belief and take hers seriously, a new way to approach philosophical texts.

Is waiting *always* the best thing to do? Of course not. But at what other school and in what other approach to learning can we so usefully discover that there is not a necessary connection between intelligence and constricted time, and that by "waiting," in slow time, we – both students and mentors – can learn so far beyond the beliefs we started from?

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Expectations and Revisions

I was not in the college long when I was asked to mentor a student, who was interested in doing a sociology study. From a brief conversation I had with the student it was soon obvious that she had very poor verbal skills. When she handed in her first assignment I discovered to my horror that her written skills were even worse. I was confronted with the problem of how to work with someone who it turned out had about a sixth grade reading level. Our discussions were an exercise in misunderstandings. I would try to convey a theoretical model or concept only to see her struggle to comprehend its meaning. It was at this point that I realized how difficult mentoring would be. Up to that point I saw myself as primarily the disseminator of information. I realized that with this student I had to change my approach completely and try to find some way of communicating, let alone learning. I adopted the technique of listening and saying very little, interjecting a question here and there but letting the student do most of the talking. She had a lot of personal problems that she was only too willing to share. It occurred to me that her life might be the grist for some learning so I asked her to tell me about certain aspects of her life and then to write about them. My goal, insofar as I had one, was to get the student to see these situations from different perspectives, which she was able to do to a certain extent. We ended up scrapping the original learning contract and continuing the conversation. I ended up writing an evaluation for the student even though the work she did fell far short of what one might expect for college-level learning, let alone the requirements of this study. What I learned was that mentoring is a very individualized exercise and that one's expectations can be blown asunder in engaging students of varying backgrounds and abilities.

Wherever and However Learning Occurs

I interviewed a student seeking credit for her knowledge of cultural diversity. Her essay was brief and poorly written. There was an indication from those at Empire State College who knew her that she had struggled with mental illness and poverty and that her communication with others was not always clear. Based on just this, it was hard to get a sense of her learning. Before the interview, I made sure that I had a thoroughly prepared list of questions. During the interview, she answered all of the questions and by spending more than the average amount of time for such an interview, I found that she understood this area very well. I couldn't find a reason not to recommend the 4 credits she requested. The context in which she gained her knowledge was not as manager in a large corporation, responsible for diversity issues. She most likely would have a hard time being hired for such a position. Rather it was on the other end of the spectrum – working on an assembly line helping immigrants adjust to a different culture or working as an apartment manager renting to individuals from a variety of cultures who had struggles similar to her own. When I think of this interaction, I am always reminded how the processes and structures in place at Empire State College help to level the playing field.

Learning Freedom?

Background:

Stu is unusual among my students in that he comes with three years of liberal arts credit from Cortland State. He's got the usual 20 years of corporate experience, but he doesn't have that two-year technical degree that seems to typify 90 percent of my students. Stu has also lost his job, and is enrolled full time. Finally, Stu has a daughter with a life-threatening illness.

Stu was coming in for our third meeting related to Educational Planning. We'd had our initial, what's going on here, what's expected discussion, and had met to talk about an essay he'd written in response to an article about "Multiple Intelligences." Since that meeting I'd received an autobiographical essay from Stu,

and this meeting was going to focus, I thought, on prior learning essays.

The Visit:

Stu is an intense guy, and that's an understatement this morning. He's hunched over in his chair, glaring at me. He takes a few minutes, as we get started, to bring me up to date on his daughter's illness. There are bright spots, but things remain very frightening. When we do get around to Educational Planning, he burst out:

Look, I just want you to tell me what the shortest distance is between two points! We've talked about Organizational Communication as a title for my major, and that's fine with me. What do I have to do to get there? What's required? I'm willing to do whatever I have to, just tell me!

And there I am, back on my heels. How do I get from here to a discussion of planning options, investigating alternatives, student ownership and informed decision making?

THE STUDENT-MENTOR RELATIONSHIP

Advocacy

As I sit at my computer, I am trying to decide which event would best describe a conversation, an encounter, or an incident which alerted me to an important, distinctive feature of this college: its mission, its students, its educational philosophy etc.

There have been so many encounters and incidents surrounding what Empire State College is all about; to put it simply, the service that we deliver to our students. This college has always been a student-centered form of education. Our mentors work very hard to provide the best one-to-one instruction to each and every one of our students. It makes me proud to be part of such a caring institution. At times, we just need to listen to students who have personal tragedies, who feel that they have nowhere else to turn. I remember one particular day when we had a student who really needed to speak to her mentor. Prior to meeting with the mentor, she explained to me what had happened. This was a truly difficult day for this student because she had a death in her family involving a tragic accident with a small child. This child was playing on top of a large dirt pile in his backyard. The dirt pile collapsed burying this young boy and, of course, he suffocated. Unfortunately, this happened in Boston. This student had minimal financial resources available to her and relied heavily on her financial aid. While she was in with her mentor, I called Eileen Corrigan, head of the Financial Aid Office, and asked her if there was anything that we could do to assist this student in traveling to Boston to attend her nephew's funeral service and to be there to comfort her sister. I knew that she would not be able to attend the services without financial assistance.

Eileen Corrigan was able to put together a small hardship grant. This was not an easy thing to put together on such short notice. It required two other signatures at the Empire State College Coordinating Center and asking one of her staff to drive to the post office for this grant to go out in overnight mail. After having accomplished all of this, the student was able to travel to Boston without delay.

I can't tell you how proud I felt working for an institution such as Empire State College. Not only do we provide the best education possible, but Empire State College has a heart as well. This type of service and caring to me is part of the college's mission, and its educational philosophy. One final note, this student graduated from Empire State College with her B.S. in community and human services with a concentration in helping principles and practices in human services.

This is but one of many stories. But our goal is the same. To provide the best educational services to each

and every one of our students so that they may achieve their life's goals upon completion of their degree. Thank you.

Making It Work: Collaboration

Sometimes, I must confess, when I hear us celebrating the transformative moments in mentoring, I think of those moments that seem quite the opposite. One student, whom I'll call Nelly, and I have had a whole string of those moments. Nelly is a young wife and mother who cares for her own and other people's children in her home. She hopes to become an elementary teacher, and is concentrating in historical studies. She came to Empire State College with an associate degree and fairly good grades. With her A.S. degree and the need to fulfill NYSED course requirements for eventual certification, and because, she said, she wanted to learn about history, Nelly had little room for credit for experiential learning and decided to complete her bachelor's degree through course work.

Nelly is one of several of my students who want to do all their studies at home. At least, the others come into the office to enroll, but Nelly says this is hard for her: after the day-care is over, she has to make dinner for her family. I have seen her maybe twice. We communicate a lot on e-mail, as she seldom calls.

Nelly would have liked to do all of her studies through CDL, but CDL has not offered all the studies she has needed, and sometimes we have tried to enroll her a week before the beginning of a term, and she has been closed out. She has expressed frustration at being closed out of web courses.

In her first enrollment, Nelly obtained an incomplete but then failed her first upperlevel CDL history course. The tutor gave both Nelly and me feedback: Nelly's essays were not analytical or in-depth enough. She did finish her two other studies, including Educational Panning, but we decided not to submit her program until we were sure she could get (and pass) the studies she had listed. Perhaps I should have suggested she transfer to CDL, but I made some assumptions, one of which was that she might fare better with individual, local studies. In retrospect, I think I also decided she was not a strong student, perhaps not fully committed to her work, either.

Next term, she did three individual studies: Exceptionality with Frances, New York State History with Charles, and Writing About History with me. A little distance group study in NY History had formed, with two other students who were already having a great time working together on projects, and I had hoped Nelly would join but she did not want to leave home and meet with the other students. We gave her the option of calling them, but she did not.

This time, though, she did work hard to improve her writing. She kept e-mailing us for feedback, and I dare say I was the one who was remiss in giving her much detail. Again, she had some difficulty in analyzing a controversial book Frances assigned. In her writings about history I saw a steady improvement. She moved from subjective informal writing to discussion of material taken from local as well as scholarly sources. Research, synthesis and evaluation were coming together.

I mailed her an LCP for the spring CDL term, but she was closed out of two courses. Again we did individual studies, this time with Larry Reynolds and Kammy Hanlin. And this summer, she again wanted CDL courses. We talked on the telephone and I mailed her the registration form three weeks before the term was to begin. I sent it to her, then went away to M.A.L.S. and UUP, came back, found the envelope from her in the mail – and assumed it was her rationale essay, which she had also promised to send me.

Well, during no appointment week, two weeks later, I pulled her envelope out of my bag, intending to read it – Lo and behold – it was her enrollment form! We were too late for CDL – again. Needless to say, Nelly was unhappy with me, as well as extremely worried about how she would finish her final term.

At the May center meeting, two of my colleagues rescued the situation: Paul Miller agreed to tutor Nelly in Women's and Family History, and Kammy Hanlin, in Middle Eastern History. Kammy noted that she had indeed built a good relationship with Nelly through phone tutorial.

So, what has this chain of events taught me about mentoring? First, I realized that Nelly had become a pretty good student, not through my efforts, but through the help of my colleagues and her own hard work, none of which I had seen her doing. I had not established rapport with her, and had underestimated her dedication. Finally, Nelly's experience reminds me that mentoring is in many respects a collective process among everyone who works with her.

Life Learning and Academic Skills

I have a student who was enrolled with Empire State College for the first time in 1997. When she enrolled, her only prior experience with higher education had been two community college courses taken in 1985: Developmental Writing and Basic Mathematics. During our orientation session for new students, we ask them to write brief endings for the following: "Once I was … , Now I am … , Some day I will be … ." She wrote: "Once I was a person who really didn't care. Now I am a person who cares about what happens. Someday I will be my own person. I never gave a thought to what life really was. Now I have three children, two with problems, one that is a double A student. I think it is time for me to make a difference in my life, Hopefully a better life for all of us." In her admission essay, she had written: "What I would really like to be able to do, is to help other parents … Some parents have no clue what to do one minute to the next for their special children. It took me six years to even begin to learn, it was all the hard way to learn. Many parents would have given up after stumbling through the first two years of their child's education. There is a real need for some kind of help here for the families who have children with disabilities. I would also like to be able to do counseling to those families, who have children with ADD, and other emotional problems."

> "Once I was a person who really didn't care. Now I am a person who cares about what happens. Someday I will be my own person. I never gave a thought to what life really was. Now I have three children, two with problems, one that is a double A student. I think it is time for me to make a difference in my life, hopefully a better life for all of us."

I discovered in our first meetings that she was very naïve about "college." She believed that achieving a degree would make her better able to help other parents, but she was not clear about how a degree would help and even more unclear about what would be expected of her in her academic studies. Nevertheless,

she was enthusiastic and eventually enrolled full time in four studies (a CDL course in Human Development, a study group in Society and Technology, an individual independent study in Disabilities and Society, and a field study/independent study in Creative Models for an Ecologically Just and Sustainable Society). In fact the study in Creative Models happened because she immediately "got" the concept of individualized study. When she had an opportunity to participate in a week-long retreat with her teenage daughter, she approached me about designing a study that would incorporate this learning opportunity. She finished three of the studies in her first learning contract, but with consistent feedback about marginally acceptable writing skills and need for substantial further development of her critical reading and analysis skills. After this learning contract, I was on sabbatical for a year. During that year, she enrolled again but failed to complete the three studies.

She then came to see me in the fall of 2000 asking about finishing the prior studies and about re-enrolling. Eventually she decided to "give up" on the prior studies and to re-enroll for new studies in the spring of 2001. I realized during the meetings to plan the new studies that I was talking with a much more sophisticated woman than I had met with three years ago. She had experienced significant growth not through her studies with Empire State College but through a very rich set of learning experiences connected to her new job as a family advocate with the regional independent living center. She had been sent to conferences and training at the state and national levels. She had collaborated with individuals in several counties to start up support groups for families. She interacted with educated professionals on a daily basis. She had learned how to use computer programs for word processing, including checking grammar and spelling. She was much more aware of her academic developmental needs.

She completed the studies in her third learning contract over a very extended period of time, but experienced significant growth in her writing skills and once again was able to ask for tailoring of the studies to her needs. In her fourth learning contract, she attempted four studies, which were interrupted by September 11. By chance, she was in New York City for a visit to an independent living center near the World Trade Center towers when the attack happened and ended up not being able to return home to the North Country for several days. She found this an extremely profound experience. Even though 9/11 happened only a month before the end date of her learning contract, we modified two of the studies to address new priorities that she felt after the experience.

My whole experience with this student has repeatedly demonstrated to me that each student studies, learns, and grows within a complex life, of which Empire State College is only a minor part. I was continually humbled by the growth that took place and in which I had no particular role. I believe a strength of Empire State College is our willingness to acknowledge and incorporate that continuous experiential learning, to notice when someone has changed or become more aware, more articulate about his/her own learning needs. Another uniqueness illustrated by my experience with this student is the student's willingness to return again and again to her studies ever hopeful of success and with the expectation that the door remained open and that her individual needs would be considered.

Life Learning

While the following is not exactly a mentoring moment, it was a moment when I felt, aha, it worked, that's what this place is all about: helping students to re-invent themselves. Mary-Anne, I'll call her, came to the college unhappy with her life, her husband and the lot she thought had been handed to her. She also had three young children, though they were obviously her joy in life. I don't know what she did about her husband, though I have an idea. We worked together closely in ed planning and eventually discovered a direction that would help her out of the hole she thought she was in. Ten years after she graduated I got an e-mail from her:

I think of you often with tremendous gratitude and real fondness. I always had the sense that you were embarrassed by how much I appreciated your efforts to point me in the right direction but the fact is that of all the people and events in my life, I consider your guidance to be the catalyst for my most significant turning point. I have tried to pass along that legacy in some small way whenever I could since I know there's no way to ever repay you for the hours you spent listening to me and helping me create a better life for myself.

As much as I figure I would have placed myself on an academic track "if I had everything to do over," I think I've finally found my niche. Since I can't imagine myself ever becoming facile at corporate politics, I've started my own consulting firm outside DC where I let people know on their first interview that the choice to politic their way around the company can get them fired. Synthesis will be five years old in October and we did around $1.25M in revenues last year. We focus on fusing technology with content expertise to support federal, state and nonprofit health and safety outreach programs. If you'd like to take a look at our web site to see more about the things we do you can click on www.synthesisps.com.

Whenever I get in a discussion with a self serving conservative who brings up Clarence Thomas as an example of leveling the playing field by pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps as Justice Thomas advises, I tell them that first people need to know they have bootstraps and even where their bootstraps can be found. Typically, they have no frame of reference to even hear what I'm saying, but I immediately think of you and silently bless you for helping me find mine.

If you ever get to the DC area, please let me know. I'd love to see you and catch up. Meanwhile, I hope you and yours are well and I wish you all the best."

It was not her material success that strikes me, but the certain knowledge that she had found herself with some help from Empire State College. That's what this college is about and it's why I work here.

Discovering Learning and Life Possibilities

Looking backward in time leads to a mist, beyond which many students and experiences have vanished from view. A few shine through the haze.

The achiever. One early student, Tom, was very accomplished and requested letter grade equivalents for each study. I need to know how good I am, he said. He drove himself to meet deadlines. He also drove me to meet his deadlines for returning work and submitting evaluations. He was demanding and critical of his tutors. In our discussions, I learned his father and his brother had earned their doctorates. He confided that he had decided to prove he could succeed on talent, without the credential. He had done well. Tom supervised a group of writers at Baxter Labs, providing technical documentation for software and for hardware. Tom had decided that he needed to complete a degree to achieve the levels of success he was aspiring to. While Tom was still a student, he accepted a position with a leading book publisher, Prentice-Hall, as an editor in New York City, meriting a corner office with a coveted window.

It took some time to get Tom's credit by evaluations reviewed and his portfolio submitted to Ed Saueracker, our capable dean for assessment. I heard a lot from Tom, who called frequently and occasionally with some sharp remarks about how hard he had worked and how he expected the same from others. I generally felt more than a bit inadequate following these phone calls. I continued to work on his portfolio and we eventually got it submitted and approved. Tom graduated. I was quite certain that he had written me off. To my surprise, I received a thank you note from Tom, with kind remarks about how much he appreciated his experience at the school. Later he called to say he was applying to graduate school, and would I serve as a reference. A few years later, he called to let me know he had successfully completed law school, graduating among the top in his class.

What I learned – Tom was a difficult student. He drove himself to high levels of performance and had little tolerance for others who did not reach his standards. As a result, he was a difficult student to work with. I learned to stick with students of this type. As a colleague said, he probably drove many people who might otherwise have been close to him away with his incessant demands for perfection.

Death of a ghost. Another student I worked with was "George," a sales manager for a small firm. When he came to us, George was barely college-level material. He had recently been let go by one firm and been hired to represent another small business. His writing was mediocre. He frequently expressed a concern about having to do any math. George struggled through writing studies with a wonderful mentor, Wendy Goulston, who stuck with him. He completed his other courses, avoiding math like the plague. Eventually, he completed his associate degree, having taken a course of business math with me.

We spent a number of hours discussing math. He related that when he was a kid he recalled bringing his report card home, with poor grades in math. His father slammed George's head into the wall to motivate him to do better. On another occasion he indicated his father had told him he wasn't college material. Wendy and I breathed a sigh of relief when George qualified for his associate degree.

We were flabbergasted when he then announced he intended to continue on for his bachelor's degree. Both of us felt the associate degree was the appropriate stopping out point for him. He wouldn't listen, despite my efforts to counsel him out. He said again and again how important it was to him to complete his bachelor's degree and how important it was to him to show his father he could do it.

We began studies for his bachelor's degree. Eventually, he made it. A day or so before graduation he called me to ask if he could bring his 90-year-old father by to meet me. We met in the parking lot outside Trainor House, his father too feeble to walk into my office. I talked to George and to his father, while the father sat in the car. He seemed a perfectly normal, nice old man. He had flown in from California to attend George's graduation. I told him how proud he should be of his son completing his bachelor's degree, a program that only about 40 percent of those starting would complete at our college. We shook hands.

What I learned. This student has sometimes been identified in my mind as the student for whom achieving his college degree meant the most of any graduate I have had. He was a marginal student in terms of academic accomplishment. He consumed enormous resources and energy. But … in some important ways he was more changed by accomplishing this degree than any other student I have worked with. And, I am proud of his accomplishments. Perhaps I was changed, or at least solidified, in making choices about supporting his dreams. Although he expected his life to change in a substantial way as a result of earning his degree, I don't believe it really did in any material way. George kept his job, played golf, and remained married to his much loved wife of many years, Linda. But I believe his inner life did change.

Divorced. I heard a great deal of marital problems from Mary. Her husband was taking the Long Island Railroad for a ride, claiming a back injury that was fake. She was fed up with him and had decided to leave him. Mary had come to Empire State College to improve her job, so she could support herself. Mary was a better than average student motivated, polite and funny. She spoke and wrote with a New Yorker accent that made me think on Pygmalion story. She completed several more studies, and announced her divorce had been completed.

One day, we met in the large conference room at Trainor House. "Are you a priest," she asked? I laughed and said, "no." Why do you ask?" "You act like a priest," Mary said. Several months later, Mary brought a good friend into meet me. He became more than a friend, and later they were married. Mary continued her studies, finishing her degree very successfully. Her speech and writing still contained much of her New Yorker accent. A few years later, Mary called to ask if I would be a reference for graduate school. She was

still married, and life was good for her. Mary wanted more education. I gladly completed the evaluation.

What I learned. A mentor is privileged to be on the periphery of student's lives, as they go through difficult times. It's important to be supportive and accepting; and important to have limits.

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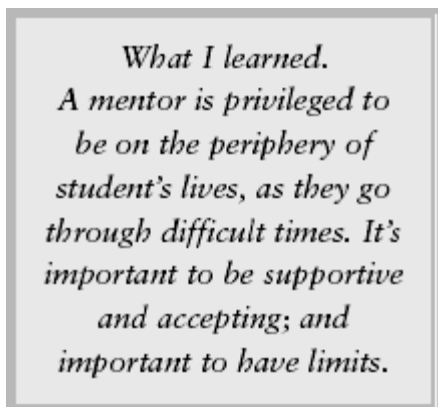
BECOMING A MENTOR

Self-mentoring? Maybe

I was daydreaming the other night, thoughtful after one of our center meetings in Syracuse, and suddenly felt the urge to write in my diary. I would like to share my thoughts with all of you, my new colleagues.

All consider me an eccentric, a crazy lady who jumps into situations impetuously, sometimes taking useless risks. I can't help it. I know certain things and I act on them spontaneously, even furiously. I had a terrible childhood in Morocco and an equally awful first school experience in a French school system that addressed none of my daily experiences, realities or dreams. I felt lost during all of my elementary and high school years. When I finally joined the rank of the dropouts at the age of 15, it was not because I needed more stimulation from the world. It was because I was deadly bored.

Nothing my teachers taught me tricked my curiosity. I was constantly bored.

During my adolescence, I worked at odd jobs and got more bored. My only engagement in those days, as I recall, occurred in a failed attempt to help Moroccan Jews escape for Israel. I was not interested enough and disengaged very fast. When I was 20, my family immigrated to Canada. Our community was being persecuted, which forced my parents to make this painful decision. They were leaving behind, for their children's future sake, everything that was important to them as individuals and members of a community.

I remember the instant sense of freedom I felt when I first arrived that December 24, 1966. A new life opened up for me, comparatively devoid of rules and taboos to what I had left behind. I also remember that curiosity I felt for everything I saw, heard or did even though I needed to learn to live in a cold climate, communicate in a new language, conform to new social norms, and ways of being so drastically different from the ones I knew so well.

One year later, I was married to an English Canadian professional and was back to school. It was time for me to finish high school that I had interrupted after only one year for a vocational school. Married, adult and Jewish, I chose a Jesuit convent for this adventure. Nothing could have stopped me. Even the mathematics

and algebra I so beautifully failed over and over again. Seeing my limitations, the sisters allowed me to take physics instead. I loved it and had no difficulty learning. And this is how I was able to finish my high school diploma and get back on the road of academics.

Because understanding was my motivation, I, of course, chose philosophy as my next challenge. I learned how to think critically with great teachers who made me love the subject because they loved it themselves. What I was learning made sense to me, I could associate it with experiences I did not know I had and I had learned from. It meant something. The new words I was learning, these new ideas I was conceiving made sense with my past, and present life. And what more, they gave me hope for the future. To my amazement, without feeling I was working very hard, I was able to receive great marks for my assignments. To my astonishment I was not "a lost cause." I was not a failure. I was not only good enough to get married, have children, keep a good Jewish home, and be loyal to my husband and a good cook. I had without knowing it learned many important things during that lost childhood and adolescence of mine, and I was able to integrate this learning into philosophical ideas.

I've never stopped studying since then. I was reborn. I did conform to the traditional educational system, but this time I did not let "them" destroy me with put downs and marks. I had a goal, and it was to learn. I was never an "A" student during these years. I had to study hard and was never sure I really understood. But I kept going. Something was there to discover and I was going to discover some of it.

And then one day I was invited to come to Empire State College for an interview. I had read about the college teaching philosophy and it seduced me for its lack of walls, classrooms, rigid syllabus, curriculum and marks. So I came, and this is what I would like to tell you today.

You have a wonderful philosophy of learning, and I hope that with your help one day, I will become a mentor you'll be proud of knowing. You are giving people like me the opportunity to discover, evolve and become. This is a precious gift. By being curious yourselves, and learning with them you are helping them actualize their dreams and goals. You are, maybe for the first time, giving them birth. You are helping them become integrated human beings. The knowledge you are helping them integrate is unique. It makes sense with their life rather than being conditioned by alienating social values. Thank you.

Helping Adults Learn

When I first started working at Empire State College, if someone had asked me what I thought mentoring was I would have remarked that it was a lot like babysitting. It seemed to me that faculty spent a great deal of time watching over their students, making sure that they had done all of the proper paperwork for financial aid, that they made regular appointments, and that they were clear on what was expected. To me, it also seemed a bit like overkill because these students were "adults," many with children of their own in college, who should know that they were expected to stay on top of things. But, as I continued to work and learn more about Empire State College and how it functioned, I realized that adults at this college are less likely to cling to the processes involved in being a student than younger students at traditional colleges. For students here, life outside their student identity often gets in the way. I cannot identify a particular moment or instance when my perception of mentoring changed for I would have to say that it evolved over time. It became clear to me that mentoring is more about acting as a guide, a motivator, or a reflective device for moments of doubt. It's more personal than simply teaching or evaluating. We are the students' lifelines, at times, and what greater gift is there than seeing them move on to bigger and better things?

Getting the Degree is More than Getting the Degree

I think the most meaningful incident I can recall was attending my first Empire State College graduation

ceremony, in June 1998. I had been with the college for five months and had only been assigned a handful of mentees up to that point, so I hadn't heard many stories. Hearing student after student talk about the long path to getting the degree, I started to have more understanding and appreciation of the role of the college (and mentors) in making a college education available to students who really wouldn't have been able to get a degree any other way. I think the fact that students appeared to be genuinely thankful took me totally by surprise … . I can't imagine feeling thankful to any of the educational institutions I've attended. And it was the first time I saw evidence of the often-strong connection between students and mentors. It made me realize that mentoring is totally different than teaching; that it's much more complicated and much more rewarding.

The Truth Is …

At the end of a typically frenetic week, she made one last check into her e-mail before signing off and heading out to the blessed relief of a long weekend in rural lake country. She glanced through the "re:" list quickly. No new student work to evaluate. Good. A note from a colleague she'd respond to later, and then the last item … about the upcoming center retreat. She opened it, gave it the old 10 second scan, and groaned inwardly. The e-mail asked for everyone to "write something and read something." She thought twice about opening the attachment. Is this something she wanted hanging over her head all weekend? Better to know, she decided and double clicked on the file attachment. Another 10 second scan revealed some key words about "a moment of realization … conversation, encounter or incident" that illuminated some "important or distinctive feature" of mentoring … an essay assignment not unlike those that she routinely dispensed to students.

Oh, shit, she thought. One more thing to do. I shouldn't have looked.

She tried to forget about it all weekend. But it was an assignment, and the student in her worried over it, despite the late appearance of spring and the soothing warmth of the sun on her cheeks. She tried to let the sounds of waves breaking on the beach, the buzz of newly hatched flying creatures and the sparrow's chirping for a mate take over her consciousness … an approach that worked well in the dentist's chair. But push and shove as she might, those key words cracked through the thin gauze of her relaxation therapy with dogged regularity. She tried to tell herself that she could ignore this assignment if she wanted, or send back some babble about the nobility and challenge of working with adult students. Isn't that what was wanted? Didn't the student in her always strive to give back what was wanted?

She replayed the three years of her mentoring experience … the distinctive encounters and incidents … searching for an "Ah hah!" moment that would best illustrate her thoughtful, committed approach to her work as a mentor. Perhaps she could write about the intellectual promise of a gifted student she guided into graduate studies, or one of the appreciative notes from writing students recounting her inspirational abilities. One of these would certainly show her in her best light. But maybe one of the others could lead to a better, more introspective piece about her growth and development as a mentor. Perhaps she could tell about the student who wrote an e-mail wishing her "a slow and painful death." That would make for some interesting reading, but not the best testimony, perhaps. She thought about all she had learned from her experience in the graduate program, when she first learned about mentoring from her own mentor. That would be the truth, and appropriately noble. She remembered the pile of student portfolios on her desk awaiting evaluations, the revisions that were due to the paper on transformative learning, the evaluative tool she needed to develop for the graduate program. She could not possibly bore herself or anyone else with yet another learning evaluation, even if she could select that one, single moment of truth in her seven years of experience at the college.

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The truth shall set me free, she thought. And the truth is complicated, but elegant: Mentors are students, students are mentors, and every day brings a new learning experience in public and private mentoring, teaching, scholarship and community. There is never a single moment that informs, or a single hat to wear. The hats are many, kept handy and ready to wear … some fit better than others, some flatter, and some are absolutely hideous. Much later, at the graduation commencement, she watched the students she'd known now capped and gowned. She clapped and hugged and laughed and grew teary-eyed, as usual, and felt appropriately humbled and sentimental. That piece of writing was still hanging over her head, but maybe now she could tell the truth.

Transformative Learning for Students and Mentors

My philosophy of adult education is informed by the work of Giroux (1997), Mezirow (2000) and Kegan (2000), all of whom emphasize the importance of dialogue in education. Dialogue (virtual, written or oral) occurs in a learning space that is open, honest, respectful and safe. Within this space, the educator and learner discuss subject matter – termed informative learning (Kegan, 2000) and also become aware of how culture, history and biography inform the way we find meaning in our world – termed transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000; Kegan, 2000). Dialogue places value on both kinds of learning – informative learning because it increases our range of skills and breadth and depth of knowledge, and transformative learning because it changes our understanding of how we know what we know.

One of the most important challenges an educator faces is fostering a dialogue dedicated to encouraging both informative and transformative learning. Although Mezirow assumes that the learner has "an equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 13), I believe this is often not the case. I believe that one of my strengths as an educator is my ability to cross the border of authority commonly found in traditional educational settings (Giroux, 1997) and work collaboratively with the learner. I encourage the learner to participate fully in the various roles of discourse and, together, we learn something new about the subject area and about ourselves.

To promote open and honest dialogue, I take several steps. The first step is to understand the educational history of the learner. In working with traditional college students, nontraditional adult college students, and with adults enrolled in literacy programs, I have found that many of the learners have had a checkered relationship with the education system. They reported that they "didn't learn much in school." They felt "separated and discounted" because they were "poor," "a minority" "a woman" "learning disabled" or "stupid."

My second step in fostering a dialogue is to examine the learner's assumptions about learning. Despite the fact that these students are interested, active people who can and do learn, they are hampered by their assumption that learning is strictly rote memorization. I gently suggest an alterative perspective, which sees learning not as rote memorization but as a developmental process that is not always straightforward and is

often spiraling and recursive.

My third step in establishing a dialogue is to examine the learner's assumptions about the study topic. It is important for the learner can come to realize that ideas, values and beliefs are, by their very nature, assumptive (Kegan, 2000, p. 58).

When learners become active participants in the dialogue process, they are transformed. They become "critically reflective of their assumptions and aware of their context – the source, nature and consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs," (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19) and take a step in the process of social justice because through critical examination of assumptions, the learner gains self-determination (agency) and the ability to work in a democratic and interdependent manner with others (connectedness).

In sum, the innovative theories that underlie my philosophy, and practice, of adult education are those that: (1) conceive knowledge as ever-fluid and changing, (2) place dialogue using border crossing techniques within the learner-educator relationship as the crucible to learning; (3) conceive of learning as developmental recursive and spiral; (4) and foster opportunity to engage in an educational process that promotes social justice.

… **This is me just thinking about things:** To get this point across to the learners I have worked with, I tell them a story about how I learned about geographical borders in rural America. Briefly, I was raised in New York City and at the age of 29 found myself in the small town of Wabash, Indiana. I was renting a house about five miles from the main area in the village.

Many of my colleagues would say, "oh, you live in the country." I would look at them and not know what to say. I thought, "The entire state of Indiana is the country." Despite the detailed explanation from my colleagues, I spent two years working on this problem and one day I "saw" it. I understood the border of country and town. Yes, I did have an "ah-ha" experience (or insight) that was immediate – but it took me two years to get there. Most of my students appreciate this story; learn something about me as a learner and something about the learning process in general.

For example, in a study group examining research methods, a young woman from Guyana exploring the interest of African Americans to adopt was appalled by the results of her survey. She assumed that African Americans were anxious to adopt but found that they were not. She assumed that all black-skinned people were like her family, willing to adopt a black-skinned child. With the study group two white women expressed their views of adoption and the conversation turned to examine the assumptions we have about family and community.

The Enterprise

My awareness of mentoring as an incredibly important and distinct feature of Empire State College evolved over time. No one moment but rather many have made me aware of the role of faculty (as well as professionals and support staff) in guiding students through their educational programs at Empire State College.

Reading student programs is, perhaps, the one conspicuous activity that convinces me of the value of our mentoring model. It is exciting to read contract evaluations demonstrating the care and concern our faculty gives to the learning opportunities presented to students. It is exhilarating to begin to understand, just from the written words, the academic growth and progress our students experience. It is hard to imagine a more effective educational enterprise.

Student Purposes, College Requirements

I remember a moment early on in my career, which only several years later did I understand.

It was one of my first assessment meetings at Saratoga, and Forest Davis was on the committee. We were looking at a business degree and it was regarded as deficient – by some of us – due to the fact that there was no Business Law. Forest proposed that we accept the program as it was "because that is what the student wants."

I remember that this dumbfounded me. In my mind it was not what the student wanted that was important, but what the college required … I was fresh out of classroom-traditional teaching and could not understand how someone like Forest could "have no standards."

> *Mentoring is and must be a collegial endeavor, and includes coaching, cajoling, and compromising not only with our students, but with our colleagues as well. The community we create is a wonderful construct. It must be tended, watered, nurtured, and even occasionally fertilized.*

Well … I have learned that he **did** have standards, and those standards were based upon student choice. I now feel that this simple moment and statement (what the student wants) told me heaps about what the college was here for, and that we should guard that with our lives. Without that discretion on the part of the student we risk losing the essence of what this college is all about.

Becoming a Mentor from Being a Student

I have too much to do. It seems to consist of a bit of this and a smidgen of that and a smackeral (my daughter's new favorite word) of something else. I put this particular smackeral in the pile and, as such things usually do, it finally surfaced again, demanding that I do something. Just what that something actually was, was a bit of a problem. Since free-association is supposed to be therapeutic, perhaps I will start there.

My association with the college started a decade before I became a part of the faculty. As a student in the business and policy studies program, I first learned about mentoring from the other side of the red pen. I learned about it – had my first mentoring moments – as a series of small and seemingly unconnected events. Some examples:

- Dennis DeLong commented on a paper I submitted. He said that he very much enjoyed the paper, that it was well researched and presented, and that it didn't answer the question he'd asked.

- Participating in a debate at a residency and wishing that it could happen every weekend, not just once a term.

- A mentor who shall remain nameless informed my fellow students and me that the text and the workbook for financial analysis (which I still have and treasure) were indeed by different authors and publishers, and that there were indeed differences in the notation each used.

- A written master's exam, written in a stack of blue-books which stressed me enough that I spent ten minutes trying to remember how to spell the word, "who."

- Receiving my little "Empire State College" pin at the final residency, and realizing that the faculty really looked and acted as though this was something important.

- Trying to find someone – anyone – in the North Country who carried the thesis covers specified in the graduate handbook.

Each of these in isolation does not seem to involve much mentoring. Different occupations do each of them at one time or another. Yet as I look at the totality of the experience, I am struck by the amount of care, time and nurturing that went into creating the situations that precipitated these events. Mentoring is and must be a collegial endeavor, and includes coaching, cajoling, and compromising not only with our students, but with our colleagues as well. The community we create is a wonderful construct. It must be tended, watered, nurtured, and even occasionally fertilized.

Lessons from a Simple Life Form: What Dandelions Know

Forest K. Davis, Professor Emeritus

Note: This piece was originally published as The Philosophy Motion #337. *Thanks, as always, to Forest Davis for kind permission to include these thoughts in* All About Mentoring.

Mowing lawns is no doubt a search for order in the midst of chaos, a simple-minded enough undertaking in most obvious settings. Yet there is an astonishingly wide variation of characteristic abilities of dandelions, which are there to see when one attempts to influence nature in ways it does not approve. Taken by itself, the dandelion is a plant handsome enough for any normal purpose (to borrow a phrase). It has been pointed out by plant people that each seeming petal of a dandelion blossom is actually the source of a seed, potentially, so the plant is perhaps more than ordinarily successful at being what it is and in perpetuating itself.

Its stems are very flexible. It is capable of lying down out of the way of an approaching threat such as a mower blade or a footstep. If there is rainwater on a stem this changes its weight so it adds to its self-protective capabilities, at least for the moment. The incidence of its occurrence is abnormally high, as witness solid fields of golden blooms, most of which herbivorous animals avoid. This suggests that the plant tastes bitter. People have made varieties of wines from its substance, as they have from many other plants.

With respect to rival plants, rival for space, that is, it is quite powerful. It throws out a circle of flat leaves which extend its space, surrounding itself with a sterile area where nothing gets any sunlight, and probably gets less rainwater, so that it successfully jousts with its neighbors for space-per-plant. In effect it kills off grass within its circle. It is remarkably deep-rooted, burrowing straight down and seizing the ground in a tenacious hold. It is difficult or impossible to uproot except with a strong pry-tool which allows indirect leverage to be applied.

Its stems can grow up to what looks like four inches in a single night. It has an indefinite but plural number of reserve stems. If one is cut off or otherwise removed, the reserve stems are called into play, so that one or more will develop. They start very short, and mature into viable stems more quickly than the casualty-stem seems to have done. It can achieve a second, third or fourth reserve stem in full bloom on shorter stems than the first. This apparently satisfies the plant's drive to replace itself on less physical investment per stem than was required the first time, which first stem presumably became a casualty.

But that may not be the whole story. If one ignores the edges of the field, dandelions develop there in response to competition from other plants of comparable size. They may actually be different kinds of plant, still in the dandelion family, with different appearances and behaviors.

They grow much larger, do not lie flat, but expand upward like tall grasses all around. Their stems may be 15 to 20 inches tall. Leaves are pointed, thin and relatively tall. Patterns of variant greens appear on the leaves, which are also cut deeply. It does actually look like a different plant, though it is noticeable that it is also contending with grasses and other rival plants which are in similar ranges of size, shape and behavior. It does everything but talk, and one is surprised that it doesn't do that, so precise are its responses to competition from its surroundings.

It is tempting to suppose the dandelions metamorphose into different plant forms in order to meet differing conditions. One might ascribe intelligence to the plant, by which is meant it can recognize new conditions and can meet them with different but appropriate responses. It could be said to be an intelligent discriminator among conditions and responses appropriate to either itself or the plant into which it may shortly metamorphose, assuming it is located near a field edge. Occasionally, aggressive plant forms appear in monster-type fictional stories. These stories are apt to be mildly disturbing, resembling as they may, stories about biological monsters on distant islands, arising inexplicably or hypothetically left over by forgotten life forms from thousands or millions of years ago. After all, perfectly rational people go out to side hills or valley slopes, even city streets, and discover petrified skeletons of dinosaurs, which roamed these or other familiar regions, allowing for variant vegetations. We are more or less used to this phenomenon and don't think much about it. We may ring up a nearby anthropologist to tell us what something is. It is reassuring to know that creatures have names, although that may not actually get us very far. What did these creatures eat? Mostly each other, with appropriate cacophonies of terrifying growls and screams, invented by television and computer experts who are paid by the amount of noise they can create. Already biologists specializing in cloning ancient lifeforms, drawing perhaps on biological remains left below the tundras of Siberia, or on petrified eggs from nests covered over lately by urban sprawl and busy pavements, are threatening to make real on-earth things that hitherto partook primarily of childhood nightmares. We suppose that ways will be found to eliminate these hazards. It is a little like the watch for wild asteroids in the relatively nearby sky: if they show up there is already not much you can do about them.

All of which may go to show that residual nature contains traces enough in plenty of how natural life-forms work, preserving and defending and promoting themselves. Some scientific theorists suggest that the small birds of our time are the left-over remnants of the ancient dinosaurs, or such of them as flew. We do not know what the dandelions prove, except that nature is more original and more adaptive than it has been given credit for being. It seems reasonable to allow for what dandelions know as being, if we were talking about what people know how to do, quite far up front. They really know quite a lot, and they know how to use it all effectively and in rapid-fire order to suit their purposes. That is no assurance that dinosaurs, if they should happen to be re-cloned back onto the planet some day soon, would be automatically able to do a lot of comparable stuff which would suit their purposes. But you have to admit that it is a very fair beginning on the general problem. When one wrestles with dandelions in the spring and early summer, one develops a healthy respect for what they know how to do and for the speed with which they do it. It got so, a few springs ago, that one found oneself looking for dandy little notes written in dandelion dialect and hanging on the new-sprung blossoms well above the level of the nearby grass stems, of a friendly morning full of mist, saying something like:

"Things are indeed going very well for us, and so we have new plans. Please take account of them because there are some requirements. We are thinking about moving from the front lawn into the house come fall and the attendant coolth. We shall be needing three square meals a day and, of course, you will be expected to provide them, preferably on trays. Initial this note to show you understand your roles and what will be expected of you."

Would that be so surprising – that is, if you had just spent the summer trying to mow off the dandelion heads, to not so awfully much success?

> *It seems reasonable to allow for what dandelions know as being, if we were talking about what people know how to do, quite far up front. They really know quite a lot, and they know how to use it all effectively and in rapid-fire order to suit their purposes.*

Is This What They Mean By Mentoring?

A. Tom Grunfeld, Metropolitan Center

Tom Grunfeld

Last year I was on sabbatical and missed the gradual introduction of the general education (Gen. Ed.) curriculum. When I returned in August 2002, I began to see my first gen. ed. students and since then these new requirements have had a dramatic influence on my mentoring.

I understand that these changes may very well be highly specific to location and discipline. Indeed, I may very well be describing something, which many of you have contended with for years. Thus, your response to these thoughts may be: so what's new? I simply don't know, but I have a sense that this lack of knowledge as to the specifics of our workloads hinders our ability to address our chronic workload problem.

Yet even while I am describing the specifics of my work, my reasons for putting all this on paper is not to focus attention on my student load – my current dilemma will be addressed through consultations with colleagues and my dean – but rather to encourage conversations (and perhaps some investigation by our crack new research team) about the details of our responsibilities, which demand of us as academic faculty to be accountable for teaching students, keeping current in our fields, providing college and university service, conducting research, and managing our sanity through it all.

Given current workloads, a notable increase in any one of those areas can only mean a curtailment in all the others. Moreover, and equally important, is the question of how faculty loads affect the learning experiences for our students. Can we find a feasible accommodation where faculty can do a reasonable job without lessening individualization and access for students? Recently, and historically as well, our UUP

(union) chapter has made heroic efforts to define our workload, but I don't recall the various reports breaking down student numbers in the manner I am doing here.

If the changes I am experiencing are more typical than not then we will have to radically alter our conceptions of what it is like being a "mentor" at Empire State College, or change the structure of the college. I know that I am in the midst of doing the former for myself.

One additional unique factor in my situation is that the two other colleagues in my historical area of study at the Metropolitan Center now have other obligations, leaving me as the single historian whose sole task is to teach. On the positive side, I am seeing lots and lots of students who never would have elected to study history in the past when it was only one of many options. The new mix of students is quite exciting for me and many of them are articulate, skilled and delighted when they discover that history is much more than wars, that I have as much trouble as they do remembering dates, and that I don't think memorizing facts is a good idea. In the brief time I have been teaching these "new" students, several have told me how pleased they are at having been "forced" to study history. As far as I am concerned, there will never be enough of these students!

The negative side, however, is troubling.

Oh, how I recall those long ago halcyon days when the *Mentoring Handbook* read "every mentor will work with up to 30 students." Those conditions haven't existed for some time of course and the norm for me, in recent years, has been more in the proximity of 60-80 students at any single moment; i.e., more than double the number of bodies I worked with in the distant past.

I dealt with this increased student load in a manner, I suspect, familiar to many, if not all, of you: some of those 60-80 students elected to take Center for Distance Learning (CDL) courses, some worked with tutors, while some I taught directly on an individual basis in addition to routinely offering two study groups on an ongoing basis. In addition, since there weren't all that many voluntary students of history, and there were others at Metro teaching it, I also acted as the primary mentor for many students who had concentrations in other disciplines. Thus I did a great deal of educational planning and general advising on academic programs. This mix allowed me to work with that many students without having to directly teach (the most time-consuming activity) every single student who came through my door. But no more.

I now deeply regret never having taken snapshots of my student loads at various times, which I could now use as a basis for comparison. Nevertheless, I can recall, anecdotally (and it is really just a guess), that if I had 70 students, about 15-20 were doing educational planning, about 15-20 were working with others for which I received credit, while the remaining 30-40 were studying history with me. Not all of these people were enrolled of course, and some were part of my "ghost load," but it is beyond me to even estimate how many of them fell into these latter categories.

What I can do – quite accurately – is present a snapshot of what my teaching load is today (May 13, 2003). While the numbers change daily, I suspect the proportions do not, so the point I am trying to make applies beyond this single moment. Today I am working with 94 students – counting only students I have actually met. There are an additional five students whose names appear on my DocPack list as registered for history but neither they, nor their mentors, have ever contacted me. Perhaps they will – tomorrow, or next month, or never. (This is an interesting twist to the ghost load where we work with students but don't get credit. Here I get credit for students I never work with and, indeed, have never met. A few dozen more like them and I'll be wondering what to do with my spare time!) Also, as I am writing this, I have appointments over the next two weeks with five additional students (not yet on my official list) who are new to me and whom I have not included, since we haven't actually begun working together. I have also been assigned five new students from the next orientation. So there is a possibility I may soon be working with 99-104 students.

I have never had as many as 94 students at one time although the numbers have reached into the lows 80s in the past. But here's the rub. Because gen. ed. compels students to study history, I am doing far more direct teaching. Of these 94 individuals, only two are doing educational planning with me and/or enrolled in a CDL course and three others are working with other mentors. This makes me the primary mentor for only five of the 94 students. That means that I am directly teaching 89 students, easily more than twice the number I was teaching before the introduction of gen. ed.

And it gets worse. One would think that being responsible for 94 students would put me at my expected load. But one would be wrong! Of these 94, 15 are not enrolled (they have financial problems, they are waiting to complete earlier studies, etc.). They will, undoubtedly, eventually enroll, but there will always be a number who are not enrolled at any given time. Then there is my ghost load, which, at the moment, stands at 25 students. That's 25 people who, even though they are past their contract end date, remain in touch with me and provide work I have asked for, albeit at a slower pace than we have contracted for. What that means is even though I am working with 94 individuals, I am getting credit for only 54. (And, of course, there are also those five students on my roster that I've never met.)

That means I am not at my required load. In fact, since all these students are working with me for 4 credits, my load, at the moment, is 226 credits, about 60-70 below the target I am expected to reach. Because I am not at my expected load, college policies prevent relief in the most obvious ways: I cannot ask to hire outside tutors. Nor will CDL or cross-registration work, since I would not get the credit, the primary mentors would. In this situation, in order for me to be at load, I would need to be responsible for somewhere in the vicinity of 120 students, whether I was teaching them or they enroll with CDL or with tutors. I once taught a class at New York University which had 110 students but then I only saw all of them together for two and one half hours a week and I had two TAs who read the papers and met with the students in small groups.

Given this new demand for historical studies the old ways of "managing a load" are simply no longer available to me.

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So my workload has, for all intents and purposes, close to tripled. In the "good old days" I used to insist that each student see me at least twice a month, which, in reality, worked out to six to eight times during the course of a 16-week period. I must confess that I have not done that in many years, even though I have managed to insist that students see me a minimum of four times if they were doing 4 credits of work with me.

I simply cannot maintain that same level of support if I am teaching 90-100 (or more) students. Not only in the time I can devote to each of them, but I also have to find the time to read their papers and write their narrative evaluations (grades only anyone?). Add to that center meetings, membership on two college-wide committees, reading papers, preparing for students, etc. and finding time to do it all – that becomes far more problematic. And academic work? Forget it. I haven't so much as written a book review since last September and I don't see how I can possibly do anything given the current situation. Even this article had to be written late at night and on weekends over an 11-day period.

If one of the most basic definitions of "mentoring" at Empire State College has meant individualized lessons

and frequent mentoring sessions, I am no longer mentoring. I have just begun two "study groups" for the summer and the enrollments are 21 and 11. With that enrollment I no longer know what a "study group" is supposed to be.

If we are going to maintain any reasonable form of individualization, the number of students that each faculty member teaches directly has to be capped. That would require hiring additional faculty and, perhaps, filling up one's load with students who are only advisees. It is far less time consuming to work with 100 students if they are all going to be taking distance learning courses or study groups. The problem, it seems to me, is how we "count" a faculty member's load. This is an old problem exacerbated, at least for me, by the new gen. ed. requirements.

The consequences are not solely the generating of additional work for faculty but also a pronounced negative effect on the students who cannot hope to have their studies (and their entire Empire State College experience) as individualized as they might have anticipated, nor can they expect to replicate their predecessors' experiences. In fact, I see only two options on how to handle this load, assuming, as I am, that I will not get relief by being asked to see fewer students. (I welcome suggestions for other options.)

> *One option is to see students less often. But fewer than four times means what? Three times per contract? Twice?*

One option is to see students less often. But fewer than four times means what? Three times per contract? Twice? Once at an initial meeting when I tell them what is expected of them and once 16 weeks later when I "test" them on what they have learned? Individual attention becomes less meaningful if we decrease the time we spend with each student and I am loath to see students less than four times if I am working with them individually. But since I am seeing close to 60 students individually, what else can I do? The other option is to offer more groups (three classes? four classes?) or larger groups, while strictly limiting seeing students individually. I could also try imposing my own calendar, if the college doesn't, in order to force more timely closure on student work.

I have always planned my study groups for the evenings. Once every few years I have tried offering daytime groups and never had much of a response – four to six students usually. I tended to get more students who complained about their inability to register during the day than actual registrants. In January 2003, I offered a study group from noon-2:00 p.m. to see if anything had changed. Did it ever! I was deluged with students. Although it reached a high of 21, the group settled at 17 enrollees. I now have another "class" with 21 students and the numbers appear to be increasing. It will be interesting to see what happens in September, which is the period when Metro gets its highest enrollments. Large classes are certainly a possibility.

As I said at the beginning of this piece, my working life at Empire State College has changed and I will find a solution to my predicament by talking to my colleagues and dean. But beyond my personal situation are the important questions that I think my example raises relating to what "mentoring" means in this new climate. None of us can offer individual instruction to 100 students at one time in any meaningful sense. Large groups imitate traditional colleges, so where's the real difference at Empire State College? Since we cannot expect to get a workload reduction, how do we go about creating an institution which continues to give students the individual attention we have become noted for while allowing the academic faculty the ability to

offer that close attention while still managing to stay current in their fields and do whatever academic or creative work is expected of them? What does "mentoring" mean in this new gen. ed. climate?

Dewey's Process of Inquiry
Eric Zencey, Center for Distance Learning

Eric Zencey

At the Center for Distance Learning, faculty groups review new proposals for courses, making comments and suggestions and in general sharing their thoughts. When a proposal for a course titled "Reflective Learning" came before my small group, I suggested that it might usefully incorporate material on John Dewey's method of inquiry. Dewey, of course, was one of the leading lights of the progressive education movement in this country, and his schematic analysis of the process of inquiry remains useful and powerful today. For some years I taught at Goddard College, and the adult students I worked with there generally responded very well to workshop sessions on the subject. Several told me that learning about Dewey's method of inquiry had changed the way they undertook their studies, and that it brought their learning a coherence and purpose they hadn't sensed before. So it seemed a good idea to include something on this aspect of Dewey's work in an upper-level course intended to help adults become better learners by encouraging their reflective awareness of their own learning processes.

Problem: while Dewey's method of inquiry is visible throughout his work, nowhere that I know of in that considerable corpus does he lay it out in clear, concise prose for a general audience. Having suggested the topic, I couldn't very well say to the prospective course developer, "it's in there somewhere; just read a lot of Dewey." So I undertook to write a brief note describing the essentials of Dewey's method, and it soon occurred to me that others around the college might find this information useful, too. Thus, this essay.

Dewey formulated his method of inquiry as a critical response to what he perceived as the flaw in all

previous theories of knowledge. These he lumped together as variants of a single theoretical approach, which he called the "Spectator Theory of Knowledge" (Quest, p. 23). The Spectator Theory, he said, accepts a radical distinction between knower and known, subject and object, which it then fails to resolve effectively. It conceives of knowing as an event like seeing: knowledge somehow impinges on the passive knower just as images of our environment register effortlessly on our retinas. The Spectator Theory, Dewey suggests, mystifies the whole process of knowing; once you've split subject and object apart, making the knower and the known into distinct metaphysical entities, there's no easy way to get them back together, no easy way to explain how accurate ideas about the objective world enter into the subjective self.

For Dewey, knowledge is inexplicable except as the result of inquiry, and inquiry isn't an abstract, metaphysical category; it's a temporal process that we, as living creatures, regularly enter into. As he defined it in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*: *"Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole"* (1938, p. x). [Italics in original.]

At first glance this definition is neither clear nor elegant; but further acquaintance with Dewey's thinking brings greater appreciation of what he has done here. Knowledge is the result of inquiry, and inquiry is a temporal process with an identifiable structure. It begins with unease, with an "indeterminate situation" in which the live creature experiences discomfort, and it ends in an essentially aesthetic state, the "resolved situation," in which the live creature feels some measure of harmony or satisfaction. Between these two states is the process by which knowledge is gained. Dewey's contribution to our understanding of knowledge, and learning, was his careful dissection of this temporal process into its constituent stages.

Dewey called this process of inquiry by several different names. The process of inquiry is also "the method of intelligence," because to be intelligent is to be conscious in the process of inquiry. It is also "the structure of experience" because in retrospect we can find the stages of inquiry present in any temporal passage that has the unity and coherence we ascribe to "an experience."

There are five constituent stages of the process of inquiry. They are present in all manner of inquiry – from the most abstruse investigations of the cosmos down to the most mundane efforts we make to stay out of trouble. It helps to walk through the stages with a simple example. Dewey himself offers the example of hearing a fire alarm in a crowded theater.

1. First, the sound of the alarm propels us into an indeterminate situation. ("What's the alarm for?")

2. We define our unsettledness into a problem. ("Something's burning.") Notice that we use additional information from our environment (through our senses of smell and sight, perhaps) and we rely on past experience (that sound means fire).

3. We translate the problematic situation into a problem-solution pairing. ("The place is on fire. I gotta get out of here.") The nature of the problem determines the character of the acceptable solution.

4. There follows in close succession a series of steps: observation of the facts of the case (the nearest exits, the probable location of the fire), the formation (either consciously or unconsciously) of an hypothesis ("To escape I must go to the nearest exit"), the test of the hypothesis by experiment (which is not, Dewey emphasizes, a purely mental process; it requires action in the world), and the evaluation of the results of the test. If facts, hypothesis, and experimental test have been chosen well, this experience ends with the final step, the

5. Determinate situation (we are safe, away from the burning building.)

In different kinds of experiences, different elements in this temporal sequence stand in the fore. A learning experience is one in which the hypothesis and test are seen to predominate. An aesthetic experience is one in which our appreciation of the final, settled state is seen to predominate. But any temporal passage that we recognize as having a degree of unity (Dewey says) has this structure, even if it doesn't obviously issue in learning or an aesthetic epiphany.

The process of inquiry can, of course, go wrong at any step. We could fail to see a problematic situation until too late: we are in it, and no efforts we make will get us out of it. We could mis-define the problemsolution pairing. We could misperceive or fail to perceive relevant facts. We tend to formulate hypotheses that are consistent with the other intellectual structures (the beliefs and theories) that we hold; these may have served us well in the past, but nevertheless be mistaken. (We may believe they have served us well in the past only because they have never encountered a disconfirming instance.) Our beliefs may be held for poor reasons – prejudice, superstition, hearsay – and so a hypothesis that is consistent with them may fail in its purposes. Our experimental effort (the execution of the action indicated by the hypothesis) may be poorly conceived or poorly executed – it could fail, Dewey says, to "disclose precisely those conditions which have the maximum possible force in determining whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected." In some cases, no experimental efforts we could make would be sufficient to resolve the elements that are in tension in the indeterminate situation we face – the heavy object is falling out an open window above us, and we have time to glimpse our fate, but not get out of the way. Life contains both mystery and tragedy, and there are no guarantees that we will be smart or quick enough to outrun fires, duck punches, or solve all the problems we face.

Not only did Dewey find this method of intelligence more-or-less evident in all purposive human behavior, he thought that even brute, non-conscious existence implicitly followed this structure:

"The conjunction of problematic and determinate characters in nature renders every existence, as well as every idea and human act, an experiment in fact, even though not in design. To be intelligently experimental is but to be conscious of this intersection of natural conditions so as to profit by it instead of being at its mercy" (1958, Chapter 10.)

An uncharitable reviewer of Dewey might characterize his approach as dour, as being infected with a kind of protestant-puritan worldview: life is struggle; life is one damn problem after another. There is perhaps an element of truth in that criticism. If you define your world as the perpetual occasioner of problematic situations, it seems quite a stretch to talk about the human experience of joy, for instance. The Deweyite might defend the master by allowing that "problematic situation" is perhaps a poorly chosen term, or that the associations we attach to "problem" don't capture exactly the technical meaning of the term within Dewey's system. And, as Dewey's writings make clear, for him the world is not the perpetual occasioner of problems, but a near-infinite potential for experiences, many of which culminate in happiness, in joy, in a sense of aesthetic or spiritual transport. Experiences can and do bring us the full panoply of human emotional response, and the variety of that response is no claim against the similarity of structure that he finds in those experiences.

> *For Dewey, the world is not the perpetual occasioner of problems, but a near-infinite potential for experiences, many of which culminate in happiness, in joy, in a sense of aesthetic or spiritual transport.*

I think Dewey's temporal approach to the problem of knowledge succeeds in establishing the deep, formal similarity between kinds of "knowings." His structure is discernible within the scientist's formal and ritualized laboratory research as well as within the more informal, less self-conscious learnings we accumulate through unreflective experience. If our aim is to encourage students to become reflective learners, one clear avenue toward achievement of our goal is to teach them Dewey's method of intelligence.

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Making Technology Work for Us: An Interview with Walt Frykholm
Mary Klinger, Genesee Valley Center

Walt Frykholm came to Empire State College in 1985, after 30 years in human resource management and consulting. In his consulting, Walt specialized in strategic planning advice to emerging high tech companies. At the college, he mentored students in many areas of business and technology, including management, business policy, and technology and change. Walt retired in August of 2002, and spoke with Mary Klinger last July.

Walter Frykholm

Mary: What have you enjoyed most in your years at Empire State College?

Walt: There are a lot of things, but I'd specifically mention working with students on an individualized basis and doing things in an unstructured-like manner. And, of course, the majority of students want to be here and you can enjoy them and not have to spoon-feed them.

Mary: Does anything stand out as a high point during your career at the college? Walt: My involvement with the educational technology committee from its beginnings and being successful at getting it in place as a standing governance committee after much hard work. That really stands out more than anything else. I got involved in a lot of things at the college that I probably wouldn't have been involved in at other places. For example, I was involved in a search for an assistant vice president of technology, which we ended up canceling, but in the process I learned a lot about what other schools are doing from the technology stand point and got a better handle on what, when, where, and why we couldn't do a lot of things.

Mary: Would you like to share any challenges you experienced?

Walt: I've had a lot of students who were challenges, but we all have that. I think that one challenge I experienced was when I was part of a team that was to determine the future of the Labor Center. That was a real challenge! We all had different ideas – some people, pretty strong ones. At one point, I actually thought we were going to pull the plug on the whole Labor Center. When we got through, we came up with a way to make it viable and not totally rely on the apprenticeship program. That was really a challenge.

Mary: Have you seen any changes in the kinds of students that come to the college?

Walt: Yes, I have seen a lot of changes. I think on one level I am seeing a lot more students who are not as prepared as they were when I first came here. I also see students that are at a different stage in their career. Initially, I saw a lot of students that were probably mid-career; now I'm working with students that are probably the same age but are early in their career. These are people who have re-entered the labor force, worked their way up out of the ranks, and who are in entry-level management positions or who hope to get into them. They don't have as much prior transcript credit as I used to see or as much general education. Their writing skills are also not as good. I see a lot of weakness in the math area. From the perspective of the mentor, this group is a lot more labor-intensive.

Mary: From your point of view, what has changed in the college and have those changes been useful and productive?

Walt: We've become a lot more bureaucratic. Everyday we have a few more rules and regulations and a few more policies and a few more restrictions. Some of it hinders our ability to do our job. One area I've watched ebb and flow is credit by evaluation and assessment. We've had policies in the past that gave the mentor a lot more discretion in what we viewed as "credit." Some of these policies are good, but I think some went too far. For example, we used to be able to sit down and talk to a student about credit. Not everybody required a lot of formal documentation. You'd sit down, talk, have them bring in supporting data, and recommend the credit. Today everybody wants a very formalized essay and everything done beforehand. I've had colleagues in the past that used that as a method for just not having to do credit by evaluation, and I know we've had students just go away because of it. I don't think that's what we want to do, but sometimes that's a sign of the bureaucracy creeping in and it hurts rather than helps.

Mary: And how about the area of technology, in which you have been very involved?

Walt: Sometimes, and this has been my pet subject, the area of technology is not where it should be and probably won't be basically because of the money. I don't think it has very much priority right now, and I think that's bad. For example, in this college we operate through a system in which all computers have to be controlled centrally out of a server in Saratoga. This means that the college is thinking about all of this from the administrative standpoint. Because it's basically an administrative program we have to standardize this and standardize that. Looking at it from the other side, as an educator working with students in the field of computers, I have to be able to work with a student who goes out and buys a computer today. So, they are going to buy a system that has Windows XP and we don't have it. If we expect to stay current, we have to have it. The issue of who is going to support it shouldn't even be discussed. We should have technical people in our centers who have the ability to support it. We shouldn't look to somebody centrally to say, well we can't support it; therefore you can't have it.

> *I think we need to start looking again at technology as an educational tool, as opposed to an administrative tool.*

My other pet peeve in the technology area is that we operate in a mainframe mindset. This again means that nobody can do anything without Saratoga's consent. You can't move a computer; you can't add something; you can't drop something. I think there's a level of control that needs to be in place to ensure that we comply with laws. On the other hand, in a distributed system or in a network system that we (and most organizations) have, all those decisions need to be delegated to people close to the action. I think we have a long way to go technology-wise. I think we need to start looking again at technology as an educational tool, as opposed to an administrative tool. A lot of stuff that's going on in our system (like Doc Pak), has really been an administrative tool and has not necessarily helped us do our work, although in some cases it may have.

Mary: So how do you see this affecting your day-to-day mentoring work?

Walt: For example, I do a lot more standard contracts today because the system expects me to have a contract on file immediately. I don't have time to be creative and create a contract where the student and I build it as we go along. So for a lot of reasons we're using technology not as well as we should. I would like to see the technology used for more research, or to be able to do distance learning studies with students without having to go through the Center for Distance Learning or through the SUNY Learning Network. The technology should be able to easily link us to students in our area or across the state. So I think there's a lot of potential, but we haven't reached it yet.

Mary: Are there any new challenges or activities you're planning on in your retirement?

Walt: After I get through resolving some family issues, I have a couple of things I want to do. I bought myself a copy of the latest version of Adobe Photoshop and I still have to update the RAM on my computer so that it will run as well as I want it to run. The program I have now let's me do some things but not as much as I want. I've got the idea of writing a couple of books and I have a fair amount of information that I won't be able to find anywhere else because I want to look at the history of a company I worked for. I want to document why it failed. And then, because in all the years I have been working I've never found any good books that talk about recruiting, I want to write something in the field of recruiting that maybe would be a useful tool for people. And, I want to go fishing.

Mary: Is there anything else you would like to share with our community?

Walt: I think this has been a good college. And, we are starting to address the issue of advertising. When I first came here, I told people about students I could have easily referred to Empire State College, but I didn't even know the place existed!

Distances Between Students and Their History Tutors
Paul Miller, Central New York Center

My purpose is to discuss the intellectual distance that occurs between mentor and student when a student's writing and thinking become too literal, without any attempt at analysis. This is not a new issue; there has and perhaps always will be considerable wailing and gnashing of teeth over student failure to think critically. However, my paper is hopefully more than just a lament, and attempts to locate the source of this distance, at least in one example. At the outset, let me say that I do not believe that this distance is often the result of student ability. The majority of students are capable of reflection. Rather, the source seems to be related to the educational/intellectual baggage that students carry with them to a study. In the case of history, students' previous academic experience and the way they currently consume history shape their performance.

To illustrate, I have chosen recent work from three students: a horticulture therapy student taking an introductory African- American history study, a window and door salesman (I will use his occupation since he is undecided about his degree concentration) taking a Western civilization study, and a counseling student, who is taking an advanced study in 19th century women. The first two students I mentioned – horticulture therapy and the window and door salesman – are taking history studies to meet general education requirements. However, they have not come kicking and screaming. They have to date shown real enthusiasm for the work. The same cannot be said for the counseling student. She was more or less ordered to add history to her program by our assessment office.

Now, student objectives aside, I insist that students learn essential material – this usually means developing a kind of working chronology of the sources – and reflect on the study's main themes. Assignments often ask students to assess contesting interpretations, analyze primary documents, or look for themes in the reading. This is not unusual. This kind of critical analysis is required throughout the college.

Two of the students I introduced you to, perform brilliantly in this regard. They routinely offer insight into the material that both surprises and impresses me. For example, and this is from a paper that was submitted on March 10: "As a horticulture therapy student, I was interested in the correlations the book made relating the treatment of slaves and the treatment of the soil. The Europeans not only had disregard for the human life that was sustaining them; but, also for the land which they ruined within a generation." What a thoughtful connection.

Or, this insight on the French Revolution, from the window and door salesman (and, here I am paraphrasing from a meeting that we had on March 3): "The French Revolution ran out of gas," this student remarked, "because people were getting tired of the fighting and spying; people want and need stability; people cannot

always be in a state of revolution." This is an important insight – one that is at times lost on historians.

However, the counseling student has struggled to be reflective in her papers. For example, in a paper on Harriet Tubman submitted on March 9, she wrote:

"In 1849, after learning that she and her brothers were to be sold, Harriet planned her escape. Her brothers were to go with her but were unable to get away. Harriet knew nothing about geography and knew only the names of two states. She knew only to follow the North Star. She was told as a child that the North Star would lead her to freedom. She left with only the clothing on her back and a quilt that she had made."

The entire paper proceeds in this fashion. There is no reflection here. The student merely absorbed the material and rewrote it into her paper.

Why? What explains the gap between my expectations and her performance? The answer has important implications for mentoring.

Now, it could be that the student hates history, wants to complete her work, and move on. After all, she has done very well in her human service and sociology studies. However, I believe that the answer has more to do with her prior academic experience and how she currently consumes history, rather than her abilities or whether she likes or dislikes the subject. In fact, she has told me that she liked history in high school. She did very well in it, and was able to score high marks because she memorized all the important dates and facts.

Second, she informed me that she likes the history channel on the "telly." (She's not English but I like the word "telly.") Both points are revealing, I think. These say a lot about her relationship to the field. It seems that she is accustomed to thinking about history as the memorization of dates and facts. Next, she seems to regard history as a kind of leisure activity. Now, I do not mean to dismiss learning essential facts or watching the history channel, but neither of these experiences prepares students for a college-level history study.

However, with some guidance, I think that this student can do very well. And, I would say the same is true for most adults at Empire State College. Our students can draw on their experiences as parents, workers and citizens to reflect in ways that the typical undergraduate cannot. Moreover, many of them have lived through some rather tumultuous times, and they appreciate and understand the meaning of change. They know, in ways that younger people do not, that life is not static, and that change is the norm. This intimacy with change is a real advantage in a history study.

Let me finish with one postscript: Much of the literature on critical thinking stresses the need to prepare students for the 21st century workforce. While this is important, it needs to be said that critical thinking is integral to a study like history. I could not imagine doing a study in which the student is asked to merely "memorize." After all, history is about using imagination and critical thinking to conceive and revise our understanding of the past. Not to ask students to attempt this on some level, takes too much away from what history is all about.

"Any life depends on continuous learning, but in most life stories you have to seek it between the lines. We hear about the new job, but usually not the adaptation it entailed; about falling in love but not the transformed outlook it inspired; about the joys or burdens of parenthood but not the need to relearn a child from day to day and year to year. We find descriptions of landscapes but not of developing the skills of noticing and remembering the landscapes' details, conclusions about the motives of others but not the mental steps that led to recognizing those motives. When writers do describe their own learning, it almost always appears that recognizing and reflecting on that process has strengthened their very capacity to learn."

Mary Catherine Bateson, "Lives of Learning" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education,* 25 July 03)

Teaching Physics: Inquiry and the Ray Model of Light
Fernand Brunschwig, M.A.T. Program, Hudson Valley Center

My thinking about these matters was stimulated by my participation on a panel devoted to "Inquiry in Physics Teaching" organized by Don S. Cook of Bank Street College and Fran Wald of New York University at the New York Academy of Sciences in March 2003. The specific sequence of questions as a way to provoke inquiry in physics was originally developed by Dewey Dykstra of Boise State University.

The popular conception of physics involves solving equations to obtain accurate numerical results, which correspond closely with the results of experiments. But actually learning (or teaching) physics involves mastering how to use a scientific model – an ideal mental representation underlying the observed phenomena. The ability to use (that is, manipulate mentally) a theoretical model is what is referred to as "understanding," and this is what gives rise to the equations themselves, as well as the ability to solve problems and to predict what will happen in a given situation.

The phenomena of light (particularly images formed by pinholes and lenses) offers a good example of the issues involved in learning how to use a scientific model. A good scientific model for this situation is called the ray model of light. The basic feature of this model is that light is assumed to travel in straight lines, called rays, from sources (for example a glowing object) to receivers (for example, a screen or our eyes). If a student is to use this model successfully, he or she must, to the extent possible, engage in inquiry – that is, constructing and testing his or her own mental version of the ray model, and applying it independently in a variety of situations.

An aside on approaches. A teacher can supply a detailed list of the assumptions of the ray model, and I will summarize these later, but I believe, and most scientists agree, that in order to be able to use a model successfully it is not really useful to simply memorize and recall a static list of assumptions. Rather, one must build up a more comprehensive mental picture of the model from which the assumptions can be derived, or into which the assumptions are integrated. Students differ in the way they assimilate information, and fundamentalists could argue that memorizing the assumptions is the obvious first step. I won't disagree that this might be the best first step for some students. But I believe that the essential step is to build up the comprehensive mental picture by testing it against what you know about the world, by means of a variety of crucial "thought experiments," and/or by conducting experiments, explaining them more or less successfully on the basis of the model and thus successively improving your conception of the model's assumptions, how they fit together and how they should be used.

The purpose of this essay is to exemplify and explore the details of this process of inquiry, helping build up a progressively more powerful ray model of light by means of several "thought experiments." Thus I will

present, first, two questions about images formed by a pinhole and by a lens. Diagrams and detailed explanations of how to apply the ray model to these situations are included, but I invite you, before reading my explanations, to pursue the questions yourself, make diagrams and write your own explanations.

After these two questions, I present a third question – an intriguing and somewhat more challenging extension of the earlier questions. You are invited to construct your own response to this third question, as a way to gain experience with the inquiry process as well as additional insight into the ray model. My own diagram and explanation are also included. This essay concludes with my reflections on scientific models, the inquiry process, and the challenge of helping learners use scientific models effectively. Here are the three questions:

Question 1. Have you ever observed an image on a screen formed by a pinhole? If so, you very likely noticed that the image was upside down. Can you explain this with a diagram and a model for how light travels? You can use Fig. 1 as a starting point for your drawing. Explain the assumptions you are making about how light travels. Are there any other features of the image you would expect using your diagram? In particular, how would you expect the image to behave if the screen were moved further away from the pinhole? See below for an answer to and explanation of Question 1.

Question 2. Have you ever observed an image formed on a screen by a convex lens? If so, you very likely noticed that the image was, as in the case of the pinhole, upside down. The lens image, however, differs from the pinhole image in two important ways: it is brighter, and it is "in focus" only when the screen is at one position; if the screen is moved closer to or further from the lens, the image becomes steadily more blurred. Can you draw a diagram and explain this on the basis of the ray model? You can use Fig. 2 as a starting point for your drawing. The key new assumption you must make here is that the lens *bends* the light, that is, the light no longer travels in a straight line when it goes from air to glass, or vice versa. See below for an answer to and explanation of Question 2.

In the spirit of inquiry, before proceeding to Question 3, I invite you to work out your own responses to Questions 1 and 2, and, if you wish, to consult the explanations and diagrams. When you are ready, proceed to Question 3.

Question 3. Suppose you were to use *both* the pinhole and lens, placed next to one another, to form an image on a screen (as in Figure 3)? Would you predict that the resulting image would be upside down or right side up? You are invited to make a prediction and to justify your prediction with a drawing based on Figure 3. Naturally, you will want to draw from your thinking about Questions 1 and 2 preceding. Whether or not you make a prediction that agrees with what is actually observed, the process and logic you use to arrive at your prediction, and your experience in making diagrams and in applying the ray model, will be a key foundation for gaining deeper insight into the nature of images and how to explain them using the ray model. See following for the observed result and an explanation.

Explanation of Question 1 – How is an image formed by a pinhole? Figure 4 illustrates the formation of an image by a pinhole. A bundle of rays diverging from point A near the top of the glowing object pass through the pinhole and illuminate the point on the screen at **A'**. A bundle of rays diverging from point **B** pass through the pinhole and illuminate the point on the screen at B'.

Now, why is the image upside down? Note that the rays from the top (**A**) of the object must travel downward in order to go through the pinhole and reach the screen, while the rays from the bottom of the object (**B**) must travel upward. In other words, the rays from the top and bottom of the object cross at the pinhole; this is what guarantees that the image will be inverted. In fact, you can pick any two different points on the object; the two rays must cross at the pinhole, and the image will be an exact copy of the object, but upside down.

To understand better how the image is formed, think about what would happen if there were additional pinholes in the foil. Each pinhole would give rise to a different image, and each image would be slightly displaced from one another, depending upon the location of the pinhole. These images would overlap and tend to wash each other out. If we were to take away the foil, there would be a huge number of overlapping images, which would result in a uniformly illuminated screen. Thus we can think of the pinhole image in two ways, either as the result of the light that goes through the pinhole to the screen, or as the result of the light that is blocked by the aluminum foil, allowing the image from the light that finds its way through the pinhole to become visible! Another way to say it is that the foil and pinhole are eliminating all of the other images and permitting rays that will form only *one* of the images to reach the screen.

It is important to note that we are assuming something here: that each point of the glowing object emits light rays traveling in all directions and that the rays from a point carry information only about that particular point and not about the image as a whole. Thus we are thinking about the process by which an image is formed as a kind of interaction between a source (the glowing object) and a receiver (the screen and then our eyes); the light rays traveling in straight lines are the way this interaction is transmitted from source to receiver.

It is also interesting to think about what will happen as the screen is moved further from the pinhole. Using the diagram, we can imagine the screen moving to the right, with the rays continuing to spread out. Thus we expect that the image will appear at any distance from the pinhole and that the *size* of the image (the distance from **A'** to **B'**) will be directly related to the distance between the pinhole and screen. In addition, we can see that the bundle of rays from A and from B *also* continue to spread out after they pass through the pinhole, so that the size of the "points" **A'** and **B'** will get larger as the screen moves to the right, showing that the edges of the image should become less distinct or fuzzier, and the image itself should become dimmer as the screen moves further from the pinhole. You can indeed verify (with a candle in a dark room) that an image from a pinhole behaves like this.

Finally, what effect will the *size* of the pinhole have? Again, we can use the diagram; if the pinhole is larger, a larger bundle of rays will pass through, but they will also be spread out over a larger angle. Thus we would predict that a larger pinhole would form an image that will be brighter but fuzzier.

Explanation of Question 2 – How is an image formed by a lens? Figure 5 shows a ray diagram for an image formed by a lens. The rays originating at A diverge until they strike the lens where they are bent so as to come back together at **A'**, which is the "image" of point A. Similarly for the rays originating at H. We have shown what happens to the rays starting from **A** and **H**, but other points (such as **B-G**) on the object also generate a cone of rays. In fact, you should imagine an infinite number of points all over the object; each point originates a cone of rays which strikes the lens and is bent so as converge at a distinct image point on the screen.

One can see immediately that the image is inverted: the image of the top of the object (**A'**) is at the bottom of the screen, and the image of the bottom of the object (**H'**) is at the top. In this diagram, the rays are not traveling in straight lines, as they were in the case of the pinhole; they are now changing direction at the lens.

But, why is the image inverted? As one can see from the diagram, the rays from **A** and **H** are, as in the case of the pinhole, crossing each other at the lens: the rays from A start at the top of the diagram and end at the bottom; the rays from **H** start at the bottom and end at the top.

The upside-down image is a direct result of the rays from the top of the image crossing the rays from the bottom. This is because all of the rays that reach the screen must pass through a limited opening, or an

aperture. This aperture is defined by the opaque material around the lens. Thus the inversion of both the pinhole and lens images is due to the existence of a limited aperture: in order to get through the aperture, all the rays from any point on the object must cross the rays from other points on the object as they go through the aperture. In the case of the lens, however, the cone of rays leaving each point of the object, which reaches the screen and forms the image point, is indeed much larger than in the case of the pinhole. In Figure 5, I have illustrated this by showing several small cones of rays leaving each point; each of these cones is equivalent to the cone that might reach the screen through a pinhole.

If the lens itself doesn't invert the image, what *does* it do? The lens changes the direction of the rays, so that all the rays originating from a particular point on the object come together, or converge, at a particular point (as at **A'** through **H'**). This is the essential feature of the lens – rather than the cone of rays from a particular point on the object continuing to diverge after they pass through the aperture, as with the pinhole, all the rays originating from a particular point of the image are bent as they pass through the lens so as to converge to a single point. As you would expect from the diagram, if a screen were placed at the point where the rays converge, the image formed is brighter than the pinhole image. In addition, the image formed by the lens will be sharper than the pinhole image. However, the image formed by the lens is only sharp when the screen is at a specific distance from the lens; in the diagram, you can see that if you were to move the screen to the right or left the image would very quickly get fuzzy and out of focus. In addition, Figure 5 shows that the brightness of the image is related to the size of the lens (the diameter of the aperture).

In summary, the pinhole prevents most of the light from reaching the screen; the rays that pass through the keyhole must cross all the other rays at the pinhole and as a result form an inverted image. The rays continue to diverge after passing through the pinhole; thus the image is relatively dim and fuzzy. The image can be displayed on a screen located at any distance from the pinhole; this is a property that is unique to the pinhole image.

On the other hand, the lens also forms an inverted image. This can be explained in the same way as the inversion of the pinhole image: all the rays must pass through the lens opening (the aperture), just as in the case of the pinhole. Even though the lens aperture is larger than the pinhole, the rays from any point on the object must still cross the rays from all other points on the object, and this fact alone guarantees an inverted image. The crossing of the rays, and the inversion of the image, thus, is the result of the existence of the aperture, not of the action of the lens.

The lens does not really invert the image; the function of the lens is to bend the light that strikes it so that the rays that diverge from each point converge at a point located on the other side of the lens. This, and not the inversion of the image, is the distinctive contribution of the lens. The lens bends each cone of light that originates at a point on the object so it converges onto a specific point on the screen; the pinhole doesn't do this, it selects out part of each diverging cone, but the cone continues to diverge after it goes through the pinhole. This converging, or focusing, action is what makes the image formed by the lens brighter and sharper than the pinhole image; however, the lens image will be sharply defined only if the screen is at a specific distance from the lens.

Explanation of Question 3 – Is the image formed by a pinhole and a lens together upside down or right side up? Now, how about the image formed by a pinhole in front of a lens? Many students reason that the image would be inverted twice and thus appear right side up on the screen. However, in fact, the image appears *upside down!* Before reading the explanation following, you are encouraged to revise your own explanation and diagram as necessary to account for an upside-down image.

Figure 6 illustrates the situation. The image is right side up because the lens and pinhole together act as a single aperture. Therefore, the rays cross just once and the image is still inverted.

Another way to think about this is that the pinhole simply restricts the aperture of the lens, so that fewer rays reach the lens. In a sense, the lens is now using the aperture of the pinhole rather than the wider aperture of the lens itself. Therefore, the image created by a pinhole in front of a lens should be the same as the image created by the lens itself, except not nearly as bright, since so many of the rays are prevented from reaching the lens. As you can see in the diagram, however, the rays passing through the pinhole will now, because of the lens, be brought together at a point, rather than continuing to diverge as they did without the lens. So the image should also be sharper than the image created by the pinhole, in fact, just as sharp as without the pinhole, but with fewer rays and thus dimmer.

A third way to think about it is to visualize the result if there were several pinholes in the aluminum foil. As explained earlier, if there were no lens, there would be several overlapping images, one from each pinhole on the screen. However, the lens works, as described, to bend all the light coming from a particular point on the object so that it converges at a particular point on the screen. As a result, when multiple pinholes and a lens are used, the images due to the various pinholes would not be distinct overlapping images tending to wash each other out; all of them would fall exactly on top of one another, thus forming a much brighter image.

There is at least one more useful insight we can glean from Figure 6: the image formed will have one other characteristic due to the pinhole: the image is not located only at one location. The screen in Figure 3 can be moved toward and away from the lens and the image will still be visible. The cone of rays is restricted by the pinhole, so that the image can be viewed at a much wider range of distances from the lens. This is known in photography as the relationship between "depth of field" and aperture. That is, if the camera aperture is small, then the focus is not too important, and objects at various distances from the photographer will still appear sharp in the photo. On the other hand, if the camera aperture must be opened wide (because of little light), then getting the focus right is very important, and there will be a relatively narrow range of distances from the camera within which objects will appear sharp in the photo.

Finally, I suggest a final question (to which I will not provide the explanation!):

Question 4: Can you find a way that a pinhole and a lens *can* be arranged so as to produce an image on a screen that is right side up?

Reflections on scientific models and on inquiry. The fundamental properties of light that are usually assumed as part of the ray model, and which we have tried to build up on the basis of "thought experiments" are as follows:

Light travels from a source to a receiver in straight lines, called "rays."

A single ray does not carry the whole image, just "information" about the specific point it came from.
Rays go in straight lines unless acted on by something else; when passing from one substance to another, light bends, or changes direction in a consistent way.

Each point on a source emits many rays in all directions.

Rays can overlap or cross each other without affecting each other.

These assumptions, plus a few others, collectively form the ray model of light. Using this model effectively requires being able to actively participate, to some degree, in the process of abstracting these ideas from the actual phenomena, as well as keeping straight the differences among (in order of descending generality): the underlying assumptions of the model, the diagrams and the actual observed phenomena.

The process of inquiry in science involves carrying out your own experiments or recalling your own experiences with a particular phenomena, constructing your own mental model, using it to understand what you have observed and, most important, using it to predict the results under new conditions or in changed circumstances. This process is not a "one-way" process – rather, it involves encountering contradictions and changing your thinking in some way to resolve the problem. This change in thinking can involve modifications at any level of abstraction: in the underlying assumptions behind the model, in the reasoning or logic involved in applying the model, in the specific diagrams or equations used in applying the model, or even in the way the observations of the real world are carried out. Memorizing the assumptions of a particular model is of little help in building up one's own mental version of a scientific model and in using the model effectively. Rather one must actively engage with the physical world, subjecting the model to critical tests and modifying it as necessary to account for and explain one's own experiences and carrying out a variety of "thought experiments" based on such experiences.

The examples given involve using the ray model to account for the appearance of the pinhole and lens images. A deeper understanding of the model, and more careful analysis were required in order to resolve the paradoxical result when the pinhole and lens were used together, but the ray model itself did not fail or have to be modified. However, no scientific model, including the ray model, is universally applicable, and there are always situations in which a given scientific model will fail. In particular, the ray model fails to predict phenomena that are observed when the sizes of the pinholes and other apparatus are very small, less than about one ten thousandth of an inch. In such cases, another model, the wave model, can be used more successfully. To account adequately for other situations, we have had to modify the ray model and to think of light as consisting of individual particles that are transmitted from source to receiver.

The generally accepted current theory of light, known as quantum electrodynamics (QED), was developed in the 1940s by Feynmann, Tomonaga and Schwinger. Quantum electrondynamics does not rest on a simple intuitively satisfying mental image and a direct analogy with everyday phenomena in the same way that the ray and wave models do. On the other hand, QED has a set of clearly stated, logically consistent assumptions and resulting mathematical equations that can be used in an agreed-upon way to yield accurate predictions about the behavior of light. But it is not correct to say that QED consists only of abstract mathematics. Just as with the wave and ray models, there are a variety of practical images and "heuristics," shorthand ways of thinking about QED, analyzing phenomena, generating an intuitive feel of what is likely to be the result and guiding us toward generating the appropriate equations. For example the "Feynman diagrams" offer much the same power and help in thinking about how to relate QED to what is observed as our diagrams provided for working out how to apply the ray model to pinholes and lenses.

Thus we see the continuing importance of simplified mental "images" and constructs as the key foundation for scientific modeling and for the more formal assumptions and equations of scientific theory. This also brings out the critical role of inquiry (trying out various assumptions, doing experiments, seeing how well you can explain what you find or what you have previously observed) in developing effective mental constructs and strengthening the ability to use scientific models effectively.
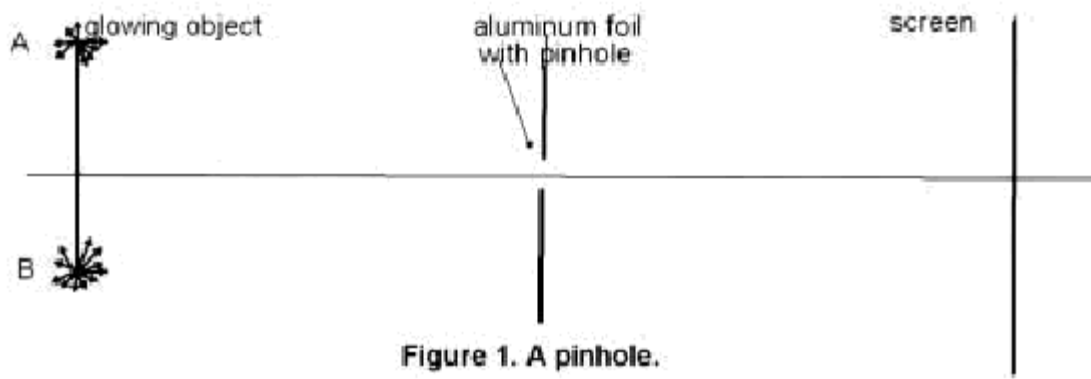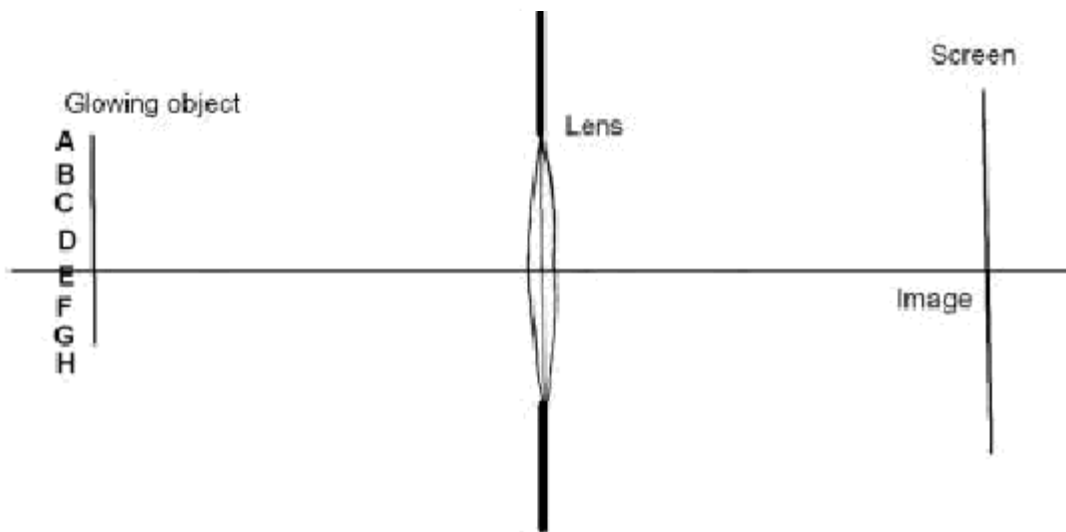
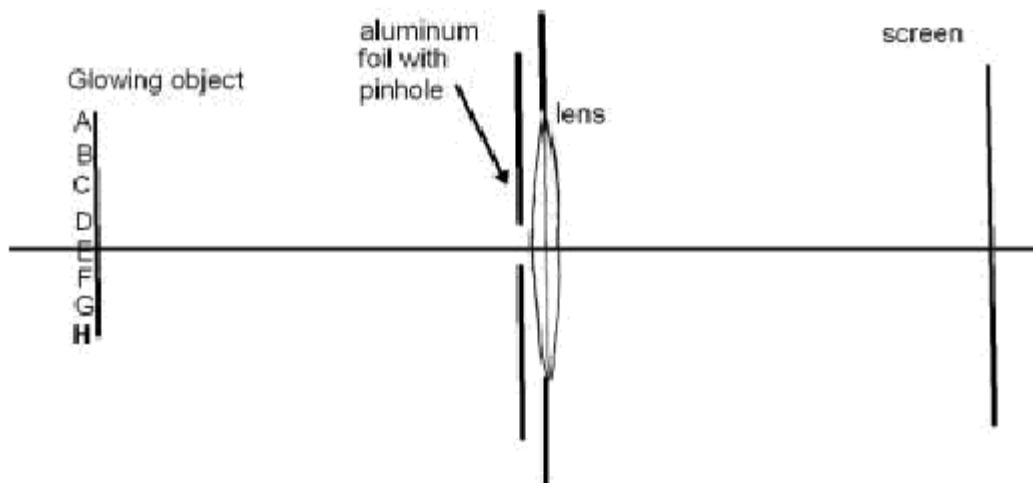**Figure 1. A pinhole.**

Figure 2. A lens.

Figure 3. A pinhole and a lens.
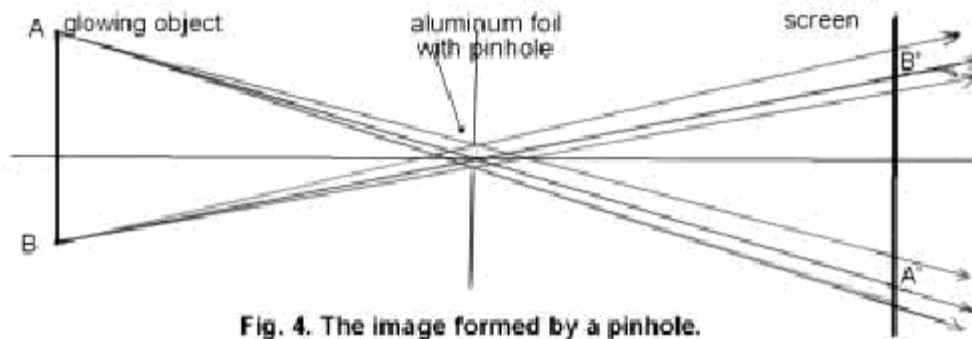
Fig. 4. The image formed by a pinhole.
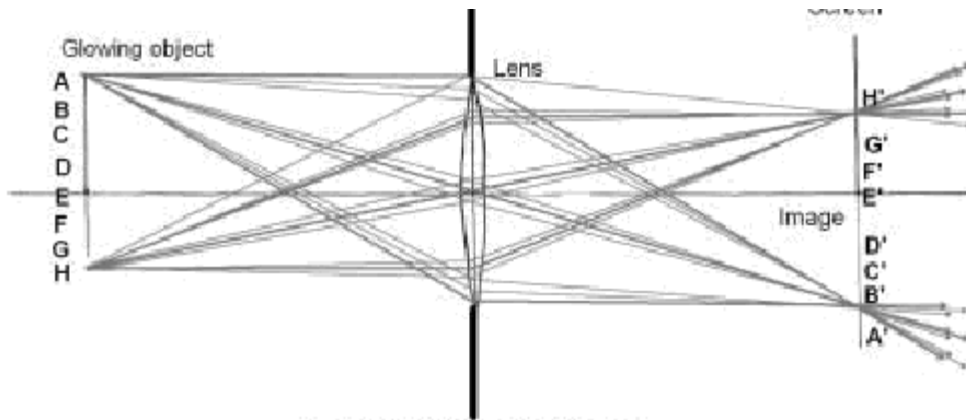
Figure 5. The image from a lens.
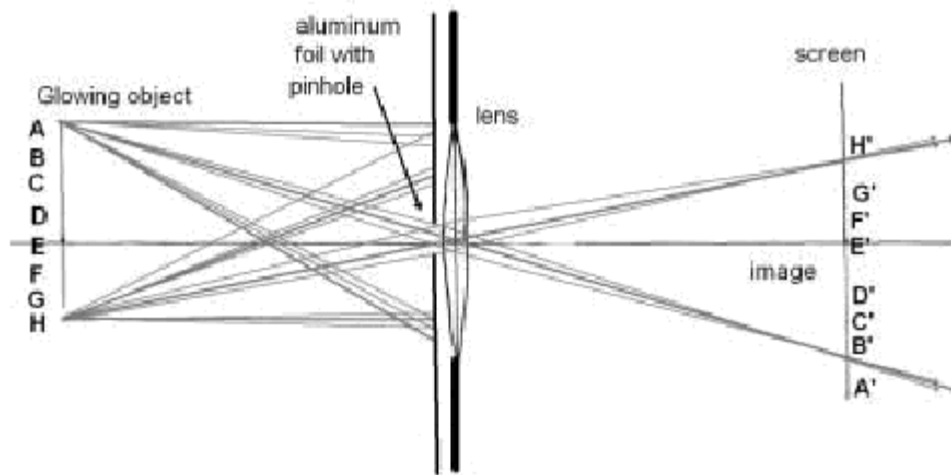
Figure 6. The image formed by a pinhole and a lens.

Follow Your Student's Bliss: A Mentoring Anecdote
Mark Peters, Niagara Frontier Center

Composer, poet and visual artist John Cage once said, "When I'm not working, I sometimes think I know something. When I'm working, I discover that I don't know anything at all." He could easily have been talking about mentoring; like making art, mentoring is a process in which principles and conclusions can be located only after the fact.

What follows is my description of a memorable mentoring session – a session that supported and reaffirmed a few of my fundamental beliefs about the mentoring process, particularly the mentoring of student writers.

Recently, I was working with a student named Beth, an interior designer who has run her own business for two decades. Beth was so accomplished in her field that area colleges were seeking her services as an instructor, but they wouldn't hire her due to Beth's lack of a college degree. Enter Empire State College and our writing study.

Due to a hectic work schedule on Beth's part, we hadn't met for awhile, and it was time to discuss the always-scary research paper – the traditional closing episode of this and most writing studies or classes. I gave Beth a big and frightening pile of handouts about writing a research paper, while encouraging her to think of the assignment as small and non-threatening – just another essay, but with sources.

I said that two types of papers usually work out well: those that are either really fun or really practical for the author. As an example of a fun topic, I mentioned that if I had to do a research paper, I would probably write about *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (and, in fact, I am writing an essay about this series which is widely respected yet also widely dismissed). I also pointed out that there is an entire academic journal *(Slayage)* devoted to *Buffy* scholarship, so the odds are that even the most unlikely topic can be, and has been, explored in an academic way.

After a lot of hesitation and preamble, Beth then told me about an experience she had while working on the window design for a Delaware Avenue mansion in Buffalo. It seems that some spooky things – such as faces and orbs – had appeared in the photographs Beth had taken of the windows. This, and possibly other baffling occurrences at the mansion, led Beth to do research on the supernatural, and a few books she had read before the experience proved oddly pertinent to her odd experience.

We talked for awhile about this idea and decided that it sounded like more of a narrative essay than a research paper. I didn't think it was a good idea to dump the research paper, but I wanted Beth to write

about something that excited her, and I said as much. I was intrigued but unsure how to proceed, so I said we shouldn't make any decisions yet.

Just then, as I was about to prod Beth to come up with more ideas, she mentioned that I would need to read a book called *City of Lights* for her story to make sense. While thinking, "the odds are about zilch that I'll have time to read this book," I suddenly thought (and asked), "What if you wrote about that book as preamble to your story?" I suggested summarizing and analyzing this book and told Beth that if her essay were partly a literary analysis, we might have the research component we needed.

Beth then mentioned that there was another book that was relevant to her story, and I said an examination of both books would make an even better prologue to her story. Now, we were getting close to an exciting mix of research, analysis and personal experience. We had a plan.

I offer this anecdote not so much to pat myself on the back (pat pat), but to remind myself and possibly others of how open-ended but extremely active mentoring can work. I offer the following nonearthshaking but easy-to-forget conclusions:

Always start with what the students likes, loves or has a genuine interest in. Sometimes students may be reluctant to state their likes, but be persistent. Obviously, the higher the quality of the mentor-mentee student rapport, the easier it will be for the student to volunteer her likes. But there are ways to better the rapport and increase a student's comfort level, such as …

Take chances by putting your own obsessions and hobbies on the table. If I hadn't mentioned my liking of the supernatural-oriented Buffy, my student might not have thought to mention her supernatural-seeming experience. If you can show a student that you're a real person who likes at least some things that exist outside of scholarly journals, that student will probably find you more trustworthy and likeable. I'm, therefore, hesitant to blab too much about my obsession with 20th century procedural poetics, but I'm quick to volunteer how much I love the NBA or *The Osbournes.*

If there is any way possible, adapt the student's preference to the assignment or vice versa (or both). When Beth mentioned her idea, I had no clue how such a thing could be turned into a research paper. My first suggestion was to look into cultural representations of the paranormal or psychological studies of people who claim to have had supernatural experiences, but it was quickly clear that Beth wanted to write a narrative. Thankfully, (and luckily) I didn't shut the door on this idea – and seconds after I encouraged her to leave the door open, Beth and I came up with a way to add a scholarly, analytical element to the project.

As of this writing, I have no idea if this successful mentoring session will result in a successful paper, though I am obviously optimistic, and Beth seems motivated and prepared to write her paper. But regardless of this particular outcome, I have renewed my optimism that a good idea is always around the corner if you, as Joseph Campbell liked to say, "follow your bliss" – or rather, that of your student.

"Thinking is neither coerced nor coercive. It is exploratory, suggestive; it does not prove any-
thing, or finally arrive anywhere. Thus, to say people are thoughtful or thought provoking sug-
gests that they are open minded, reflective, challenging – that they are more likely to question
than to assert, inclined to listen to many sides, capable of making sensitive distinctions that hold
differences in play rather than dividing in order to exclude, and desirous of persuading others
rather than reducing them to silence by refuting them."

Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, "Teaching Thinking: Moral and Political Considerations" (*Change*,
September/October 2003)