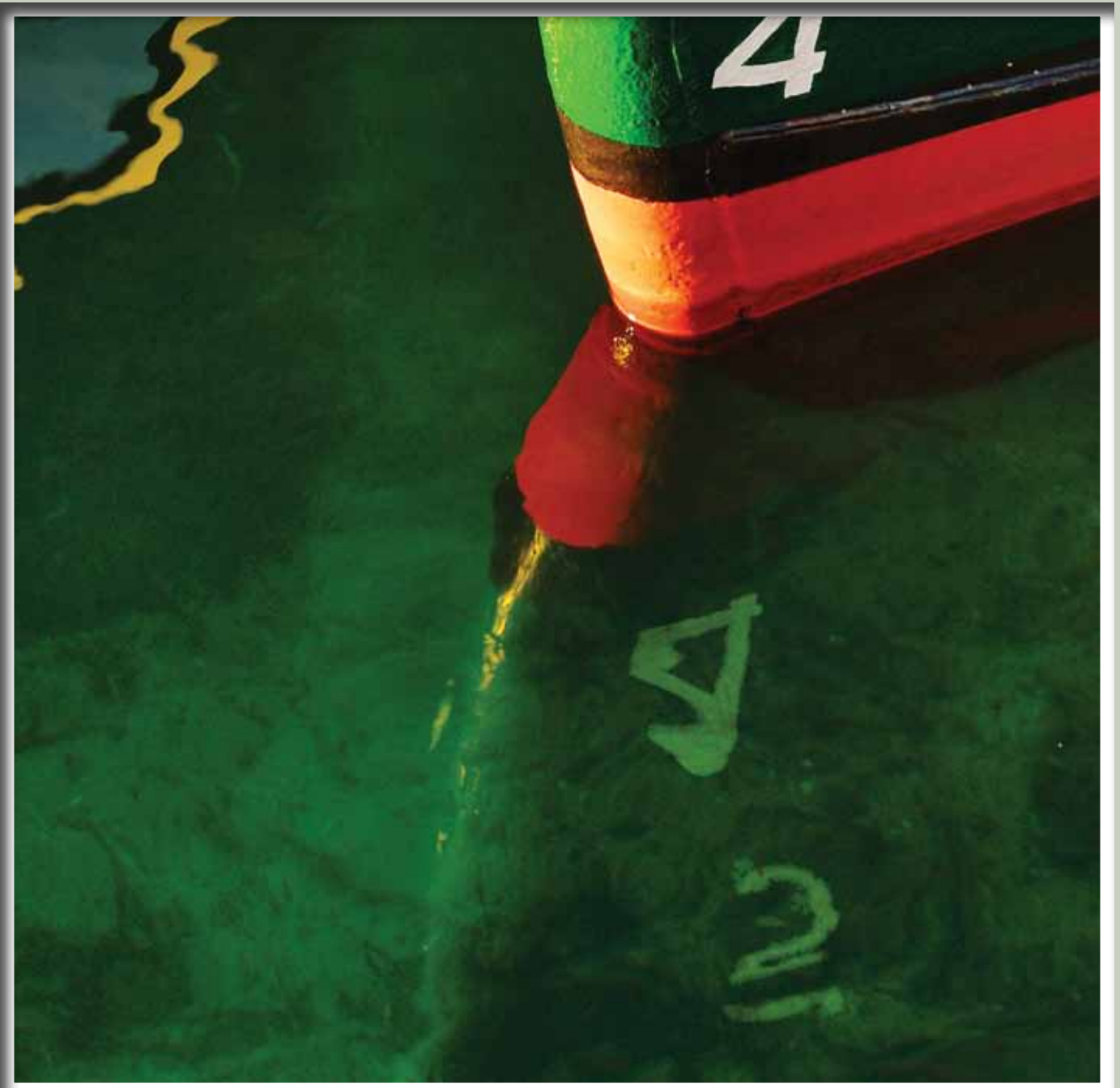


ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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Issue 41 • Summer 2012



ALL ABOUT MENTORING
Issue 41 • Summer 2012

Phyllis M. Cunningham: 1927 - 2012

*“Education is not simply about attaining knowledge,
education is about the politics of knowledge.
Education is not about the preservation of status
and elitism; education is about democratization of
power relationships.”*

*Phyllis M. Cunningham,
“Let’s Get Real: A Critical Look at the
Practice of Adult Education,”
Journal of Adult Education, 22(1),
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EDITORIAL



Against Teaching

"It's like you got yesterday, today and tomorrow, all in the same room. There's no tellin' what can happen."

– Todd Haynes, *I'm Not There*, 2007

Without doubt, over the last 40 years, there have been enormous changes in higher education, including, of course, the stark reality that the so-called "nontraditional" learner (still, today, a slightly pejorative term) is now the norm, not the oddball exception. But there's an underside to all of our successes and it's deeply worrisome.

First, three indications of our success:

The first is PLA, prior learning assessment. In championing PLA, we have made a very basic assumption: that a person could have learned, could have gained skills and insights, and could be knowledgeable in an area after having spent not one millisecond in one seat on one college campus. Prior learning assessment overturned a most sacred notion of the university as holder of all the knowledge worth having. Whether in business, the arts, human services, the technologies – just name the area – with PLA policies in place, students have been given the opportunity to show that they have come to the university with legitimate college-level learning already in hand. It only has to be recognized.

The second success is what might be understood as the democratization of the independent study. Of course, many universities offered students the opportunity to enroll for a "299," many an academic department's place-holder for the special student to propose a special course with a faculty member who, usually without any extra compensation, would agree to sign off on a project not identified in the official catalog. But in the academic world we now take for granted, the independent study is defined not as the province of the elite but as rather customary. Why shouldn't every student engage in studies freed from the constraints of being anywhere at any time and the tyranny of the college catalog? No special permission need be granted; anyone can take it on.

And then there is a third indication of success: the explosion of distance learning opportunities, the establishment of mega-institutions entirely devoted to online learning – the webinization of higher ed. The so-called "correspondence course" was a mid-19th century creation, so it is not new. What is new is the ubiquity of the virtual university and the growing consensus that asynchronous study is a significant freeing from artificial institutional constraints. Try as we might to establish rules of engagement (for example, to reproduce a classroom, online), in a world of distance education and open learning resources, who is where, when, for how long, and glued to what materials, is far from transparent.

Together, these three changes (manifesting themselves in different ways, to different degrees, in different institutional contexts) will continue to transform higher education. This is exciting; it's important. It's about the experience of freedom within the academy that students richly deserve.

But I want to get to the underside because it affects every single thing we do, every move we make.

In their own particular ways, PLA, the independent study, and distance learning share a basic premise: the radical claim that "learning" can be disconnected from "teaching." PLA celebrates those myriad activities in which many people have sometimes spent thousands of hours diving into an area of particular interest to them or being trained quite apart from any university. PLA is not at all about teaching; rather, institutions are recognizing what someone has already learned. (Indeed, in some countries, our PLA is RLP, the *recognition of prior learning*.)

The independent study, too, rests on a claim that students can be out there on their own – researching, galloping about, and swallowing up what they need to know, often without much teacherly help at all. And the triumph of distance learning (today, most evident in the preoccupation with and exhilaration over the freedom of access to open educational resources) only rarely attends to learners who need careful and methodical help, who cannot do it on their own, and for whom even the most stunning "resource" can be impenetrable without a teacher.

Of course, PLA programs are always asking about the role of the "teacher" in helping a student shape an essay on that student's experiential learning (not inconsequentially, the debate about this often concerns faculty offering *too much* support). So, too, many are regularly asking about the tensions between "independent study" and "guided" independent study (we genuinely worry about our lack of contact with our students and are truly dismayed when we recognize how little mentor contact a student has actually received). And some distance learning educators (see, for example, Randy Bass's important essay, "Disrupting Ourselves" in the March/April 2012 issue of *EDUCAUSE Review*) are concerned that the

resource, the curriculum and/or the course have taken over as the core of our discourse on learning.

But even with these caveats, even with these little hesitations, isn't it striking that our conversations about education these days have so often pushed us away from attention to the learner, from attention to the learning process: away from attention to the power of mentoring in working with a student? Isn't it striking that with our new freedoms, with all of these changes, we have turned against teaching and constructed some image of a free-floating-independent-

resource-savvy-learner who can take on pretty much anything (and what there is to take on is, indeed, quite infinite) and only needs teachers-as-evaluators?

No teacher, no mentor, feels the spirit of his or her vocation as a producer of disembodied resources and as an interchangeable part preoccupied with assessing. And no student is a completely self-directed learner who needs only access to stuff and no instruction, no help to find his or her way, no need for deep dialogue. Empire State College and other experimenting colleges of its time broke

many institutional barriers, and all of us have gained significant academic freedom as a result. But to wax triumphant about PLA and about distance learning and about open learning by jettisoning any serious talk about teaching, about meaningful academic mentoring, is a huge error that undercuts the very values that so deeply animated our movement for change almost a half century ago.

Alan Mandell

Rewards and Challenges of Community Engagement Through Service Learning

Reed Coughlan, Central New York Center

Following a brief discussion of the notion of service learning, this essay will focus on a project in which one of my students – David, we'll call him – collaborated with the Utica Municipal Housing Authority to plan and implement a set of community gardens for 40 Somali Bantu families in the city of Utica, N.Y. in the spring and summer of 2011. The UMHA is a publicly funded agency that provides subsidized housing for low income families and individuals where many Somali Bantu live.

To complement this service learning project, David and I developed a set of interdisciplinary learning contracts that included a study of the politics of food and one on the dynamics of community organization. This project illustrates the range and scope of socially relevant and socially engaged activities that can be incorporated in student projects that harness university resources in service to the community.

With the assistance of a small grant from Empire State College, as well as funding from the Municipal Housing Authority, 40 garden beds 4 feet wide by 40 feet long were tilled and planted with starter plants donated by local farmers. These Somali Bantu had spent 10 years in refugee camps in Kenya, but prior to that they had been subsistence farmers in their native land. While they brought some farming knowledge with them to the U.S., growing conditions and crop differences necessitated an ancillary education program during the summer months.

While this service learning project was largely implemented before my involvement with the Rust to Green College Consortium, this joint venture involving a dozen colleges in the Utica region has come to embody the notion of “University-Community Engagement,” the title of the conference for which this paper was formulated. The consortium facilitates actions and

interactions between academic and community partners engaged in reimagining and reinventing Utica and its region’s sustainable future. The Rust to Green College Consortium is committed to helping students to engage in service learning and community service. It also encourages public scholarship and dialog on current issues of relevance to the local community. It attempts to promote social responsibility and social justice through the enhancement of university-community reciprocity. The consortium is committed to the common good through interdisciplinary approaches to problems and issues of concern to the region.

The Scholarship of Engagement

The approach to service learning embraced by the consortium reflects the beliefs articulated by the late chancellor of SUNY, Ernest Boyer who said,

I am convinced that ... the academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement. (Boyer, 1996, p. 11)

In anticipation of the theme of this conference, Chancellor Boyer went on to imagine a vision in which:

Campuses would be viewed ... not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action. The scholarship of engagement also means creating a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and creatively with each other. (Boyer, 1996)

Learning can be much deeper, more relevant and meaningful when it is anchored in actual experience of the world rather than academic or theoretical musings. The literature on human learning tells us that:

The method people naturally employ to acquire knowledge is largely unsupported by traditional classroom practice. The human mind is better equipped to gather information about the world by operating within it than by reading about it, hearing lectures on it, or studying abstract models of it. (Morowitz & Singer, 1995)

In a recent faculty workshop on service learning at the University at Albany (SUNY), Dr. Edward Zlotkowski articulated a set of principles that should be reflected in our approach to the design of service learning projects for our students. He said that service learning courses should be designed to meet assessable learning objectives, and they should involve experience with community-based organizations or groups suitable for promoting civic learning. Courses should ensure that students engage in structured reflection or analysis and that their projects reinforce principles of campus-community partnerships and reciprocity (Zlotkowski, 2011).

Furthermore, Eyler and Giles (1999) maintain that service learning should address complex problems and community challenges that encourage students to engage in critical thinking that involves being able to sort through the most salient issues within real world situations.

David’s community garden project and the two tutorials we developed together reflect the spirit of the ideas introduced above. The service learning project helped David learn about the history and culture of the Somali Bantu, while he took a course on the politics of community organizing in order to reflect on his approach to marshaling resources in support of the community gardens. At

the same time, he studied the politics of food in order to learn more about the logic behind the locavore food movement and the countervailing forces of globalization. He was interested in the connections between industrial food production and public health, in particular, the proliferation of childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes, and the competing explanatory paradigms, namely personal responsibility versus the production methods and marketing of food under corporate and consumer capitalism. As a capstone project designed to help David synthesize insights from all three courses, he wrote a proposal, and once it had been accepted, gave a presentation at the Unspoken conference sponsored in the fall of 2011 by the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (more about MVRCCR to follow).¹

The Immigration Context

In order to understand the influx of the Somali Bantu to the Utica area, David read about the larger issues associated with the history of immigration in U.S. history. He studied the patterns illustrated in the

following chart that show two major spikes in immigration, one in the period from 1901 to 1910 and the recent surge in the decade 1991 to 2001.

The foreign born and their children (first and second generation immigrants) number more than 60 million and represent about 23 percent of the entire population of the United States (Portes and Rumbaut, 2005). But immigrants and “foreign born” include those who arrived in the U.S. as refugees, of whom about 70,000 to 100,000 have arrived yearly since the 1990s. The United States has resettled more than two million refugees since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980. Immigrants typically leave their homes willingly in search of opportunities and a better life in America. Refugees have been forced from their homes by violence and coercion and find themselves resettled in a strange land through no choice of their own. Also, whereas immigrants are generally attracted to cities where there are jobs, that is, the traditional “gateway cities” such as Los Angeles, New York and Chicago, refugees are intentionally distributed across the U.S. (Singer and Wilson, 2006). In 2004

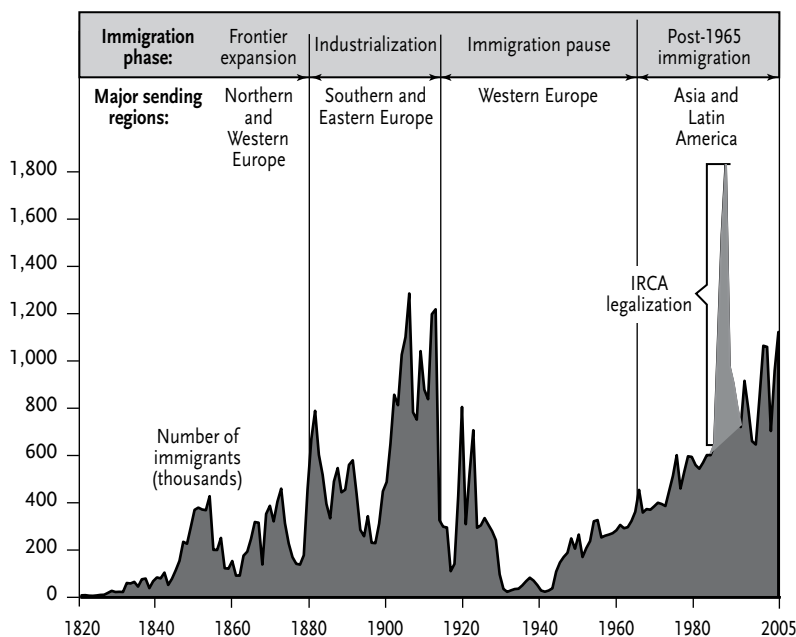
for example, about 4,470 Somali Bantu were resettled in cities and towns in 10 different states across the continental U.S.

Utica has a refugee center, the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees funded by the Lutheran Immigration and Resettlement Service, one of 10 Volags (voluntary agencies) that contract with the State Department to assist with the resettlement of refugees. As a result of the efforts of MVRCCR, Utica has become known as the “Town that Loves Refugees,” the title of a special issue of the magazine published by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. According to MVRCCR, in the last 30 years, 11,000 refugees have settled in Utica, making up about 18 percent of the total population of approximately 62,000. These refugees came from Vietnam, Russia, Bosnia, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Burma and more than 30 other countries.

About 12 years ago, I undertook interviews with 100 Bosnian families and subsequently wrote a book about their lives before the war, their experiences during the conflict and in resettlement (Coughlan & Owens-Manley, 2006). While I heard many different life stories, in general, Bosnians succeeded in re-establishing stable family lives by buying affordable homes, learning English, finding jobs and educating their children. They have acculturated into American society and achieved a measure of socioeconomic stability, and in many cases upward mobility. About four years later, I completed a set of interviews with 50 of these families and our findings confirmed what we had earlier observed in the larger group.

At about that time, the U.S. State Department identified Somali Bantu residing in the refugee camps in Northern Kenya as an especially vulnerable group worthy of asylum in the United States, and agreed to resettle them here. Using the same formula for government funding as that employed to resettle Bosnians, voluntary agencies contracted with the State Department to resettle Somali Bantu in cities and towns across America. Over the next few years, I completed a set of interviews with 76 Somali Bantu families in 10 cities in New York, Ohio, Arizona, Maine and Vermont.²

Legal Immigration to the United States, 1820–2005



Note: IRCA adjustments refer to the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, under which 2.7 million undocumented foreign U.S. residents obtained legal immigrant status.

Source: DHS, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2005* (www.dhs.gov, accessed Oct. 12, 2006): table 1.



Site of proposed gardens



Marking and cutting beds



The gardens

These families and their experiences differ from the Bosnians in several obvious and important respects: They had been subsistence farmers in Somalia before the war, they had been marginalized in their own society and had been denied access to education with the result that most adults coming to this country were illiterate in their own language. After the war, they had spent a decade or more in refugee camps after escaping the violence. So, unlike the Bosnians, they had no experience in industrial or post-industrial society and they were ill-equipped to learn English. Also, at least for the 27 families who settled in Utica, the local conditions they encountered on arrival were changed. The affordable housing stock had been bought up by the earlier wave of Bosnians, and entry-level factory jobs had largely evaporated. Employment opportunities for unskilled non-English speakers in the other six cities where I interviewed Somali Bantu were no better, and sometimes worse, than in Utica.

Also, while both Bosnian and Somali Bantu are Muslim, (Bosnians are more secular) and family values are strong in both communities, Somali Bantu subscribe to polygamy and attach great value to fertility and large families. As a result, many Somali Bantu men were required by the U.S. immigration service to divorce all but one spouse and to leave behind the children of their ex-wives. Still, they often have eight or more children and their wives eschew employment in favor of staying home to care for their children. When I asked these women if they wanted to get a job or to stay at home, they all said they'd prefer to stay at home and have more children, God willing. The costs of day care, after all, would make going to work entirely irrational. Many Somali Bantu men were unemployed and those who reported that they were working typically had part-time or seasonal jobs with no chance for self-sufficiency, let alone advancement.

During both the Bosnian and Somali Bantu research projects, I would typically invite the students enrolled in my Research Methods and Refugee Resettlement study group to accompany me on interviews. I recall one interview in Syracuse. When I offered the usual token honorarium of \$15 to my Somali Bantu subject, he said through

my interpreter, “Well thank you, I know what I will do with that.” I asked what he meant and he explained that he had 10 children but no food in the house. When the interview was finished, my three adult students and I pooled our cash and went with him to buy groceries in the store.

Unfortunately, he went directly to the potato chips and fast food section, but we explained that we would rather provide him with staples, such as rice, milk, cheese and vegetables. This was only one of many incidents that demonstrated that the Somali Bantu are impoverished and more importantly, they do not know how to make good use of the few resources they do have in their new environment.

In the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011, I received funding to assist with the costs of conducting a second round of interviews with these Somali Bantu families. I quickly discovered that conditions had not improved for them. The recession hit the poor in American society particularly hard and for those at the margins of subsistence, like the Somali Bantu, things got a good deal worse. Unemployment had increased, public assistance was scarce and food insecurity had become commonplace. As a result of the recession, the percentage of the American population at or below the poverty level had increased dramatically. Historical poverty tables taken from the U.S. census indicate, for example, that between 2006 and 2010, the percentage of the U.S. population at the poverty level increased from 12.3 percent to 15.15 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

David’s Work and the Community Garden

In the spring of 2011, as the plight of the Somali Bantu was becoming clear, I was working with David, helping him to design his degree program. He explained that he had been involved with community gardens in the Utica region for a number of years. He had worked on the Utica Municipal Housing Authority community garden project, which had largely been taken over by the Russian refugees who live there. He jokingly explained that one of those gardeners would have to move away or die before a municipal housing resident would get access to one of these coveted garden

beds. He also had managed the farmers market for the city of Utica for several years and as a result had cultivated solid business connections with many of the local farmer vendors.

Also at about that time, because I had become known in the Somali Bantu community through my research, I was summoned to a meeting of the elders who wanted to know if there was some way that I could help them to secure grant money for their community association. We were unable to formulate a specific proposal at that meeting but it got me thinking about David’s experience with community gardens. I talked with him about a possible community garden project for the Somali Bantu and we agreed that we should approach the Municipal Housing Authority to explore their interest in helping to sponsor it. After a series of meetings, we came to an agreement based on a proposal I had put together. But before we went ahead with our plan, we were careful to meet with the Somali Bantu elders to be sure that we had their agreement that this project would help their community. Once we had their assurances we went ahead with concrete plans.

I decided to use the money I had been awarded to conduct interviews (to pay for an interpreter and for honoraria, etc.) to hire David to plan and implement the community gardens and to pay for part of the tilling and some of the starter plants and seeds. I made this decision because I thought that I had learned what I needed to know about the social and economic stagnation of the Somali Bantu community since the first interviews based on the set of 20 follow-up interviews I had completed in the fall, and because I saw an opportunity to capitalize on their prior agricultural experience and help them to partially address the patterns of food insecurity that had been exacerbated by the recession. This project seemed to be a perfect candidate for a successful service learning project. As we will see, I did learn about divisions within the Somali Bantu community in ways I might not have through interviews alone.

Through his contacts, David solicited donations from local farmers, the Utica Municipal Housing Authority provided

a fence around the garden, and a local community college donated two tool sheds that had been built by students in a construction trades program. In turn, the UMHA allowed us to use a five-acre plot of lawn for the gardens themselves. The Oneida County Waste Authority made its own compost and we prevailed upon them to donate 20 truckloads of black gold to our garden project.

The UMHA began to purchase garden tools, but this proved costly. When they complained of budget constraints, we told them to return the tools, and my wife and I spent two weekends visiting garage sales in the region soliciting donations and paying modest sums out of pocket when we had to. We soon had more than 100 used but serviceable shovels, hoes, forks and related tools to begin the gardens.

Tribal Membership

Although I had become aware of the existence of two linguistically differentiated tribes among the Somali Bantu, it was not until we began to plan the garden layout that I fully recognized the importance attached to tribal membership and the depth of the antipathy between them. The two groups are defined by the Kizigua and the May May languages. Members of the Kizigua tribe frequently speak both Kizigua and May May, whereas May May speakers do not speak or understand Kizigua. As a result, when the local refugee center made what seemed like a logical hiring decision and employed several Kizigua interpreters, the May May were incensed and were thoroughly convinced that they had been victimized by the discriminatory and preferential policies of a partisan executive director of the agency. So, when we decided that the 40 garden beds, measuring 4 feet wide and 40 feet long would be equally divided between the Kizigua and May May tribes, I was approached by one of the young interpreters and was asked on behalf of the May May elders to be sure that a fence was erected between the two tribal gardens. I explained that I was unable to accommodate such a request, and that further, I hoped that the gardens would be a place for reconciliation of differences not the reinforcement of them.

The project almost faltered a week later when the May May inadvertently tilled 22 garden beds rather than the 20 they had been allocated. I was summoned by the May May elders who threatened to withdraw from the project because they said that they believed that I had tricked them into tilling two beds that had been allocated to the Kizigua. Much negotiation and many apologies later smoothed the situation over and things went forward. Although the garden sheds and tools, hoes, shovels and rakes had been equally distributed between the two groups, a few days later another tribal dispute erupted over who owned which garden tools. The police had to intervene to prevent intertribal violence.

Other forms of conflict seemed to erupt every weekend in the spring and summer.³ Conflict emerged between tribal elders and their young interpreters who were being pressured to take a stronger stance with David and me in representing the interests of their particular tribe. Tensions simmered between David, who was the garden manager, and the Somali Bantu gardeners who were placing the plants much too close together and who were overwatering, especially at high noon in full sun. Disagreements between the executive director of UMHA and his staff were common-place, as were conflicts between the executive director of UMHA and David and me, usually over who had agreed to pay for what.

Another misunderstanding surfaced as it became clear that men were not involved with the gardens after the first few weeks. I asked several of the interpreters about it and they said that the men of the community wanted farms, not gardens. They wanted to be able to work large tracks of land and to be able to take the produce to market for cash. As it turned out, this type of gardening was considered women's work.

All the forms of conflict you can imagine – cultural, fiscal, horticultural and administrative – took place throughout the spring and summer. As often as we could, David and I would try to debrief a conflict situation and ask ourselves, “What just happened and what can we learn from it?” If we think back to our earlier discussion of the characteristics of service learning,

David was constantly challenged by real life situations that required critical thinking, reflection and analysis. His readings in community organizing repeatedly encouraged him to question the efficacy of conflict over consensus building, and his readings about the politics of food led him to consider a variety of micro and macro issues even as he daily confronted a plethora of cultural considerations about food choice and preference.

From Work Study to Service Learning

So, I had paid David as a sort of work study student in the spring to plan, organize and implement the gardens. He arranged for and helped to cut the sod to line the beds; he met with UMHA authorities periodically to keep the project moving; he met with and solicited starter plants from local farmers, took delivery of the plants and stored them until it was time to put them in the ground. He instructed and supervised the Somali Bantu in planting, and he did all of the myriad things necessary to get 40 Somali Bantu families to plant their gardens. Then in mid to late May, he transitioned from a work-study project to an academic service learning project that required him to continue all of the coordinative minutia while engaging in a set of readings that would ensure that he had an opportunity to analyze and reflect on his involvements and interactions.

But by the middle of July, his academic term came to an end and I needed to think about how I could justify David's continuing involvement in managing the gardens. Somali Bantu were unfamiliar with many of the crops we had planted and they needed ongoing instruction in how to care for their plots, how to weed and deal with insects and pests, and how to harvest and prepare the vegetables as they ripened in the gardens. In my naïveté, I thought that I should be able to get some further faculty development money to manage the gardens and finish the project for the two remaining months of summer. After all, once I showed what we had been able to accomplish with a mere \$1,000 of development funds in the spring, surely the funding committee would see the value of bringing this project to fruition. Unfortunately, the committee concluded that

faculty development monies are specifically earmarked to support faculty research or to attend academic conferences and not for service learning projects. Perhaps I should have classified this project and my collaborative experience as action research.

As it turned out, I was able to locate some scholarship monies that allowed David to see the service learning project through, but this hiccup in the funding stream did lead me to reflect on the academic reward structures that seem to discourage faculty from involvements in service learning activities. When I attend conferences and workshops on service learning, I often remark on the preponderance of administrators and the dearth of faculty in attendance. Administrative leaders want to promote service learning and university engagement with the communities in which they are embedded, but they need to help to change the incentive structures on university and college campuses, because when I talk with faculty colleagues about service learning, they tell me they believe that tenure and promotion committees do not value these types of involvements. Students and faculty alike benefit from this type of deeply experiential learning, and community groups can learn to appreciate and benefit from the use of university resources applied toward the common good.

Notes

- ¹ The conference was described as follows: “This year's Unspoken conference theme, ‘Many Cultures, One Community,’ will explore the place of the arts and culture in the experience of people and peoples who have been forced from their homelands to build new lives and communities through resettlement.”
- ² This was part of a larger project involving 100 African families. In addition to Somali Bantus, I interviewed 13 Liberians and 11 Sudanese in Utica, New York. Of the Somali Bantu, 26 were interviewed in Utica, and 10 each were living in Rochester, Columbus, Burlington, Lewiston and Phoenix-Tucson.

³ One issue that was especially vexing to the housing authority surfaced repeatedly over the summer months, namely the inclination of the Somali Bantu to slaughter their livestock, usually chickens or goats in the kitchens or bathrooms of the UMHA apartments because of their cultural preference for Halal meat; that is, meat from animals that are humanely slaughtered according to Islamic tradition.

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“If democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all.”

– John Dewey, Democracy and Education, New York: Macmillan, 1916, 1966, p. 122

Thanks to Katherine Jelly, Center for Mentoring and Learning, for suggesting this quote.

New Mentor Reflections, Part I

Shantih E. Clemans, Metropolitan Center; Kjrsten Keane, Center for Distance Learning and Angela Titi Amayah, Genesee Valley Center; Amanda Sisselman, Metropolitan Center

At the beginning of the fall 2011 term, we invited new mentors to keep track of their first months at the college. In the following pages, as well as in a second section in this issue (pages 81 - 84), we are pleased to include the reflections that we received. Thanks to the contributors for taking the time to do this.

What Is This Place? A New Mentor Reflects on Life at Empire State College

Shantih E. Clemans

No one in my life was especially surprised when I accepted a faculty position in Community and Human Services at SUNY Empire State College, known for its innovative approach to education and its emphasis on teaching. Teaching has always been my thing: doing it well, writing about it, talking about it, trying to improve it. My family celebrated when I finally found a school with a mission that matched what I loved to do. The fit immediately felt right. My job seemed clear. Then came the questions. The first thing I had to explain was my title.

“What do you mean you are a mentor? Aren’t you a professor?”

“Yes. But I am a mentor, too. I think it’s like an advisor.”



Shantih Clemans

Then came reading period. Right on the heels of my July 1, 2011 start date.

“What are you supposed to be reading?” a friend asked when I offered a confusing explanation about my start date and my subsequent time off. “But it’s not a vacation; I am working, kind of.” It’s unusual to begin a position, only to be off three weeks later. Not that I am complaining.

Next came the acronyms, the strange native language spoken by my new colleagues: LC, AOS, LOI, CE, AC, ERF, TIS, PLA, BME, CHS, FLIC and more. I feared I would never be fluent.

At center meetings, I listened for familiar academic words; my language: teach, class, syllabi, semester. I soon discovered that my listening was in vain; these words were on Empire State College’s endangered species list.

Then there were those independent studies. I am a die-hard group person. I teach about group work. I delight in groups of students to teach. Group studies made perfect sense to me. But working one-on-one with students? That felt a little strange. What would I do without student interactions? And what if no one ever showed up?

Trying to feel grounded, I had conversations with myself:

“No syllabi.”

“What?”

“No departments.”

“Why?”

“Almost everyone admitted.”

“Hmmm.”

“Five overlapping terms.”

“Whoa!”

“Credit for prior learning.”

“Wow!”

By October, I really knew that I had landed on an unfamiliar, yet amazing planet. I answered questions from curious outsiders:

“So, how’s the job going?”

“Great. I am not exactly sure what I am doing, but I love it.”

“So, what classes are you teaching?”

“Well, we don’t actually teach, we facilitate the learning process. And we don’t have classes, we have studies.”

Silence.

“So how many students do you have in your, uh, studies?”

“Well, it depends, somewhere between one and 20.”

“Did you have to create new syllabi?”

“Well, we don’t have syllabi. We have learning contracts and yes, I wrote all new ones.”

By late November, my mentee load had grown rapidly, although it was still smaller than that of many mentors. Every month, students came for orientation, left introductory calls on my voice mail; their official files brimmed with transcripts that looked like hieroglyphics to me. Registration for March began while I was still learning January names. How do I keep everyone and everything organized in my mind and on my desk? Panicked, I decided on color coding: green for mentees, orange for group studies, yellow for guided independent studies. What color for TIS?

Not surprisingly, my students asked the hardest questions:

“So you are my mentor? Are you going to be like my coach?”

“Um, sort of. Mentoring is a bit mysterious.”

“Can’t you just tell me what to take? I don’t have time for all of this creative stuff.”

“I wish it was that easy, but that’s not what we do at Empire State College. Your learning is up to you.”

By February, my culture shock felt more like a creative shift. I am happily at home in my classroom for group studies and getting comfortable in my office for one-on-ones. I navigate the LOI with ease and curse DocPak like everyone else. Now, if I could only figure out PLAs.

Mentoring a BME Student: Similarities and Differences at Two Centers

Kjrsten Keane and Angela Titi Amayah

The following piece, written by Kjrsten Keane, is based on discussions between colleagues Keane and Angela Titi Amayah.

I first met Angela Titi Amayah at the New Mentor Orientation that kicked off in July 2011. While I had been serving as an adjunct mentor for the previous four years, Angela was just beginning her affiliation with Empire State College. We both call the Business, Management and Economics area of study home; however, we serve two different centers. Angela works with students at the Genesee Valley Center and I work with students at the Center for Distance Learning. The centers have unique personalities and different approaches to serving students. While Angela often meets with students face-to-face in her Rochester office, I consult with my mentees entirely via phone or computer-based communication. The distance between our workspaces is greater than the distance from Rochester to Saratoga Springs, as well: I collaborate with my BME students from my home office in Virginia.



Kjrsten Keane



Angela Titi Amayah

The role of the mentor at Empire State College is deep and diverse. Mentors and students work side-by-side on a path to course success, degree plan approval and graduation. The strengths, weaknesses and personalities of the team involved in all of these processes vary greatly; therefore, the path is not a predictable one. Angela and I were curious though: How different might the interaction between a new student and mentor be? In an effort to better understand our institution and the nature of our positions, we thought it would be interesting to embark on a comparison exercise. We agreed to document our initial interactions with a January 2012 term student in order to compare and contrast the differences that personalities and centers bring to the BME mentoring process. Angela and I each took detailed notes on our communications and sent them to each other to analyze and consider.

All Empire State College students are provided with their mentor’s preferred contact information and often initiate first communication. Angela typically has access to her mentees’ folders quickly though, whereas mine need to be mailed through the postal service to Virginia. Sometimes, a student will initiate contact with me before I have received notification that they are my mentee. If that is the case, I have some standard questions that I use to begin the relationship. For this exercise, though, I initiated contact with my mentee.

Angela credited a three-part workshop offered at GVC with providing her the foundational skills to work with students from early advising through finalizing the degree. At CDL, such information has been imparted in monthly mentor meetings

(offered in both face-to-face and phone-in formats), as well as through a buddy-mentor matching process. Angela works closely with other mentors in her center, but her official buddy is not located at GVC. She also referenced a number of documents available to her in print format as she prepared to meet with her mentee; more is available to her online. Most of

my mentoring information is referenced online. The support approach taken by each center seems similar, but CDL spreads out topics over time and space and GVC compacts them.

Angela and her new mentee, “Jesse,” were able to trade emails and set up a face-to-face meeting. My new mentee, “Mike,” and I traded emails in order to set up a phone meeting. Angela mentioned that a profile had not been established for Jesse in degree program planner through GVC and that together they would set one up. At this time, CDL is creating a profile for new students upon acceptance, entering in all eligible transfer credits that have been received by the college. Mike’s prior credits were easily accessible to me in that format. After reviewing Jesse’s intended academic path, Angela consulted with another established GVC mentor to confirm her ideas on a logical path for her new mentee. This is a helpful idea, one that can really support a developing mentor-methodology. A similar process occurs in CDL’s Planning and Finalizing the Degree course. I team teach the course with several other mentors, and our mentees participate in discussions with each other and offer advice and input on their evolving degree plans. Mentors comment on the programs and patterns for all students. In Angela’s center, the collaboration with students of other mentors serves to make connections that may lead to future learning contracts; I have not yet heard of this happening with students who have participated in the group version of the course Planning and Finalizing the Degree.

Through our exchange, Angela discovered that there appears to be notable differences in the way educational planning is handled in general between GVC and CDL. While there are exceptions, most educational planning coursework at CDL is offered in sections worth 2 credits each. There is more variability at GVC. Depending on how self-directed a student is, how clear his or her goals are, what previous experience the student has in higher education and other factors, a mentor at GVC may choose to do one 4-credit educational planning study. Some educational planning studies are completely individualized, while others are done in groups, and yet others can be done in a group format for the first half of the

term and individually for the second half. Some students need the added structure that a group study provides, particularly when it is their first term at Empire State College and they are not familiar with the model. I speculated that perhaps CDL students enter the online learning forum expecting to be more self-reliant and independent.

As we delved further into the specifics of the educational planning process, Angela and I noted another similarity. Although the Empire State College literature given to students at all centers is clear about the degree planning process, it seems that a majority of new mentees expect to pick courses from a predesigned curriculum when they first contact the mentor for educational planning.

As our contact with Jesse and Mike evolved over the weeks leading up to January term registration, our experiences grew increasingly similar. While Angela met Jesse face-to-face at the initial meeting and can offer that support possibility in the future, she has found that, in general, her mentees prefer to meet over the phone rather than coming in to the center. In this way, the communication methods between mentor and mentee at GVC begin to mirror those of CDL. We suspect other centers see a similar evolution.

A previous issue of *All About Mentoring* (2010) included an essay by Bernard Smith that addressed concentrations at Empire State College. A focus of this discussion was the idea that concentrations develop through the initiative of the student and are housed within an area of study to provide a support network. Accordingly, faculty members within an area of study have diverse expertise. They are not often hired to become part of a peer teaching and research group that has an extensive and in-depth knowledge of their unique subject area. Instead, there is a greater emphasis on selecting a new hire based on his or her ability to mentor students successfully and to contribute to an area of study and the institution as a whole.

While the comparison exercise that Angela and I embarked on has not yet progressed to the detailed level of degree planning and meeting area of study guidelines or concentration requirements, the fact that

we share the same area of study had little impact on our contacts with Jesse and Mike. The more information we exchanged, the more we came to understand that mentoring is done in many different ways across the college. However, the major differences between Angela's experience and my own were due to center strategy, particularly the structure of educational planning courses. The similarities between Angela's experience and my own were based on the overall strength of Empire State College's individualized approach to student learning and our growing skill sets as mentors.

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Learning to be a Faculty Mentor

Amanda Sisselman

I have always been one to think and work outside of the proverbial box. As a social work faculty member at more traditional institutions, this always required a lot of maneuvering and of course, creativity. Social work programs are typically quite structured to meet guidelines of the academic accreditation body; however, I found that this structure and linear form of thought did not always jive with my students. I have found that many social work students are nontraditional, that is, returning to school after working many years or having a family. Helping nontraditional students learn had become a challenge and a passion



Amanda Sisselman

of mine. So, when the opportunity arrived to interview with Empire State College, I was more than intrigued. It was very exciting to learn about an institution that welcomed this sort of creativity in helping students to learn.

I remember having many questions when I first walked into the room at the New Mentor Orientation in July, among them, how would the mentor and faculty roles mesh into one job? It quickly became clear to me that this was part of the creative process, and that I would be able to create this role for myself. As I began to conceptualize what this meant and what it would mean to be a faculty mentor, I realized that I would have the opportunity to bring students into many aspects of the work that I do, and that learning would not only take place in the traditional classroom.

This was finally the place that would allow me to mesh my teaching, clinical, research and community interests into one role. I began to conceptualize what this would or could look like and was quite excited about the possibility of bringing undergraduate Empire State College students into the community with me, to the community-based grass roots organization with which I work closely. I was encouraged to dive in and try something new, so I did! I dove in head first. I set up a small group study and had five students sign up and show up ready to learn. They agreed to spend 12 to 15 hours in the East Village at the organization, and expressed a mixture of excitement and anxiety. I, too, was excited and anxious about this new endeavor. I put together a learning contract to the best of my ability, including some written assignments, and introduced the students to the organization and the staff. We met several times as a group to discuss the reading and the literature and what they might expect once they actually began the hands-on work at the organization. Ultimately, they all did wonderful work at the organization and made a huge impact on the people with whom they were in contact. There were, however, bumps in the road. The beauty of this job, and of Empire State College, is that bumps in the road are OK. I am a firm believer that as long as the bumps are handled responsibly by the students and instructor, in the end, the bumps can be instrumental in creating a better learning experience.

Thus, in order to shape this as a better learning experience in the future, we addressed a number of things. I had conversations with the students and the

agency, and asked what worked and what might need some additional work. We addressed one of the major bumps in the road, which was the structure and organization of the study. The beginning was reading and group-heavy, with a brief introduction to agency personnel, while the end was more experiential. Student feedback, as well as feedback from the agency director, indicated that it would have been more helpful to begin the experiential component sooner. So, I revised the process and rewrote the assignments, developing a first assignment that prompts students to interview agency staff and research the organization to learn about what they will be doing. This new assignment is a direct result of student suggestions.

Ultimately, these conversations culminated in better assignments for the future and a better understanding about how the students and organization staff can work together most effectively. This process was a part of my adjustment to my new role as faculty mentor. It is still possible that adjustments will be necessary and further revisions will be made. I am OK with that possibility. That I had this opportunity to experiment, without judgment, and to be open and upfront with my students and receive the same type of feedback in return is incredible and almost a novelty. To hear

that all of the students had a meaningful experience, and were able to break apart these experiences in order to articulate exactly what was meaningful, was quite amazing. The students were stretched and admitted that they were going outside of their comfort zone, but enjoyed this stretch. As I listened to the students deconstruct their experiences, I was heartened to note that their critical-thinking skills improved. This was something that would have been harder to assess had I relied solely on the usual written assignments and traditional class discussion. Having this conversation about the nature of the work and the actual learning process really provided insight into their ability to stretch and think critically. This conversation felt quite natural in the Empire State College context and made me appreciate the nature of my new position.

Also, students who were normally quiet in the group were heavily engaged in the assigned tasks at the organization. I was able to assess learning in a different and perhaps more realistic way, and the students acknowledged capabilities they did not know they possessed prior to this experience. Even the once quiet students were involved in the conversations about the process, providing suggestions for future Empire State College students who might take this study. We were able to see that

learning is a process, requiring feedback, flexibility and willingness to make changes. Students were able to see that we, as instructors, also are learning and adjusting. It is a parallel process, one that is important to model for our students.

As I mentioned earlier, initially, I was not sure how the roles of faculty and mentor would mesh. Now, although I am still learning, I have a better understanding. I have the opportunity not only to teach, but to mentor in the true sense of the word. Teaching is mentoring. I was and am able to interact with students in the field and in the classroom, all the while talking with them about the material, but also about the learning process. This is what I believe mentoring is about. Not only are we teaching and guiding, but we are teaching students to think critically and to look at the ways in which we deconstruct experiences to maintain the pieces that work, and improve or change those that don't. This is real life, yet this process is often hidden from our students, so I truly appreciate the ability to make the process transparent here at Empire State College. I believe that I have learned and benefited from this experience, perhaps even more so than my students. I brought this experience with me as I began to tackle educational planning with my students during the spring 2012 term.

The Professor Goes to Yoga Boot Camp

Judith Beth Cohen, Lesley University

When I signed up for a 16-day yoga teacher training course held at an ocean front retreat in Southern Baja, Mexico, I didn't anticipate 15-hour boot camp days spent with nine women half my age. Day one: We are facing our teacher, a double for Jesus with his long shaggy hair, intense gaze and slender body. "Guru Junior," the nickname I gave him, greeted us: nine lovely young babes and me, one 60-something crone. Though I'd been practicing yoga for years, I was usually with folks more like myself, ages 40 to 70; some have fit bodies and some are well along in middle-age spread. At Lesley University, I'm the doctoral advisor to several experienced yoga teachers doing research on yoga and education, so I didn't consider myself a beginner. During that initial 90-minute class, I knew I'd landed in unfamiliar territory. Despite my relative fitness, I felt I'd begun a marathon without any training, but I couldn't turn back. In this essay, I use auto-ethnography, a qualitative research method that places the researcher's personal experiences in the context of larger issues (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through the theoretical lenses of transformative learning, embodied learning and experiential learning, I explore my participation as a student in this yoga teacher training course.

The setting immediately immersed students in the yoga philosophy and way of life: The site bordered a wild, Pacific beach; students slept in tents; vegetarian meals were served outdoors; no sugar, coffee or alcohol were permitted; bread, fish and eggs were served only once a week and computers and telephones were scarce. All learning and living took place in this environment: We meditated on the beach in the cold, windy pre-dawn hour; we practiced vigorous yoga poses in a room facing the sea. Breakfast was silent; chanting and group meditation took place every evening, and three times a week, we were pushed to articulate our "truth" in



Judith Cohen

response to carefully composed provocative questions. The curriculum sought to embody the tenets of Pantanjali's yoga sutras, 196 teachings compiled between 200 B.C.E. and 200 A.D. The ashtanga, or eight-limbed yoga path, encompasses meditation, silence, truthfulness, service (seva), ahimsa (consideration or nonharming), bhakti (love, devotion), breath, and finally asana (seat or posture); thus, physical postures are only one of yoga's disciplines. Union of mind, body and spirit is said to come from dissolving the five Kleshas (or veils), which distract us from our "true" nature. These distractions include undue trust in the mind or self, attachment to fleeting pleasures, avoidance of unpleasant experiences, and ignoring our "divine" nature (Carrera, 2006).

Embodied Teaching and Learning

From past experience leading and teaching in travel study programs set in Santa Fe, New Mexico and Cambridge, England (Cohen, J, 1997; Cohen & Counts, 2001), and from participating in programs held in Israel, South Africa and Peru, I've concluded that the physical experience of immersion in a particular site is the most important vehicle for learning. Here, the location itself becomes the primary text, which we students take in through our senses, as well as linguistic and cognitive processes. Being removed from one's familiar environment disrupts habitual ways of responding, and opens us to the enhanced sensual experiences stimulated by new sights, sounds and smells. My solitary walks on the beach, the enormous cacti silhouetted against the red sunset, meditating before the crashing waves, even brushing

my teeth or filling my tea cup outdoors were as central to my understanding of yoga as the texts I read or the comments of the teachers. Food is another important sensual feature of a site-based embodied learning experience: At the yoga training we ate vegetarian enchiladas, stews and soups, all made with produce grown on site in the large garden – truly a blooming desert. Eating outdoors, seeing the cooks working in the open kitchen, and walking through the organic garden, all contributed to the embodied experience. I still have vivid memories of meals from other travel/study experiences: sitting on the floor and eating with one's hands at a Bedouin camp in Israel/Palestine; steak and kidney pie with pints of flat beer in Cambridge, England; the importance of corn to the natives of New

Mexico. Through food, we experience the smell, texture and tastes as well as literally consuming pieces of culture, taking it into our bodies.

My notion of embodiment owes much to the work of philosopher/linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), who maintain that human reasoning is derived from our sensory-motor system; thus, the mind is not separate from the body as classical psychology maintains. Rather, our image schemas and metaphors represented in concepts such as “in front of,” “in back of” make our experiences possible (p. 34; p. 509). According to this perspective, every aspect of learning is involved with our bodies, whether or not we are aware of this, yoga’s enormous popularity today may well come from our longing to bridge Western thought’s historic mind/body split.

In a yoga flow, *viyāsana*, we envision the body as a symphony and our breath as a dance partner. Those who prefer this form maintain that it helps the practitioner stay in the present and models the concept of energy moving and changing. In other forms of yoga, each pose is done separately and may be held for several breaths. The verbal images used to teach these postures help us to connect directly with our visual intelligence, kind of a shortcut through intellectual processing. In *tadasana*, mountain pose, one is grounded and stable; we’re asked to imagine the chest, pelvis and feet like floating planets. In warrior pose, our arms reach out like arrows. Directions such as “bloom the hip bones upward” in downward facing dog, or “create space in the spine like an accordion,” provide further visual cues. During meditation, we can imagine ourselves as sky, and thoughts as clouds (Farhi, 2000). Woven throughout the entire practice is the concept of space: We create space in the body for energy to move more freely, and we create mental space through meditation. A yoga practice always ends with *sivasana* or corpse pose, a symbolic death; when we roll over and come back to sitting, it’s as if we’re reborn. The Western educational system’s avoidance of the body may stem from our fear of death – after all, the body will die (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Yoga faces this inevitability.

These embodied learning experiences contribute to what theorist Jack Mezirow (1991) calls the “disorienting dilemma” that can precipitate a transformational learning experience. Given that every site has its own history and culture, even a temporary visitor makes comparative observations about climate, food, dress, costs and glimpses what locals experience. Yet, the missing elements also must be considered part of the curriculum. At the yoga training, students were all of white, European descent. Though this was Mexico, the only Mexicans were domestic workers – these absences mirror the fact that in North America and Europe yoga is practiced mainly by the affluent and the educated. Simply observing such contrasts stimulates the critical reflection that theorists argue is necessary for transformation (Mezirow, 1991; Brookfield, 2005).

Teacher/Guru

Our lead yoga teacher, Guru Junior, a westerner, began meditating and chanting as a child, under the tutelage of the Indian guru Sant Darshan Singh. His training followed Iyengar’s Hatha Yoga, but additional training in Buddhist meditation gave him an eclectic mix of teaching approaches. As a young man, he went on a month-long solo mountain retreat where he had nothing but water for survival. During this sojourn, he claims to have arrived at the insight that he and his environment were nothing but pure energy, with no boundaries between himself and nature. Perhaps if we all had early training like this, we too might develop our somatic intelligence, but most child rearing and educational experiences don’t cultivate body knowledge. I was a poor student in physical education, avoided strenuous physical activity most of my life, and did not begin my yoga practice until my 50s. You could say that my bodily history was as different from our teacher’s as an elephant’s from a fish, yet he taught as if we could “read” our bodies as well as he read his. For me, it was often a struggle to understand his ways of communicating. Just as it’s harder to learn a new language late in life, so too is it more difficult to hone one’s somatic intelligence.

In addition to the practice of *asanas* or postures, three times a week we spent a two-hour session in “*satya*” or truth telling, an activity I came to call, “the crying time.” A question was posed that corresponded to the *chakra* or energy center of the body that was our focus in class. According to tradition, the first or root *chakra* located at the *coccyx* or perineum is associated with survival and security, and its obstacle is fear. We sat in a circle on the beach, and one by one, we turned to our neighbor, said their name and asked: Do you feel safe? This elicited very emotional responses from several people. One woman spoke of being sexually abused by a teacher; another spoke of her brother’s death; another of her mother’s deteriorating genetic illness and her own fear of having the same disease. In each case Guru Junior asked: “Where in your body do you feel it?” In other words, don’t tell stories or intellectualize, but try to cultivate “somatic intelligence”; observe your fear. He and his assistant teachers did not offer therapy or try to fix the problem; instead they encouraged us to notice, accept and then presumably, let it go.

As a college teacher, my first reaction to this was enormous discomfort at what appeared to be a lack of professionalism and boundary setting. “These folks aren’t therapists,” I said to myself; I’d never engage with students at this level of emotional pain. Rather, I’d guide them to the appropriate trained person. Yet, I came to question my own critique: Why should there be such firmly drawn professional boundaries? Must one hold a special certification in order to lead others in self-examination? Does this assumption perpetuate Western fragmentation rather than the wholeness we seek in contemplative work? Maybe Guru Junior is so deeply intuitive and visionary that he can manage this deep probing better than a “professional”? Though I sat uncomfortably through many truth sessions, the tears were soon abandoned for laughter, and I witnessed no harm being done.

Yoga boot camp also included evening *satsangs*, group study of yoga texts through meditation and chanting. Music is considered one of yoga’s many forms (*Nada yoga*), and some believe that music vibrates in subtle ways that purify and awaken spiritual power. *Kirtan*, the singing

of God's name with love and feeling, is supposed to help access inner inspiration. Though pleasant sounding, the compulsory participation made me feel as if I were in church, doing something obligatory. It reminded me of attending mandatory Yom Kippur services and chanting over and over again the collective plea for forgiveness. Though Guru Junior told us that he considers the Hindu gods named in these chants as artistic creations devised by humans, this interpretation would not be shared by fundamentalist practitioners.

Discussion/Problematizing

Despite all of the "good" stuff I've enumerated, several areas of tension made the yoga teacher training experience problematic for me as a Western, secular person committed to liberatory/emancipatory teaching and learning. If yoga is nondenominational and secular, as the training leaders claimed, then why require the nightly practice of Sanskrit chanting? If it's the sounds that matter, why include only Hindu chants rather than music from other spiritual traditions as well? If there is no fixed truth, how can we be asked to commit to satya or truth telling? If liberation comes from letting go, and everything is continuously changing, isn't this concept itself subject to change? Finally, if physical postures are only one of yoga's eight limbs, why spend most of the training on the poses? Does changing the body cause one to change at the cellular level as many yogis claim, or does such deep transformation depend on generations of human evolution? The resulting contradictions, listed below, continue to trouble me.

Oral transmission versus constructed learning

Most of yoga's ancient teachings are based upon oral transmission, with the sage or guru at the center and the disciple or pupil following instructions based upon faith and the teacher's authority. The idea of teacher as guru and student as apostle conflicts with the kind of self-awareness, critical thinking and concern for humanity that I support. In critical pedagogies, this transmission model is rejected for a more egalitarian, participatory one in which the curriculum emerges from the needs and

interests of the student (Brookfield, 2005). To adult learning practitioners, students are seen as self-directed, authority is shared, and learning is based on dialogue and reflection. In the traditional model, the teacher is the authority, students are more passive and concerned with performance (giving teacher what she wants). Since we live in a democracy, and we "support" the development of democracy in other countries, I question the viability of teaching from the traditional stance. Yet, as we Westerners adapt yoga to open, secular settings, other challenges emerge. A watered-down approach that sees yoga as a form of calisthenics may dishonor the Hindu religious tradition behind yoga. Yet, in India, some progressives refuse to participate in yoga since it's been supported by the BJP Hindu Nationalist Party as a way of preserving a fundamentalist way of life. Can we authentically adapt yoga to our Western model?

If liberation comes from letting go, and everything is continuously changing, isn't this concept itself subject to change?

Critical reflection versus meditation

That critical reflection can lead to transformation is a central tenet of adult learning theories. As a student comes to rethink past attitudes, beliefs and practices, he or she makes life changes that lead to greater personal freedom. This consciousness shift can be seen as similar to the self-acceptance one cultivates through meditation and yoga. In Mezirow's transformative learning theory, one reflects on assumptions in order to transform the self, but the reflection Mezirow and Brookfield advocate relies on rational discourse. Defining "critical" is the rub; in meditation and yoga, we're asked to refrain from judging and to simply observe. Yet, I wonder if it's possible or desirable to suspend judgments (Newman, 2008). In one of those "truth" sessions focused on the

heart chakra, we were asked, "Do you feel worthy?" We were urged to answer from our hearts, not our minds: I exclaimed, "I love my critical mind – and I don't want to let go of it. ... " To assume that "truth" comes from the heart – that the mind is a deceiver – posits a fragmented rather than holistic view of the self. In fact, recent brain research shows us that concepts like heart and mind are metaphors that do not really describe the integrated brain (Cozolino & Sprokay, 2006). If so, isn't the attempt to "still the mind" both a form of judgment and an invitation to further fragmentation?

A learning community versus a leader dominated community

I have taught and written about the power of learning communities (Cohen, 1996) and I believe that experiential learning and the synergy of learning with others are inseparable. However, putting people together in the same space is not enough to create community; there must be some recognition of each learner's past lived experiences woven through the curriculum. Though I could feel compassion for my classmate's stories of loss and empathize with the young woman caring for her disabled mother, I sensed no curiosity from others about my experiences; no one, for example, asked about my work with yoga teachers doing research. Being the only older person in a group of students half my age made me keenly aware of our differences. On the one hand, the surrender of role and status helps to engage one fully in the present; on the other hand, genuine community needs to honor and include personal histories.

Finally, despite the questions I raised, I'll conclude by emphasizing that the elements of this adult learning experience can be adapted to secular learning environments.

- The importance of setting. We can think of ways to transform a classroom into an interesting environment. This could be as simple as bringing cushions, flowers, music, and incorporating opening and closing rituals. It could involve physically moving the group to a more aesthetic location, going

outdoors. Simply changing the location of a class can be stimulating and evocative.

- Attention to bodies. In addition to yoga poses, or moving meditations, we can weave attention to bodies into the entire curriculum – sharing food, telling stories, moving around to meet in groups, poster sessions, using the space in interesting and unexpected ways, and assignments that require bodily involvement, such as site visits.
- Creation of community. It is not enough to learn in a group. There must be time to honor differences and learn from them. We can make space for students' life stories and incorporate what they bring into the curriculum. If a class becomes a community that feels connected, this might help ameliorate the extreme individualistic orientation of our mass general culture. Today, texting, cell phones and being online seems to dominate the lives of students of all ages. Can a face-to-face learning community that includes body-based activities enhance their ability to control their electronic lives?
- Reflect on our professor/mentor roles. Do you see yourself as a sage on stage, as a guru with disciples? Where does your authority come from and how does your role as evaluator impact the learning environment?

Every site-based learning experience I've had, including yoga boot camp, has stimulated my creativity and led me to new insights and new projects. Novel experiences that stimulate heightened sensual learning, surprise and curiosity can be created in any study or classroom.

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The Trip to Grandfather

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When Scotty told his parents that he wanted to travel upstate to visit his grandfather, they weren't keen about it at all, but there was nothing else he could think of doing. His little sister, Gretchen, was at day care, and his younger brother, Tim, at soccer practice, so he was alone with his mother and father for the time being (a rare occurrence) and he decided to take advantage of it. A sunny, weekday afternoon in July, they were by the pool behind the house. Scotty's mother skimmed the pool of a few leaves – it seemed that she never stopped working – while his father, in a chaise lounge and drinking coffee, worked on papers he had brought home from his office in the city.

“You want to take a trip to see your grandfather? All the way upstate in Albany? Alone?” Scotty's father looked up from his papers. His mother stopped her pool cleaning.

“Yes.”

“When did you decide this?”

Scotty was uneasy. “I've been thinking about it for a while. It's a good time to go. I can go Wednesday. I already talked to Mr. Ames at the supermarket, and he said it was OK.”

“You asked him already?” his mother said, the pool cleaning pole now at rest in her hands.

“Yes.” He waited. “And I've got nothing else I have to do.”

“I see,” his mother observed.

Scotty's father took a reflective sip of coffee.

“What's this all about, Scotty? You've never asked to go see your grandfather. To say nothing of going alone.”

Scotty felt he had to be evasive. “I just want to visit him. That's not so odd.”

His father was by no means convinced. “And how are you going to do it?” he further asked. “Have you thought about that, too?”

Scotty put his hands in his pockets, maybe to signal that it was a casual thing. “Yes, I have – if that's all right. Billy and Justin will go with me into the city. We'll take Billy's car, they'll drop me off at Grand Central Station, and then I'll take the train up to grandfather's. They'll spend the rest of the day in the city to take advantage of being there. We worked it all out.”

Scotty's mother looked hard at his father. “Peter, I'm not crazy about him going on such a trip.”

His father tried to read his face for information.

“Sounds like a *mission*, Scotty,” his father said. “I don't mind telling you I'm not really comfortable about it, either. Not at all.”

“Why are you surprising us like this?” his mother asked.

“It's not a surprise,” Scotty tried to disagree. “I had to ask you some time, and I didn't want to do that until I saw if I could arrange it all.”

“Does your grandfather know?” his father asked.

“Yes. I told him yesterday. I called.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he thought it was a great idea. As long as I was sure, and it was OK with you and Mom.”

Scotty's father made a little bit of a sour face. “God bless your father, Miriam. I should have known he'd think it was all right.”

Scotty tried to press his case hard. “Dad, I've always wanted to go see grandfather at some time, by myself. It's not that weird. It's summer, I'm not in school, I can get the time off from work, I'm not in any sports now.”

Scotty's mother took the pool skimmer out of the water and laid it down on the concrete that surrounded the pool. “They *are* very close, Peter,” she rather reluctantly observed. “That's true.”

“I didn't think they were *that* close.”

“Dad, I'm not a kid anymore,” Scotty pointed out to his father. “I'm growing up.”

“I suppose so,” his father said.

“I am. I really am.”

On Wednesday, Scotty left his home to make his trip. Having to be on his way to work almost before daylight, his father tiptoed into Scotty's little bedroom at the back of their Colonial and, whispering, wished him a good trip. Scotty's mother was more difficult. She made Scotty eat as much breakfast as she could, and then made him promise her he would call when he had a chance, to assure her that his trip was going well.

About 8 in the morning, Scotty's friends picked him up, as they had arranged, and Scotty rode with them into the city. Justin sat in the front seat of the car, with Billy. They had the radio on, and Billy drove down the highway faster than he should have, which Justin told him about, slowing Billy down. Happy for a while to forget the reason for his visit to his grandfather, Scotty was struck by the thought that to an extraordinary degree Billy was a younger version of his father, and that Billy's plans to someday take over his father's business made perfect sense. As for Justin, Scotty had known him since they were children. Justin never changed – always serious, exact, studious. Justin's parents had brought

the family over from England, where their ancestors had lived for hundreds of years, according to Justin.

“They were tenant farmers in the 16th century,” Justin had once explained. “And Catholics, when it wasn’t exactly the best thing to be a Catholic.”

On the highway, they talked about music and girls and sports. When Justin asked Billy to turn down the pop music he was playing, Billy teased Justin about liking classical music. Billy said he couldn’t understand why Justin was old-fashioned, couldn’t understand how come Justin was so different. Justin told Billy that he was the one who was atavistic when it came to music and lots other things, and couldn’t understand *that*.

“I’m not much different from everybody else,” Billy told Justin, passing a few cars, defending himself.

“That’s an enigma I puzzle late into the night,” Justin replied, turning around and smiling benignly at Scotty, for they were all the best of friends.

“And, anyway, I don’t know what ‘enigma’ or ‘atavistic’ means, Jus. You’re just wasting your time.”

“*Enigma’s* from the Latin, Billy,” Scotty told him. “It means ‘to speak darkly,’ though I think Justin means, ‘a riddle.’ That’s a contemporary meaning.”

Billy seemed so happy behind the wheel. “Terrific, hot shot. What about ‘atavistic’?”

Scotty sat back in his seat. He wasn’t ever particularly aggressive. “You’re sure you want to know?”

“Sure. What’ve I got to lose?”

“Nothing,” Justin put in. “People like you don’t even have to bother about people like me.”

Scotty shrugged. “OK. It means you’re a throwback, Billy.”

Hearing Scotty’s explanation, Billy turned the pop music back on loud and, giggling, in mock anger, tried to swat Justin on the back of the head.

“Take that – music,” he said to Justin.

When they had crossed over onto the expressway, they all quieted down for the time being, Billy and Justin listening to music, Scotty looking out the window at the blocks of commercial buildings they passed and trying to focus his mind on them. Soon, though, he was thinking of his grandfather, a small, gray-haired, scholarly man the family, of course, loved, but who had always seemed a little different from everyone else, thinking about things no one else especially thought about. No one really made very much of it, though, and everyone was used to him.

“Your father lives in a world of his own,” Scotty had once heard his father tell his mother, with something like a smile on his face. They were all watching Scotty’s little brother in a soccer game behind his school. “He really does. Maybe it’s better. I don’t know. But it certainly isn’t where other people live. Maybe it’s a luxury the rest of us can’t afford.”

“Oh, Peter, he’s just an academic,” Scotty’s mother smiled back. “You know that.”

As for himself, Scotty had always liked his grandfather very much. One of the things Scotty most remembered about his grandfather was that in his house he had a room full of books, and that sometimes his grandfather would talk to him about them. Scotty had always liked mythology, and his grandfather was certainly someone who knew about mythology.

They were sitting in the backyard of his house, in the sunlight. The rest of Scotty’s family, who were visiting, were inside, Scotty’s mother cooking, his father and brother watching a football game on television. His sister was in the kitchen, near her mother. Scotty’s grandfather often ended up sitting by himself after the family had been visiting for some time, like an old man, nice enough, but almost an extra in his own home and in his own family.

“A good thing to know about heroes, Scotty,” his grandfather had said, that long time ago. “Is the spiritual journey they go on. Some day, when you’re older, I’ll give you a couple of big, heavy books to read. But for now, what happens to heroes is that they go through a terrible time when they’re young, often separate from the people

they love, until they learn something very important. And then they get back to their world, ready to serve it, as wonderfully as they can.”

As Scotty continued to look at the passing commercial buildings, more than ever he felt his grandfather would be able to help him. His friends sitting in front of him seemed so much happier than he was, or at least so much more settled. Billy would keep on thinking about the music on his car radio, and about how many girls he could talk into caring for him. He would probably fail at school. But soon his father would tell him all there was to know about the restaurant business, they would worry together about waiters and customers, and Billy would marry the girl of his dreams, probably only to betray her and his children someday with another. Scotty guessed that Justin would study his way to law school and scholarships, and without complaining, honor his family’s hope that he would become the judge their ancestors never had. Now he played with his friend Billy, but some day Justin would fight brilliantly for what was right – which suited him completely – and earn everyone’s adoration.

Scotty envied them.

“I can tell just what will happen to them,” Scotty had told Chloe, a pretty girl he was interested in at school, who liked to run long distances and hoped to be an Olympic champion.

“And what about me?” she had asked him.

“I dunno,” he had answered her. “You could go a lot of different ways.”

A few miles from the city, Justin started acting up again, teasing Billy about Billy’s latest girlfriend, a sophomore named Janet. Justin said Billy didn’t ever think about anything else anymore.

“You’re mesmerized,” he told him. “We’re lucky to get you to do this trip. I figure in a few more weeks, at the most months, you’ll be totally unavailable. And it will be forever.” Justin sighed. “Such is true love and devotion.”

Hearing Justin say that made Scotty think about a story Chloe had told him, a story her mother had told her. Apparently, Chloe's mother had a friend whose father died only two weeks after her friend's mother did.

Scotty leaned forward, putting his hands on the back of the front seat of the car, his head between his friends' heads, only a little behind theirs.

"Chloe's mother's friend hardly ever thought about her parents at all," he explained to Billy and Justin, after saying that he knew a really good story about love and devotion. "Especially her father. But then she found these letters that the father had written. I guess they were fabulous letters, fabulous *love* letters. The lady couldn't believe it. Her father had seemed so ordinary – just a guy, no different from anyone else, pretty much someone you take for granted and overlook. But these letters were really great. Passionate and poetic and terrifically sad. The guy said he didn't want to live one day without his wife. He couldn't care less." Scotty could tell that Billy and Justin were listening closely. "Reading those letters, the lady suddenly realized what her parents had had going on between them for years, and was furious with herself for not knowing. The only thing she could think of doing, to make it up to her father, even though it was too late, was to carry his picture around with her *all the time now*, in a locket around her neck." Scotty sighed. "Some story, huh?" he asked.

"Wow," Billy said, driving the car into the tunnel that brought them under the river and into the city.

Justin didn't say anything. He was impressed, too.

When they got out of the tunnel and came into the sunlight again, Billy stopped the car and let Scotty off. That was the last part of the plan that he had with his friends. On the edge of the city as he was, Scotty didn't see too many people making their way up and down the street, and only a few trucks and cars passed by him. But after he had walked a number of blocks toward the center of the city, the crowds increased, until Scotty had to be careful of where he was walking, so as not to bump into people

passing quickly by him, or careful of how he was walking, so as not to be in the way of people behind him. Nor could he take the time to gawk at any of the buildings, which were becoming larger and larger as he went along, and whose windows promised lots of attractions within. All this really made him feel exhilarated, and he could not help thinking that now he was on his way, that it was really happening, that the first part of his trip was over, and that he was on to the second part, the major part, the trip upstate. For the first time in such a long while, he felt better; he was almost feeling good. He was actually getting something done, and the nearer he got to Grand Central Station, and the more the crowds in the streets became denser, the higher and higher he felt. He was nearly dizzy with emotion. His trip, the great city, his being so brazen, the endlessly different people! Scotty couldn't speak for anybody else. Probably they felt as he did, but as for himself, the buildings becoming larger and larger, taller and taller, the trucks and taxis and cars clogging the streets, horns beeping gloriously, the crowds now nearly at a standstill – they all caused him to be amazed. He just couldn't help it. As he stood at a street corner, waiting for a green light, standing near him were some Asian women, a black man, a couple of white business men, and a bunch of Hispanic men in working clothes. Across the street, he could see an Indian man and an Indian woman in a sari. Despite himself, Scotty watched, stared at all these people, trying to figure out who they were, where they were going, what they were thinking.

A block from Grant Central, Scotty saw a tiny nun sitting in front of a store, in black robes and white collar, holding out a plate upon which were some coins and dollars. Almost shyly, she shook the plate, so that the coins could jingle, the little nun trying to get the attention of passersby who might contribute to her begging. Slowing down, Scotty reached into his pocket, took a few coins out of it, and gave them to the nun. She smiled brightly at him, and he was nearly overcome by an urge to talk to her.

"God bless you, young man," she said to him, softly, looking up at him. "May God bless you always."

"Oh, that's all right, sister," Scotty told her. "It's extra money." He looked at her, hoping she would say something more. "It's going for a good cause, anyway, isn't it?"

The nun smiled again at him, but didn't say anything more. Instead she went back to jingling the coins on her plate. Scotty thought that maybe she wasn't sure what to make of him.

"What's it like to stand here and ask people for money?" he couldn't help asking her. "Is it hard?"

The little nun, who seemed so shy, took a few moments to speak. "It's the Lord's work," she said to him, finally.

Then only minutes later, as if the incident with the nun weren't enough, in front of the doorways to Grand Central, Scotty heard the screaming of brakes. Stopping in his travels again, he turned just in time to see a man twist his body violently to avoid being struck by a taxicab, though the momentum of the cab did cause it to hit the man somewhat, the man half bouncing, half rolling off its front fender. Instantly, as if in retaliation, the man got to his feet and pounded his fist furiously against the cab's fender.

"What are you doing, you crazy fellow?" the man cried out. "Just *what* are you doing?" Beside himself, the man hit the cab several times. "There! Take that! What do you think of that?"

Startled himself, the cabbie got out of his cab and shouted back to the man. "Stop that, you! Stop hitting my cab! You want me to hit you?"

Some pedestrians stopped their walking, too, curious at the fracas; some did not, but went on with their affairs. The ones who stopped to look seemed not sure how to react to the scene, though mostly, Scotty thought, they decided to be amused.

"But you hit me," the man tried to explain. "Didn't you see that? I could have been badly hurt."

The men remained on opposite sides of the cab. "But I didn't *mean* to hit you," the cabbie tried to point out back. "So leave my cab alone. You don't look like you're hurt."

The man, in the street, in the middle of the crowded center of the city, turned to his fellow pedestrians for understanding. “He hit me. What was I supposed to do? Do you believe him? He’s crazy. He’s a crazy man. No wonder he hit me.”

Now the pedestrians started to smile and began to continue on their way. Scotty himself lingered for a few moments, watching the man shake his head, brush himself off, and finally walk away, gesturing back at the cabbie. The cabbie, disgusted, got back in his cab and slowly drove on his way. A man standing next to Scotty, wearing an expensive business suit and a red turban, said to Scotty: “This goings-on is most interesting, isn’t it? This peoples almost came to blows.”

“Yes,” Scotty told him.

Once inside Grand Central, Scotty took an escalator down to the main plaza, holding on to its hard rubber handrail as he descended. On the plaza, he was again engulfed in a crowd, and he wondered how he would find his way to the train that would take him to his grandfather. Following the signs to the upstate trains, he suddenly realized that he was actually feeling, himself, a citizen of the world. In turn, that feeling made him feel a little dizzy again, outside himself or, perhaps better, in an outside world, where more and more these days he seemed to be. So much, he wanted to speak with his grandfather.

All the way upstate on the train, Scotty tried to distract himself. As he sat in his seat by the window, he listened to the sound of the train rushing forward along its tracks, and glancing outside his window he mused on the trees and houses and villages that passed by him so rapidly. Long stands of trees would suddenly open onto a long stretch of occasional buildings, which would be followed by houses bundled together, until more trees or a stretch of buildings reappeared. Few other passengers sat with him in his train car, prompting Scotty to remember that he traveled midweek, a thought that made him remember that he had forgotten to call his mother, as he had promised. Beyond the trees and the buildings was the great river, which Scotty also mused upon. From time to time, he saw boats

making their way along the river, which in the strong sunlight seemed to Scotty thousands and thousands of sparkling facets.

When the train finally arrived at the outskirts of the city where his grandfather worked and lived, Scotty got off the train and got directions to the bus that would take him to his grandfather’s university. On the bus, empty except for himself and the driver, Scotty tried to be patient and contain his growing excitement, exchanging a few words with the bus driver. The driver had placed photographs of his family above him on the visor of the bus’s window.

“I like it up here,” Scotty said to the driver, somehow knowing he could be friendly with the man.

“Suits me, too, son,” the man replied, wheeling the bus onto the street that would take them uphill to where the university buildings were. “And it has. For a long time.”

At the university, Scotty walked among its many buildings looking for the building where his grandfather was. They were a mix – old, dark brick buildings with ivy on their walls, and then new, modern, plain buildings. Students walked on all the pathways between them. When Scotty reached his grandfather’s office, a few students were just leaving it. Scotty saw his grandfather behind his desk, and waited in the hallway for his grandfather to notice him. His grandfather seemed older than when Scotty had last seen him, though not greatly so. His hair was even more white now, he looked tired, the way he usually did, and his suit was rumpled a little, nothing new. His grandfather’s office was filled with books, papers, awards on the walls, a computer on his desk.

“Scotty,” his grandfather said when he did notice him, looking up from his desk. “It’s about time. I was getting really hungry. Would you like to have some lunch?”

They ate lunch at a faculty dining room on the campus, surrounded by professors. At the table where he and his grandfather sat, a young woman professor talked to two male professors. Scotty’s grandfather introduced Scotty to them, but his grandfather joined in their conversation only occasionally. After lunch, they strolled around the campus,

until his grandfather escorted him to a small garden with benches in a courtyard between two of the older buildings. There they sat, his grandfather taking out his pipe, but not lighting it quite yet, which was what he usually did.

“So, Scotty, you’re here. Was it hard?”

Scotty looked at the buildings surrounding him. He could see students in their rooms, a little older than he was, but like him.

“No. I’m glad I did it.”

“Did you finally go with your friends?” his grandfather asked.

Scotty nodded. “And then the train. Like we talked about.”

His grandfather nodded, too. The gesture made Scotty remember a famous family photograph of the two of them when Scotty was a little boy. His grandfather was in the foreground of the picture, standing in the garden behind his house. Scotty was standing at some distance behind his grandfather. It had been an accident.

“It’s like they’re one person,” his mother had said.

“What did your parents think, Scotty?” his grandfather asked him further.

“They didn’t like it. It made them very nervous.”

His grandfather thought a moment. “This all had to come. They should have known it.”

“Yes, they should have known,” Scotty agreed. “After all, I’ve always liked coming up here to see you, haven’t I?”

“My little protégé,” his grandfather said.

After that, they sat for a few moments, saying nothing to each other. Finally, his grandfather asked Scotty: “So what is the trouble, young man? What is bothering you so much?”

Scotty looked around the garden again, up into the buildings where students were studying. He could also see some students strolling at the far end of the garden.

“I don’t know, exactly, but ... I’m just not the same person I used to be, Grandfather. I always feel as if I’m upside down these days.

My head always feels as if it's spinning." It was the first time Scotty put into any kind of words pretty much how he felt. "First, I feel separate from my family and friends, and then I feel closer to them than I ever have before. Or, nothing matters to me anymore, none of the old things. I always have this feeling that there's something else I should be doing, something else I should be paying attention to."

Scotty searched his grandfather's face. "Or, it's not that I'm not happy. It's just that I'm up in the air all the time ..." Scotty reconsidered. "... No, that's not true, either. All the way up here, I loved it. I really loved it. Driving with my friends, thinking about them, listening to what they had to say. In the city, I could hardly keep from ... I don't know ... feeling excited, I guess. There was this little nun collecting money on a street corner. All of a sudden, I wanted so much to talk with her. I wanted to know everything about her. And then this guy got hit by a taxicab, and he hit the taxicab back, and the driver and the guy started shouting at each other, and then they tried to explain their side of it to all the people standing around watching them. It got me feeling so ... good ... I didn't know what to do – whether to stay there forever and take it in, or to run away."

Scotty looked at his grandfather, who was listening to him very carefully, taking in everything Scotty told him. For a few moments, his grandfather said nothing, apparently thinking. Then, as if he were slowly making up his mind, making an important decision, his grandfather spoke. He spoke very slowly, deliberately.

"Scotty, I want to tell you something," his grandfather began." He paused, nodded to himself, and then resumed speaking. "Yes, I want tell you something."

"OK," Scotty said.

"You don't know this, but when I was a young man – about the same age as you – all I wanted to do ... was ... to become a writer. Did you know that?"

Scotty shook his head.

"Yes. It's true. Oh, I had such big plans in my head." His grandfather paused again, reflecting. "I remember I wanted myself

to become something of ... a ... sojourner. Yes, that's what I called it ... a sojourner. Someone who spent his life, used his life, as best he could, watching everything that was going on around him. Here in this place one day, there in that place another, or, if in one spot, taking it all in ... missing nothing."

Scotty listened.

"I wanted to be a person who was part of everything, on the one hand, but also separate from everything, too. A visitor ... a lingering visitor." His grandfather made a little laugh. "I don't know if that was anything to be proud of. I never figured that out completely. But that's what I wanted to become ... to be. A sojourner." His grandfather grew a little more animated, a bit less contemplative. "And, above all, I remember, what I wanted to do with this 'grand design' – I already had it figured out – was to capture, what was for me, the most important thing. I wanted to capture something of the ... shadowy parts."

"The 'shadowy parts'?"

"Yes, something of all the aspects of reality that didn't add up right away, but were maybe the best part, or, at least, the defining part. The part I understood, rather academically, I guess, as the paradoxes, the ambiguities, the dualities. Do you understand? The part that the philosophers call 'the ghost in the machine.' What the scientists called the indeterminate. That's what I mostly saw, and that's what I mostly wanted to get at. More than anything, I couldn't think about it any other way."

Scotty didn't move. "Well, what happened? Did you do that, Grandfather? What did you do?"

His little grandfather sighed. "In the end, I did something else, Scotty. I did something else, and let my idea go." His grandfather seemed to reflect. "There are other good things to do with your life, you know. With good reasons behind them. Aren't there?" His grandfather looked at Scotty. "Either that, or after all, it wasn't finally for me. Who knows. But I did know it was a very good thing to think about doing. A very good thing indeed."

After about an hour, Scotty and his grandfather finished talking. His grandfather asked him about his brother and sister and parents, and if he still liked school and sports so much. Scotty said that he did. In turn, Scotty asked his grandfather how things were going for him.

"Busy, busy, busy, Scotty," he told him. "Though I do want to visit your whole family soon. I'd like that."

"We'd like that, too."

"And, of course, you know you can come up here again whenever you want to."

"I do," Scotty told him. "And I will. I always want to."

That seemed to make his grandfather very happy. "We have some good times together, don't we?"

"Yes, Grandfather, we do."

"Maybe they don't look so great from the outside, but they're pretty good from the inside, aren't they?"

"They sure are, Grandfather," Scotty said. He didn't think he could be more certain.

When he got back by the bus to the train station, after saying goodbye to his grandfather, in front of a lecture hall where his grandfather had to be next, Scotty had to wait a while for his train to come. As he waited, feeling much better, he saw the waiting room begin to fill up with other passengers. When the train did come, he got on board and found a seat in one of the cars. Beside him, he noticed, there was a man staring out the window, deep in thought. Across the aisle, a pretty girl read, and the man next to her worked away on his computer. It looked like he was going to be at it for hours. Coming up the aisle toward Scotty was a woman, maybe in her 20s, holding a baby to her chest with one arm, and leading a little girl by the hand. The little girl kept saying, "But, Momma, where's Daddy? Isn't he coming with us? He said he wasn't going to let us go without him."

"Never mind. Shush now, honey. We're on the train, and you'll wake up your brother."

The woman looked a mess. Her hair was all disheveled, and she kept trying to find the strength to keep carrying her baby, while she looked for seats. Scotty wondered if he and the woman would talk. There was a chance that they would, he decided, sometime later.

He also thought, as warmly as he could, of his grandfather, and thanked him. And at that point, too, he smiled the greatest smile of his life, so far.

“Education, or human liberation, is more than a series of events, an aggregation of activities or a set of experiences; in fact, some activities and experiences may be miseducative and nonliberating. To be educative a new experience must relate to and extend the meaning of previous experience. In a very real sense, education – the process of liberation – involves a reconstruction of experience, taking something out of the old and fitting it into the new and using the new with parts of the old to enable the individual to go on to newer and more meaningful and productive experiences.”

*– Royce S. Pitkin, “Education and Human Liberation,”
A Talk Prepared for a Seminar at Wilmington College, April 10, 1975,
In Forest K. Davis, Things Were Different in Royce’s Day,
Vermont: Adamant Press, 1996, p. 290*

Confessions of a Fulbright Scholar From Thessaloniki, Greece to Brooklyn, New York and Empire State College: September - November 2011

Betty Kaklamanidou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Introduction

I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Kaklamanidou when we were both on a panel at the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance, Second Annual Conference in Brussels, Belgium in the summer of 2010. We heard each other's research on the politics of gender in romantic comedies (hers looking at the "marriage scenario" in Greek films, and mine on the construction of middle-aged women in Hollywood films), and found that our research had similar implications. We met for breakfast the next morning, where I learned that she teaches film history and theory at the Film Studies Department at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She explained that she had just finished co-editing a collection on recent "superhero" films, *The 21st Century Superhero: Essays on Gender, Genre and Globalization in Film* (Gray & Kaklamanidou, 2010), and was the author of two Greek books on film adaptation and the Hollywood romantic comedy. She explained to me that she also had been working on compiling a chronology of romantic comedies for the past 10 years and had already amassed a large corpus of material. We spoke about doing some kind of audience research together to flesh out the ways in which viewers respond to these films, which culminated in a bicultural survey and interview study of Greek and American film viewers of romantic comedies. Dr. Kaklamanidou also has almost completed a book on the same subject, a book on the Hollywood romantic comedy in the new millennium, which is contracted by Routledge. When she first asked whether our college could sponsor her for a Fulbright in the United States,

I was a little hesitant, simply because I hadn't heard about this kind of activity being done at Empire State College yet. Nevertheless, I said yes, and from there it was a relatively simple process of obtaining support from our provost, Meg Benke, as well as deans Bob Clougherty and Cynthia Ward, who would be involved in sponsoring her in terms of office space and college facilities. I want to extend my deepest appreciation to Provost Benke, as well as deans Clougherty and Ward for being so encouraging of the process, as well as Alan Mandell, who created several meaningful collective experiences for Dr. Kaklamanidou to share her work with the college community. In sum, it was a really gratifying experience to be able to sponsor a Fulbright scholar. I would encourage my colleagues to do likewise and can help them through the process.

– Peggy Tally, School for Graduate Studies

INT. GREECE – THESSALONIKI APARTMENT – March 15, 2011. Early afternoon.

As usual, I am in front of my computer screen, working. The sound of an incoming email interrupts my train of thought and I open my inbox to check who it is. The sender is the Greek co-coordinator of the Fulbright program, the always accommodating and gracious, Tatiana Hadjiemmanuel. As a hardcore pessimist, I am ready to read a polite rejection letter. However, after the



Betty Kaklamanidou (left) with Mentor Peggy Tally

greeting, the email starts with the seven words I least expect: "It is my pleasure to inform you. ..." Well, my eyes are deceiving me, I tell myself, and I keep on reading diagonally until I reach the ending of a long text with details I simply cannot process.

My first reaction would make a very funny cinematic scene. I immediately stand up and move away from the computer taking hesitant picks at the body of the email, fearing someone could see me from the "other" side of the screen. I pick up the phone and call my husband at work: "Petros, I think I got the Fulbright Scholarship," I tell him (remember I hadn't read the whole email by that time). "I knew you would," my always supportive better half answers and starts congratulating me. I then email Professor Peggy Tally, the woman responsible for the invitation letter from an American university that I had to submit along with my proposal to the Fulbright committee, and my Ph.D. supervisor to give him the news. To cut a long story short, after quite a long and

I'm afraid rather annoying bureaucratic processes (endless medical exams, the filling in of many forms to get a J1 visa, a trip to Athens to get the visa, endless emails to find accommodations in New York – thank you, Dianne Ramdeholl), I was ready to arrive in the Big Apple at the end of August. Last glitch. Hurricane Irene delayed my departure for five days during which my suitcases were left untouched next to the front door waiting like me.

**EXT. YELLOW CAB – NEW YORK –
Sept. 1, 2011.
Around 6:30 p.m.**

My yellow cab finally pulls over in front of my new dwelling on Carlton Avenue. A room in a beautiful brownstone in Brooklyn was waiting for me. My landlady, a wonderful person, helped me settle in but as I hadn't slept for about 36 hours, all I could think of was sleep.

The next day, I finally visited 325 Hudson St. and saw my office, generously provided by Metropolitan Center Dean Cynthia Ward. I had a meeting with Peggy Tally to discuss my project which, by that time, had also become a book proposal and had just been contracted by Routledge, another piece of wonderful news that my pessimist side did not expect. Meanwhile, the lovely Alan Mandell, whom I had already met in June when I was in New York City for a conference, had arranged for me to talk at the college in Albany and in Saratoga at the end of September. I had my work cut out for me. Not only did I have to complete the research for my book and prepare the presentations for Empire State College but I wanted to meet new people and immerse myself in the rich New York culture. After all, the Fulbright program envisions not only the exchange of scholars for academic purposes but stresses the cultural education and binational cross-fertilization that can flourish through the grantees' stay in America.

I arrived in New York at a very difficult time for my country, the most difficult since the seven-year dictatorship that lasted from 1967 to 1974. Wages were cut almost monthly, people were being laid off, the Greek "indignants" were in the streets protesting daily outside the Greek

Parliament in Athens, and the European Union – mainly France and Germany – along with the International Monetary Fund were basically dictating the Greek government's every move. Every day, I would pick up *The New York Times* and find Greece either on the front page or the front page of the business section. I was sad but at the same time I was far, far away. I was also sceptical about the news since I am not used to believing everything I read. However, a conversation I had with my sister around the end of September alarmed me. Although Lia is an optimistic and composed individual, she told me: "Betty, you may be gone for a little while but you will come back to a different city." This phrase haunted me for the rest of my stay.

Nevertheless, with the help of Peggy, Alan, Dianne, Ruth Goldberg, Tony Spanakos, Eric Ball, my landlady Lynne, and all the wonderful and polite people I met at Empire State College, I soon started to feel at home in New York, having established a daily routine. Each morning, I would take the train to the office or the Bobst Library, have lunch with a friend or colleague and then return home to write, have dinner and watch Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert before turning in. Each week, I would visit a museum with a friend or engage in another cultural activity. At the end of September, I was to present my work in progress in Saratoga and also participate in the film evening organized by Mark Soderstrom in Albany during the college's Master of Arts in Liberal Studies weekend residency. My trip upstate gave me the opportunity to enjoy the breathtaking scenery and take in the natural beauty of that part of the state. More importantly, however, my weekend in Saratoga was yet another wonderful experience to interact with students, members of the faculty, and have an exciting and stimulating discussion with School for Graduate Studies Dean Robert Clougherty, a fellow Fulbright grantee, who impressed me with his vast knowledge of history and literature and had so generously welcomed me in the USA.

As my area of expertise is Hollywood mainstream cinema, I had read quite a few things about U.S. politics. In *Politics and Film* (2006), Daniel P. Franklin argues, for instance, that America was built on the

principles of individualism, liberalism and the least intrusive government. Living in New York, however, working there, and interacting with Americans from diverse walks of life really consolidated some of my readings. Naturally, someone could argue that during my stay, I frequented mainly scholars – that is, people with high education and a dignified income – and that, consequently, my perspective is quite one-dimensional. However, on my first day in New York, I became friends with an American woman, originally from Panama, whose story was quite revealing. Although a few years back, she had a good job, a good apartment and a loving marriage, she had recently lost her job and her apartment because her husband suddenly got ill and the medical bills were huge. Unfortunately, her better half passed away and my friend was left literally homeless, heartbroken and with no financial security whatsoever. When I met her, she had started working part time as a shop assistant and living with friends who could put her up for a few weeks at a time. I was shocked by the state's inability to provide for its people, and for a few weeks, I couldn't help but concentrate on the inequalities of the society that was generous enough to cover all the expenses for my academic research and had presented me with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Negative ideas and concepts,

I was shocked by the state's inability to provide for its people, and for a few weeks, I couldn't help but concentrate on the inequalities of the society that was generous enough to cover all the expenses for my academic research and had presented me with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

such as inequality, difference, disintegration, racism and individualism kept pestering my thoughts but so were positive ones, such as generosity, abundance, freedom, friendship and diligence. I started questioning the nature of neoliberalism, noticing the effects of individualism, and wondering about racism. I began to feel trapped in the city I was always in love with, and looking forward to my return home. Nevertheless, the news from home, the personal “horror” stories I read on the Internet, the way my loved ones described the situation on the phone or Skype, started to dangerously resemble the story of my American friend. I then began contemplating the globalized world we are all living in or at least the “Western” developed or developing world. Suddenly, Greece did not seem so much different from the United States when it came to social inequality, the “hidden” classification of social structure, and lurking racism of different forms.

INT. GREECE – THESSALONIKI APARTMENT – Feb. 3, 2012. Night.

Today marks exactly three months after my return from New York and the completion of my Fulbright grant. Three months that helped me digest and crystallize my stay in the Big Apple, my work, my experience. My research there has enabled me to proudly write that I am nearing completion of the first draft of my book. At this point, I would like to stress that this book would not have been completed so quickly had it not been for the constant encouragement, the unbelievable generosity, the knowledge, and the selflessness of Peggy Tally, who is living proof of female power, class, integrity and beauty (both internal and external), and who has certainly become one of my role

models. I also can proudly write that I still keep in touch with many of the people I met in the U.S., which confirms that human relationships are still something sacred and they are not by definition doomed to stay on the surface.

Nevertheless, I regret not being able to write that I am proud of living in Greece. My country and its citizens are still being reviled worldwide daily. Schoolchildren are fainting at school because their parents cannot afford to buy the bare necessities, such as food. Homelessness is rising dangerously. People are losing their jobs, and those who are “lucky” to be employed are facing scenarios that even a screenwriter trained in dystopian worlds, such as Andrew Niccol (*Gattaca*, 1997, *The Truman Show*, 1998, *In Time*, 2010) has still to conceive of. Only yesterday, the nursing staff of the country’s state hospitals received their once again decreased two-week pay check which normally averages 1,000 euros. However, hundreds of my fellow citizens, fathers and mothers, hardworking individuals who have plans and dreams, received an amount that ranged from -7 euros (I’m afraid the negative sign is not a typo) to 150 euros.

We are all numb, depressed, melancholic. No one can know what the future holds for the country. The academic world is also silenced as tertiary education that is state funded and free is facing innumerable problems, and many departments are on the verge of closing their doors or merging with other departments. Scholars, such as myself, are working for free or for 500 to 600 euros per month since the ministry cannot appoint us due to lack of funds, disregarding the fact that thousands of university professors are retiring.

This devastating recession is not, of course, just an artificial stratagem used by global interests to serve the market’s master plan, although one could certainly argue that. The Greek political scene of the last 30 to 40 years has played a major part in the construction of a system ruled by corruption, “favours,” and nepotism. However, what is at stake today is the future of a country that gave birth to the values the Western world is based upon. I fear that the concept of democracy has not only lost each true meaning but is being used as a smokescreen to cover neoliberalism’s financial agenda.

I hope that things will eventually find their balance and that the Greeks, along with the people of Portugal, Spain, Italy and Ireland, will soon start sighing a breath of relief. Until then, I will keep on cherishing my time in New York, be thankful to the Fulbright Foundation in Greece, and especially Tatiana and Executive Director Artemis Zenetou, and be eternally grateful to the people who helped make my stay in the USA one of the most significant, poignant and memorable experiences of my life.

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The New York City Laboratory: Science Discovery in an Urban Environment

Kevin L. Woo, Metropolitan Center

“*Chlorophyll? More like BORE-ophyll.*”
– Adam Sandler in *Billy Madison* (1995)

As an undergraduate student at Southampton College of Long Island University, I majored in marine biology during my freshman year. Incidentally, I also was very fortunate, as my father provided me with the same educational proposition that he dealt to my older brother: if I continued to stay in school, he would continue to pay my tuition. As a mediocre science and mathematics student in high school, I suddenly found the ability to do calculus derivations, consider phylogeny based on taxonomic traits, and conquer the formation of hydrocarbons for organic chemistry. At the end of my first year, I was comfortable with my courses in the natural and physical sciences, but doubted my enthusiasm to earn a degree in science. One fall evening, I went on a car ride with my father to complete some errands. During this jaunt, we started a dialogue (circa, October 1998).

Dad: “How’s school going?”

Me: “It’s fine.”

Dad: “How about your classes?”

Me: “They’re fine.”

Pause.

Me: “By the way, I was thinking about changing my major.”

Dad: “Oh, really? What were you thinking about changing it to?”

Me: “I was thinking that I want to major in communications.”

Pause. Part deux.

Dad: “If you change your major to communications, I’ll cut off your tuition.”

The matter was settled. In May 2001, I earned a Bachelor of Science in interdisciplinary biology and psychology.

Unlike some old friends and dreamers, I never intended to be a scientist, and like many of our Empire State College students, I perhaps developed a slight phobia toward the natural and physical sciences. However, I overcame this fear, and embarked on a career in the biological sciences.

The challenge is simply how to make science engaging. At the Metropolitan Center, we have one clear advantage: the use of the five boroughs of New York City as a laboratory. In the following sections, I will discuss successful and unsuccessful activities that I have executed since my appointment in July 2010. I also will discuss two activities that I have planned, and intend to conduct this academic year.

The Good

Active learning exercises have the potential to engage students in successful learning experiences. I have employed several field trips, in situ, and laboratory-based exercises that have worked. As I serve mostly students who intend to fulfill a general education requirement in the natural sciences, my goal is to inform and to have them think critically. My students need to question anecdotal evidence about the natural world, and find ways to best support an answer that builds scientific relationships.

Monkey Business at the Zoo

Despite the ethical controversies that surround animals in captivity, zoological institutions provide a platform for education, instruction and scholarship (Ballantyne, Packer, Hughes, & Dierking, 2007). In particular, access to the Wildlife Conservation Society parks (Bronx Zoo, Central Park Zoo, Prospect Park Zoo,



Figure 1. Students engaged in the ethogram exercise of my *Animal Behavior* group study. Student David Roland is taking notes on the Japanese macaques (*Macaca fuscata*) at the Central Park Zoo, Fall 2010.

Queens Zoo, Staten Island Aquarium and New York Aquarium) allows students to study native and nonnative fauna without leaving the five boroughs. Although many of my students have visited these parks independently or with their families, many often neglect to identify the subtle behaviors that may be meaningful in the animal world. Currently, my students for *Animal Behavior*, *Behavioral Ecology* and *Fundamentals of Biology* are required to select an animal in the WCS collection, search the literature for species-specific behavior, and prepare to observe a focal individual or group of individuals at the park. In the group study, students learn the different behavioral sampling methods, as well as the scales of measurement, and are trained to identify behaviors in social interactions. For this exercise, students must complete an ethogram, a catalog of descriptive behaviors in a given context. During my first two years at Empire State College, we conducted several trips: fall 2010 (Central Park Zoo; Figure 1), spring and fall 2011 (Prospect Park Zoo). My students observed an animal of their choice, conducted some preliminary research, and collected data to develop a behavioral

catalog. Prior to the trip, students observed animals through videos or a Siamese fighting fish (*Betta splendens*) lab. The subtleties of individual behaviors may have implications for other social interactions, such as courtship, communication and territoriality. At the zoological park, students record their behaviors with a traditional pen-and-paper method, as well as employ new technology, such as video camcorders, digital cameras and mobile devices. Upon the completion, students compare their data to the literature, and most typically find that they are able to appreciate behavior that they often neglect during casual visits to the zoo. To assess their understanding and ability to discriminate between behaviors, students complete a tabulated ethogram and conduct an oral presentation. This activity enhances our understanding of behavior, and continues to provide support for education and scholarship that we can acquire at a zoological park.

Tomatoes for Bob Carey

Urban agroecology is a growing trend among city dwellers. The development of urban spaces, such as rooftops, for green gardens and agriculture has been a common practice in Europe, but it is a new venture for New Yorkers. Alternative ventures into urban agriculture also have considered hydroponic (both vertical and horizontal) systems as a way to maximize limited indoor space and grow produce all year. In 2008, the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm (rooftopfarms.org) in Greenpoint, Brooklyn started its growing season, and in October 2010, I took my first Ecology and the Environment study group to the farm for a field trip (see Figure 2a). One year later in October 2011, we went to the Brooklyn Grange (brooklyngrangefarm.com) in Long Island City, Queens (see Figure 2b). Although both groups are private, commercial farms, they provided my students with an alternative to traditional farming methods that is seemingly sustainable and local. However, farms that produce crops based on organic principles, such as the Eagle Street and Brooklyn Grange farms, also have raised questions about the socioeconomic divide toward affordability and issues of social responsibility. Moreover, as Anthony



Figures 2 a and b. Field trip to two urban rooftop farms in New York City: a) Annie Novaks (left) of the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm delivers a workshop on local agriculture (Greenpoint, Brooklyn, Fall 2010); and b) Gwen Schantz and 8-month-old Otto (left) discuss the mission of the Brooklyn Grange Farm (Long Island City, Queens, Fall 2011).



Bourdain suggests, good food simply costs money to produce (Bourdain, 2009). According to the U.S. Census Bureau and 2010 American Community Survey, 20.1 percent of New York City residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Given this statistic, we also find a distinct correlation between obesity and income, and obesity and ethnicity. For example, obesity is negatively correlated with income, such that individuals with lower incomes tend to be more obese (Wallach & Rey, 2009). Consequently, African Americans and Hispanics also exhibit higher obesity rates (Van Wye et al., 2008). Furthermore, if we consider the interaction between obesity, ethnicity and income, low income African Americans and Hispanics tend to show the highest rates of obesity and diabetes in New York City (Wallach & Rey, 2009). Although the intention for these trips is to examine

agroecology from a natural science perspective, my students were able to consider the negative social implications that are possibly created by innovative urban farming methods.

Radio, Radio, Radio!

In the autumn of 1997, I was a senior at Townsend Harris High School at Queens College, and I participated in a student group that documented the mayoral election. It was the year Rudy Guiliani defeated Ruth Messinger, and it was the second time in New York City history that a Republican won a second term over a Democrat. During this project, I learned about the local electoral process, developed skills in the applied aspects of television and radio production, and forged lifelong friendships. More importantly, I met a mentor who imparted his enthusiasm for media production. Meet WQXR presenter, Jeffrey Spurgeon.

In May A 2011 term, Dr. Mark Miyake (Hudson Valley Center), Aaron Zachmeier (former Metropolitan Center faculty instructional technologist), and I offered a group study at the Metropolitan Center called Internet Broadcasting: The New Age of Radio. The study was designed to teach our students about the history of radio, copyright, ethics, and how to produce and create a radio show using a digital platform. We also taught writing, reading, comprehension, public speaking and interviewing techniques. We aimed to teach radio using a digital format, and to consider the similarities and differences between live broadcasting versus podcasting. In addition to these objectives, our greatest achievement was our ability to bridge the theoretical and applied concepts in radio with a visit to WNYC/WQXR station (see Figure 3). During what was perhaps the best field trip since my visit to the FDNY 109th Station in Flushing, Queens as a kindergartener, Jeff was able to conduct a tour of the studios for our study group. We saw the production studios, met on-air personalities, saw live broadcasts, discussed the future of radio, and gained an appreciation for the art of radio. Moreover, students were able to ask questions about the state of the radio industry, and discuss how to improve their final project, which



Figure 3. *Internet Broadcasting: The New Age of Radio Tour of WNYC/WQXR with Jeffrey Spurgeon (left-back) during an on-air session with presenter Amy Eddings (left-front).*

was a 10-minute podcasting segment. Overall, I believe that students gained a greater appreciation for the radio business, from the theoretical perspectives to the technical components.

Science Colloquium

The colloquium series was an opportunity for me to invite scientists in New York City to speak about their research interests. The goal was to provide students with perspectives in the natural and physical sciences, and to bridge the gap between science phobias and the people who study natural phenomena. In the spring 2011 term, our guests spoke on topics such as sexual selection, evolutionary biology, social learning, marine mammal behavior, creativity in the arts, and green engineering. Our guests also came from several local institutions, such as Brooklyn College, New York University, Battery Park City Authority, LaGuardia Community College, St. Francis College, and one foreign college, Université Paul Sabatier (Toulouse, France). I asked my speakers to provide us with one or two research papers, meet an hour before the seminar to discuss their work, and then conduct their presentation. Initially, I found that the language intimidates the students, as few had some experience in science literacy. However, the bridge between text, person and research made it easier for students to link science to their daily lives. For example, Dr. Preethi Radhakrishnan (LaGuardia Community College) presented her research on sexual selection in fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*), and how they

have been used as a model to best study immunology and sexually transmitted diseases. As discussed, our ability to understand the transmission of seminal fluid from the male to the female may help us to better understand how human immunological defense may combat STDs (Radhakrishnan & Fedorka, 2011). As we embark on the second seminar series, both students and the general public can access the schedule at <http://commons.esc.edu/kevinlwo/science-colloquium>.

The Blind Taste Test

Recently, urbanites have been shifting away from commercial produce to local, organic and sustainable products. Despite the socioeconomic issues and knowledge about general science, more and more people are becoming increasingly convinced that local and organic products are healthier (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007). However, one great question is whether they can really taste the difference. During the May A 2011 term, I subjected my On the Menu: The Science of Food and Nutrition study group to a blind taste test. Throughout the term, we discussed the biological aspects, such as the evolution of domesticated animals, digestive systems (both humans and animals), difference between plant and animal cell structure, genetic disposition to disease, diets, vitamins and supplements, and the chemicals that are found in the food based on processed-food labels. Toward the end of the term, we watched Food, Inc. (2008), and discussed the interaction between sustainable plant and animal production versus our perception of the food industry. We also continued to discuss poverty, as it relates to poor nutrition and obesity. However, as we see a popular movement for local, organic and sustainable products, I challenged my students' perceptions on why they believe organic is better. I established a blind taste test that paired foods, either conventional or organic, to each other. First, I let my students see and handle the produce. I presented carrots, strawberries, kiwi, apples, raspberries, oranges and bananas. To also consider whether bottled water is better, I compared mineral water to New York City tap water. Secondly, after the students saw,

touched, smelled and handled the produce, I then cut each item up, and allowed my students to eat them. Thirdly, we recorded how many students felt that either produce "A" or "B" was organic. Lastly, I identified which was the real organic product and which one was conventional. In my observation, it was interesting to note the inconsistencies for deciding which was organic or conventional, and based on which criteria, such as the look (is it more symmetrical than the other?), taste (is it juicier?) and instinct (this one has to be organic!). Although I am an advocate for local, organic and sustainable produce, as a scientist I wanted my students to question whether organic simply means better. I wanted them to dig beyond the perceived taste, look and anecdotal evidence about organic produce, and consider the deeper biological aspects of bioaccumulation, sustainable agroecology and genetic modification/engineering. Nutrition is an important component of everyday life, and we can consider it in biological, social and consumer terms.

The Bad

Although not an absolute failure, my exercise in basic cell biology nearly encouraged a mutiny.

Pass the *Saccharomyces*, Please?

For my Fundamentals of Biology study group, my aim was to teach students the basic principles in biology: 1) cell biology, 2) genetics, 3) evolution, 4) biodiversity, 5) animal and plant form and function, and 6) ecology. However, we barely survived the cell biology unit. I purchased several compound microscopes to have students examine plant (onion and elodea) and animal (human cheek) cells both naturally and then stained with methylene blue. A simple compound microscope does not have the capacity to see *Lactobacillus acidophilus* (yogurt) or *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* (Brewer's yeast), but I thought it would be interesting to see living organisms in our food through the use of digital slides. In addition to the exercise, I included a worksheet to help guide the students through the exercise. They were to answer some basic questions (e.g., what is cell theory?), and then to draw the cells

in different objective powers: 4X, 10X and 40X. As I began to set up the exercise, I was under fire. One student, who I presume was propelled by a phobia of the sciences, began to express her frustration with the text and the reading. In response to this displeasure, others joined in to reinforce the sentiment, and to express an inability to absorb biological terms and processes. From here, the discussion escalated, and many more students joined the conversation, as I saw my lab nearly spiral into oblivion. I saw a social psychology experiment unfold, as it reflected the actions of a mob simply acting in accordance with what the entire group was doing. It continued to fuel the argument. At this stage, approximately half the students were in an uproar, repeating how: A) they believed this was an introductory level study and not advanced; B) this is not a traditional institution, so they should not do traditional work; C) the material was simply difficult to comprehend; and D) the expectations were too high. This was only the second week of the spring term. After I entertained these comments, I took half the group study period to provide them with my personal philosophy that: A) education is a basic human right; B) yet, education also is a luxury and students need to earn it; and C) despite the high expectations, I find it disingenuous to provide them with a poor-quality education, whereby they would have taken an introductory biology study without learning the fundamentals and foundations of biology. Undoubtedly, as an educator, it was my greatest challenge. However, as we proceeded to conduct the lab, I was reassured that students were indeed learning, when one student peered into the microscope and proclaimed, "That's it – I do see the nucleus." Parlay, please.

The "Works in Progress"

For every study and every term, I am constantly piloting a number of activities. During the fall 2011 term, my Ecology and the Environment study intended to look at insect and marine/aquatic biodiversity.

Biodiversity of Invertebrates in Central Park

As a replacement for the flora biodiversity activity that I did in Central Park (fall 2010), I decided to examine insects and compare select locations instead. To start, and to save time, I intended to collect two leaf litter samples from known locations, and to compare two invertebrate samples. Most insects tend to like leaf litter for the security, darkness and ability to retain moisture (Hansen, 2000). The samples would then be placed in a Berlese funnel to collect invertebrates (Berlese, 1905). My students would then be responsible for identifying as many different invertebrates according to their order. Here, students would consider the richness and evenness across these two sites, and calculate diversity using the Simpson's Diversity Index [$D = \sum(n/N)^2$]. My hope is for students to employ a truncated aspect of the scientific method: 1) Question: Are there different levels of urban biodiversity?; 2) Hypothesis: Location 'X' has higher biodiversity than location 'Y'; 3) Test: Assess insect numbers by separating individuals according to order; 4) Results: Calculate D; and 5) Discussion: Summarize, interpret, and possibly explain the results with support from the scientific literature.

Do You Smell Something Fishy?

Historically, the fish sold in neighborhood supermarkets reflected the species that were locally available; however, and more recently, we have observed a trend to provide people with farmed and wild-caught species that are harvested from around the globe (Burger et al., 2004). Like the invertebrate biodiversity exercise, my students will travel to Chinatown, Manhattan and consider the relative biodiversity that we see in local fish markets. Here, students will measure species diversity and consider whether species are native to northeastern United States waters or are nonnative. In addition to employing the scientific method, this exercise also is meant to provide students with a perspective on global fisheries, supply and demand of fish, and species sustainability. Furthermore, the activity may provide us with data on local consumption and demand for select marine or freshwater species.

Conclusion

Whether I teach at Empire State College or at another institution, communicating science is difficult. However, as a nontraditional institution, we have several advantages: 1) reaching a population that has not viewed science as a learning opportunity or career; 2) attempting exercises that may or may not work, and if the latter, may never be conducted again; 3) employing different pedagogical methods tailored to the composition of each study group; 4) allowing our activities to evolve as our population and the environment change; and 5) at the Metropolitan Center, using the city as a laboratory. As technology becomes more accessible and affordable to all communities, it is likely that blended modes of learning may partner well with traditional hands-on activities. I suspect that I may never solve years of science phobia in students, but my hope is to pass on knowledge that students can impart onto others.

Note

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“If teachers are never self-critical they will lose their capacity for renewal and growth ... if teachers are too self-critical they become powerless and timid. The tension is to end each day with a strong understanding of what could be improved, and to begin the next with forgiveness and hope.”

– William Ayers, *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1993, p. 130

Thanks to Katherine Jelly, Center for Mentoring and Learning, for suggesting this quote.

Three Poems

Susan Jeffs, Center for Distance Learning

April

Late evening, and I am standing
by the open window.
Something that reminds me of everything
at once drifts through.
Holds me for a moment like an angel
or an improbable saint.
Like the rain that will come
and the forsythia that shines
even before it has begun to bloom.
I only know that it is April.
The river runs fast tonight,
and the half moon hovers just over the hill.

A Cello in April

The moan of a cello in April,
a movement from under the earth,
dark sound beneath the city
and outside a tree stands and listens.
Outside a tree stands and people pass by
the place where the cello moans
deeply from under the earth,
slowly rises into the place
where people stop to listen,
where the cello begins to breathe
and the earth holds and releases.
Where the earth holds and releases
and the vibrato hovers and reaches
and the cello moans and rises
like a dark bird in flight,
low just over the city
that sits at the edge of a wood
where the trees moan in delight
at the rise of a cello in April
and the dark bird in flight.

At Morikami Gardens

I am not a painter. I do not speak Japanese.
But I know these words in my bones.
I hear their rat-a-tat in the bamboo grove,
feel their silky sway on my skin.
I swallow them, stumble over them,
press them into my palms.
I walk through the swoosh of the winding
path
to the place called Ochaya, or teahouse.
onto the wooden plank porch
where I move inside the wind
and know at once, mono-no-a-wabi,
Japanese for “ahhhness.”

Notes

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Changing with Change: A Conversation with Fernand Brunschwig

Alan Mandell, Metropolitan Center

Fernand Brunschwig, who came to the college from studies at Harvard and Berkeley, is one of the founding faculty at Empire State College's Long Island Center. Between 1972 and 2012, he made many contributions, including central roles in developing the first "generic" prior learning evaluation and founding the first student-alumni association. Fernand served the college in many capacities: as mentor in the Science, Mathematics and Technology



(l-r) Fernand Brunschwig, Don Park and Echeal Sigan
c. 1972 - c. 1973

area of study, as co-director of the initial self-study for Middle States accreditation, as coordinator of the Stony Brook Unit, as founding associate dean of the New York Telephone Corporate College Program, as acting dean of the Long Island Center, and as one of the first mentors in the college's Master of Arts in Teaching program. Fernand recently retired from the college. We talked about his 40 years at Empire State College on 03 February 2012.

Alan Mandell: You mentioned that you had just been given a gift from your Master of Arts in Teaching colleagues that brought

back many memories of your now 40 years with the college. What were your feelings when you saw these photos?

Fernand Brunschwig: It's the relationships with the people – with Pat Lefor, Miriam Schocken, Jane Shipton, George Dawson, Nat Brod, Betsy Steltenpohl, Jim Robinson, Beverly Rivera, John Morse – with those great, great people. Those relationships are all intertwined with work in the college. These are people who really made this college what it is. They built the place.

A.M.: What lured you to Empire State College? How did that happen?

F.B.: I was a Berkeley graduate student in physics and science education. I was writing my dissertation in the spring of 1972 and looking for a position. The business manager at the Lawrence Hall where I did my work came to me one day and showed me a copy of *The New York*

Times that announced a new college – front page, above the fold: "Ford and Carnegie award a million each to Empire State College." I thought: "Wow!" And the article included the name of Arthur Chickering. So I wrote to Chickering and he wrote back and said: "Well, if you're in the east, stop by." So I had an interview and I eventually got an offer. To me it sounded like a dream come true. A chance to be in on the ground floor; a chance to design a place, to come up with a program, to do the things you've always wanted to do. After I got here, I realized that it was basically an empty container that we were being handed with

a mandate to do everything that traditional campuses weren't doing with a wholly different structure and a wholly different set of resources. I did think that maybe what I'd gotten myself into was something closer to Tom Sawyer painting the fence.

A.M.: Were you at the Long Island Center from the start?

F.B.: Yes, I was one of the founding faculty at Long Island, one of the 14 founding faculty. My partner, not yet my wife, and I came to New York in August, 1972. We rented a car and finally found Trainor House. It took a long search! The place was empty. No furniture; no nothing. I finally found Barbara O'Connell, the dean's secretary, who had been one of the first hired, and Nat Brod who had previously taught at Farmingdale in psychology. The two of them were calling to order furniture. They had one phone line and a couple of chairs. That's all they had.

A.M.: On what had your previous studies focused? What were your expectations of Empire State College in relation to your academic background?

F.B.: My dissertation was in science education; it was about "experiments that walk." These were experiments that you could do at home. And I took the position that this was a much better way to teach people who were new to the sciences rather than bringing them into a monstrous university lab that was often really intimidating. Rather than spending the hour and a half they'd usually spend in a lab, students would be spending six or 10 hours working at home or in the dorm and sharing what they were doing with friends and family. I had a kind of innovative alternative approach to teaching physics right from the start. So I thought: "How great; I'd have this new college; I can do what I want. Adults coming and studying independently. I'll have my science kits all over Long

Island.” I took the empty vessel that was Empire State College, and I filled it with my ideas and my ideals.

A.M.: And did you find that your fantasy had any relationship to what your job was?

F.B.: Some. But not a lot. First of all, there was no support. If I wanted to make a “kit,” for example, I’d have to do it myself. I did some of that, and tried to write and find things that would help students study science in a way that I felt was important. But we found that a lot of the students who were coming to Empire State College were not interested in the abstract ideas that I had grown so fond of.

They were practical; they were adults who had jobs and had experience and they wanted to do better at work. There were no general education requirements, no science requirements. And most of them didn’t quite see how physics was going to help them. So I had to adapt; I had to change my thinking quite a bit.

A.M.: And as a new mentor, I presume that you had to deal with the fact that there was always more than just the science side of things.

F.B.: I had to deal with the whole student, not just the science piece. So, I had to take them wherever they were, whatever their interests, whatever their job. That was an important foundation of the college, which I believed in, but I didn’t quite realize what the implications of that were going to be. I had to digest that and that changed me as I went along. I believed in the students – it’s not that they weren’t interested in education; it’s not that they were unwilling to put forward a tremendous effort – but they had to see how it connected with their lives. So I worked pretty hard to find ways to make those connections and to find ways for me to learn about what I needed to do to connect with them. I became adept at degree program planning in a wide variety of areas, not just science, and I wrote a couple of books to help my students with degree program planning. When the computer came



Fernand Brunschwig (center), co-chair of the initial Accreditation Self-Study, speaking with President Jim Hall at Self-Study Steering Committee meeting c. 1973 - c. 1974. (From left, Mimi Dowd, Jogues Egan and Loren Baritz)

along, I programmed a spreadsheet in Lotus 1-2-3 called DP Assistant that many, many students used throughout the college.

A.M.: Even in the early years, did you get students who came with technology/engineering backgrounds, with applied science-based experiences, who just didn’t have a degree?

F.B.: Sure. We got people who had tremendous backgrounds in those areas who had skills that didn’t appear in any academic catalogue. The “advanced standing” possibility was a huge draw for them. They needed guidance and feedback on their experiential learning and that again required me to learn a lot about something I knew nothing about in order to help – in order to connect with them. I mentored students in physics, math and computers, as well as in chemistry and in subjects such as biology, engineering and technology where I had to learn alongside the student. This kind of teaching was different from what I had expected; I still had to know the subject, but I found that it was equally important to connect with the student and to match up the topics of study, the expected outcomes, and the books and other resources with the student’s interests.

A.M.: You mentioned that being at the college changed you. Certainly part of the change seems to be the move from specialist to one who is looking at the student as

a “whole” person, as a generalist. Did you welcome this? Did you fight against it?

F.B.: Before I came to Empire State College, I already was working against the grain of the traditional physics department. I had realized when I was a senior at Harvard that I wasn’t going to be in a room with a bunch of equipment all my life, that I needed contact with people, that I had much broader interests than all of the other students who were concentrating in physics. I went through the Ph.D.-level physics courses and exams at Berkeley because I loved the discipline of physics, but

I knew I wanted to do a thesis in education. I prided myself on being able to think about other areas, to go into new fields and understand and have fun with them and enjoy them. I welcomed the idea of dealing with students from all different areas and trying to stretch them – and myself – to design these innovative degrees that no one had seen before. I thought that was fantastic. I was making it up as I went along and I could see the results.

A.M.: The sheer enjoyment of this ongoing effort to create a new faculty role seems strong.

F.B.: We really did have a lot of fun! But it wasn’t without stress, I must say. There were times when I had students with interests that I just didn’t share, and I didn’t want to go there; there were students who had interests that I just didn’t think were valid for an undergraduate degree. And you were constantly having to establish standards – even making them up on the spot. And all of this was hard.

A.M.: How did you think about crafting a professional life for yourself?

F.B.: In the beginning, there wasn’t time to think about this. We were busy just building the place. We had to build the committees, the governance, the academic programs; we had to hire new faculty and set up review procedures; we had to have a graduation

even when half of the faculty at the Long Island Center totally opposed having a graduation because they thought it was too traditional! And back to the stress: there was a lot of conflict. Here were a whole lot of creative people who came and, like me, endowed this empty vessel with their own hopes and dreams, and then it turned out that all of these hopes and dreams were different. And we had to compromise and there were some who didn't want to do that either! So given all of this, we didn't have time to worry or even think about our professional identities. There was always upheaval; there was always something going on. This was it, the college was it. This was the whole thing.

A.M.: And the "whole thing" was sufficient for you, Fernand?

F.B.: Eventually you'd feel a lack. I had many colleagues at Empire State College, but I didn't have many science colleagues at the college. In fact, at Long Island, I had none to begin with. So I reached out beyond Empire State College, and I found colleagues at Stony Brook; I was offered an office and I got involved in a project out there. But I didn't have time for much beyond Empire State College.

A.M.: The college has gone through many changes over these 40 years. How do you think about the differences between the college that you are leaving and the college that you started?

F.B.: It's very much bigger; it's very much more institutional and established; it has a development office, an endowment and thousands of graduates; it's got a structure; it's got momentum. All of these great things. The thing that kept me at the college has been change. I've always been interested in change – in creating something that has lasting value. And that's what we have done, and I am very proud of the little part I've played. But it's true that after some period of time, I did start to get a little bit bored with the mentoring process, so I got involved in administration. I was in charge of the Stony Brook Unit, and I got involved in the American Council on Education's fellowship program and I spent a year at Iona College in administration. As the college changed, I gradually found different roles for myself that kept me engaged and

interested and that also involved helping the college to change. I was the founding associate dean of what at first was called the New York Telephone Corporate College Program. I didn't have sole responsibility, but I hired the initial faculty and was in charge of making it real. That was something that was new for the college: our first corporate cooperation. It wasn't perfect; it had all sorts of contradictions, but we had a great faculty and it was exciting to try to respond to these students. And it was also through this experience that I found out that I wasn't necessarily cut out for academic administration. Given the complexity of the college by that time, and the fact that it was still changing, I was able to keep finding roles for myself where there were new things to do.

A.M.: And your involvement in the MAT program was another example of the college changing and of you finding a new niche.

F.B.: I wanted to go back to something I'd been trained at and something that I hadn't been able to use because we weren't able to have a teacher education program. Our science education efforts were very very minimal because we couldn't do certification. We tried to get an undergraduate certification program going but we were turned down cold. And it was only with the energy of [former president] Joe Moore and the two years of effort that he put in to raise the \$2 million that were necessary to start the MAT, and to get the State University of New York and the State Education Department to say yes, that this happened. I thought it was a tremendous move for the college to get into professional education and was something that was extremely important for the country at the time. I wanted to get involved. I had some expertise that I hadn't used, and I had to come up to speed on what was going on in science education; still, that sounded as though it would be fun. But there was a fair amount of conflict as well. It's Empire State College! Even in a relatively prestructured program, everyone had his or her own idea about what this program should look like and how it should work.

A.M.: It's interesting to me, Fernand, that in an important way, we are returning to your "physics kits" and to 40 years ago and to

the challenges of science education. Are we at the point now, that some of your dreams about how to imaginatively teach science have come to fruition? Have we figured out how to do this well?

F.B.: I think it's a mixed record. Given the way our society has developed, it's not the same world. In 1972, we thought of things in one way; we had these giant science curriculum projects that developed that were wonderful, but for a number of reasons, teachers weren't necessarily all able to implement them across the country. Implementation was a huge problem. Nowadays, I think there's been a tremendous amount of progress in understanding things from the student's point of view. The idea, based on Piaget, is that we have to look at what the students do and what their inherent ideas are and how they express their understanding of these ideas; and then we have to provide some kind of input that helps them modify those ideas to coincide with modern scientific concepts. There's been excellent research in science education along these lines. But a lot of that extraordinary research has not necessarily affected the way we teach. That step still has to be made.

A.M.: With more people doing studies online, with more resources available to more students across the world, with more people trying to create materials that people can use outside of the conventional classroom and the traditional laboratory, and with more attention, as you mention, to "understanding things from the student's point of view," shouldn't we be closer to realizing Berkeley science ed. 1972?

F.B.: Those are all worthwhile developments that I think can and should be continued and amplified. I've done some of this myself by developing virtual labs, simulations of physical situations that you can interact with. I've done one on circular motion, another with musical scales, Newton's First Law ... You can try them out by searching on my name at <http://demonstrations.wolfram.com>. That is all positive. However, I don't think you can virtualize everything; you can virtualize certain things but there are other things that are just better done hands-on: in the kitchen, on the table top. I'm also not optimistic about all the

emphasis on high-stakes tests; there are just way too many standardized tests now, and it always takes the test-makers years and years to catch up, if they ever can, with the best teaching and the best teachers. We found out 40 years ago with the big curriculum projects that there's no way to create a "teacher-proof" curriculum, and I think we're now on the verge of finding out that tests can't create a "teacher-proof" educational system. Teachers simply must be respected and supported for their expertise and their dedication; retaining talented science teachers in the profession is now a huge problem.

A.M.: I know you also got involved in working with students in the computer-related areas.

F.B.: I had tremendous students in these areas. There were times when my load was totally filled up with computer people. I got into that very early; it was another chance to change, to stretch out a little bit. So I taught myself all about computers and I went out and got a master's degree at Stony Brook in computer science. Students weren't clamoring to take physics; it required a sell job. They did want to learn about computer applications and that's what we did together.

A.M.: What are your feelings at this moment as you are stepping away from something that you have been doing for 40 years?

F.B.: I was apprehensive, I must say. I lost some sleep over it. The possibility of taking Empire State College out of my life would give me all of this time and that would be nice, but still it was so satisfying having this set of demands that I knew I had to meet. I learned how to do all of the things I needed to learn to make it work, even in the MAT, and I'd be throwing all of that away for this unsettled existence. I thought the college was starting to change again. I could feel it. The scope of it, the emphasis of it, the new people – change was everywhere. If I had been a younger man I probably would have said: "Hey, great! Now we've got another chance to make it new." Because it needs to be redone. I still think that Empire State College is one of the most exciting, dynamic and wonderful institutions because it has this protean quality. It can change and needs to change. As soon as this college stops



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heading toward the future and changing, it's going to die. It's not like the Ivy League or the Big Ten, where you can rely on momentum almost forever, just turning the crank. Empire State College must be very involved in the latest stuff – what's going on with the state, what's going on with the budget, with national workforce issues, with the unions – I think that's partly what gives Empire State College its life blood. I just didn't think I was at the stage where I could change again in that way. So that told me the story.

A.M.: So you're suggesting that, above all, one of the abiding core values of Empire State College is something like "stay in flux."

F.B.: I think the concern for students, access and responding to what students are interested in – these are our core values; and I think that mentoring has a lot to do with that. Does that mean that we always have to have one mentor and one student and learning contracts and narrative evaluations? I don't think so. As much expertise as I developed in doing that, as much pleasure I took in doing it well, and as much as I believed in it, as much as I knew how effective that could be, it just wasn't going to fly forever. There were many new people around the college with their own goals and their own ideas and ideals. That vision of mentoring was just too big, too complicated; we just couldn't maintain it. So if the college was going to progress, we were going to have to do something about it. It hurts me a bit, especially when I think about people like Jane Shipton and Nat Brod, or when I had to tell Betsy Steltenpohl, who I still see

occasionally, that Empire State College was on the verge of eliminating the narrative contract evaluation. Those are the people who showed me how to be a mentor.

A.M.: What will you do with your time?

F.B.: I have been generating ideas for the last couple of years. I got connected with Teachers College about four years ago and they asked me to teach a course in physics, which has been very nice. So I get the teachers who are getting certified in physics at the master's level, who already have had an undergraduate-level physics experience. They know things that are more advanced but they don't really know the basics well enough, which is what they will be expected to teach. They often don't know how to go about answering students' questions, and they don't have much of a clue about how to be a mentor. I have a lot of fun with that. I've also gotten involved with the New York Academy of Science; I'm the chair of the science education section. We're now running programs for more than 1,200 high school science teachers. I've always wanted to do something for physics in New York City. Physics has deteriorated in the city; there are research studies showing that the number of physics courses and physics teachers in the high schools is gradually decreasing. Outside of the specialized schools, physics is crashing. I've wanted to contribute to nourishing physics teachers, so we now have a Google group of about 90 physics teachers, and once a month we also meet at Teachers College where we have a physics lab and we offer workshops. We are even going to conduct an intensive three-week workshop on physics teaching in July! It's been exciting and refreshing. I guess I've never left science education.

A.M.: Thanks for your time, Fernand. Any final thoughts?

F.B.: It's been a fantastic ride. It really has. The college has been extraordinarily good to me. I think I've helped the college in many ways; I've invested a lot; I've had a lot of relationships that I'll continue. I really don't think that what I've been able to do in these 40 years of experience would have been possible anywhere else. I really don't think so. That the college has been able to keep me interested through all of these years of change is pretty amazing.

Sophisticates, Stereotypes and the Wilderness of Mirrors: International Teaching and Learning

David Starr-Glass, Center for International Programs

Empire State College's Center for International Programs has a small faculty dedicated to its foreign operations. Recognizing the benefits of international teaching and learning, International Programs offers the opportunity for state-side faculty to create and deliver short courses in the summer. Such exposure can have considerable impact on faculty enrichment and development. Direct engagement in international education is obviously most effective for providing faculty with cross-cultural exposure; however, the number of state-side faculty members who can experience this via International Programs is limited because of logistics and budget considerations. Appreciating this, International Programs faculty are encouraged, wherever possible, to share experiences with the broader college community in the hope that our engagement with international students might stimulate more general discussions and exchanges regarding the nature of teaching and learning.

This article is an attempt to do that: to share thoughts and reflections gained in an international teaching and learning situation that might be of interest to our broader community of learning. The venue of this experience was Prague where, in the spring of 2011, I created and conducted a new cross-cultural management course. It is hoped that this essay will not only communicate some of the issues associated with international educational engagement but also will prompt (perhaps even inspire) American-based colleagues to consider offering courses through International Programs. A fuller, more technical discussion of my learning experience, written for an intended audience of course designers and cross-cultural management specialists, also is available (Starr-Glass, 2011).

Transnational Education and Faculty Enrichment

One of the great opportunities that International Programs provides for the college community is ongoing contact with students who would not normally find their way to New York, or be a part of our domestic learning programs. Engagement with these students in teaching and learning situations can allow faculty to develop a better appreciation of issues in cross-cultural communication and to encounter different assumptions, values and perspectives inherent in cross-border education. These issues, while perhaps brought into sharper relief in international situations, also have relevance and utility in dealing with all of our students.

In most American colleges, working with "international students" is restricted to the relatively small percentage (approximately 2 percent) of those who have left their home countries in pursuit of higher education goals. The characteristics of these students living on campuses in America – attitudes toward academic disciplines and toward the educational process, levels of motivation, awareness and adjustment to national culture, and styles of communication – can differ significantly from their peers, who have remained in their own countries to engage in local or transnational educational programs.

Transnational educational models allow students to remain in their countries of origin – or perhaps to make less culturally challenging moves to neighboring countries – and work with an educational provider that operates locally, but that is based in yet another country. (For example, transnational learning might involve a student from Kazakhstan learning in the Czech Republic at an American-based college.) International Programs has adopted a transnational



David Starr-Glass

model in which the college logistically and educationally engages with students in their own geographic regions, embedded in their own cultures. This model of international education has become increasingly popular for a number of reasons: rising interest in the value of dominant models of education (represented by America, Australia and the United Kingdom); the official recognition of educational services as part of global trade; and the availability of effective modes of educational delivery (notably electronic) that can support and complement transnational efforts. Increased transnational availability of education also provides a rich cluster of opportunities and possibilities for the faculties involved in such initiatives:

- *Responding to national and cultural difference.* The most obvious issue for faculty is in effectively communicating their discipline across a divide of cultural and national difference. This is significant when a "teaching" model of education is involved; it is, however, critical when the delivery mode accentuates distance learning or when it tries to establish a relational engagement with the learner. The challenge is to appreciate the constraints and unique bridges to learning that

confront students. National and cultural dimensions are always a part of the learning engagement, even if unrecognized. Instructors, who see themselves primarily as catalysts in the learning engagement rather than as teachers struggling to fill what are perceived as empty vessels, must understand more about cultures of learning and of education other than their own. Cultural assumptions and perspectives will inevitably be brought by students to the learning encounter.

- *Clarification and articulation of our own assumptions and values.* Transnational programs also require the more considered recognition and purposeful projection of the cultural values and perspectives of the educational provider. This articulation is required for students to appreciate the distinctive educational culture (often nationally shaped) in which they are to learn and progress. A communication of values (often little considered) is critical for the learning integrity of the institution and its participating students. Graduating students will, in a sense, be products of the home institution, connected to it through a commonly appreciated sense of value, purpose and tradition. Transnational students often select nondomestic institutions of higher learning to gain an understanding of a different, preferred, educational philosophy. In “international” contexts, where participants have travelled to the

target country, students are immersed in the culture of their local campus and assumed to be absorbing college and educational values by some vague process of osmosis. Transnational students, however, have to be sensitized to institutional cultures and values and, for this to occur, faculty have to become critically aware of their own values and what they consider essential to transmit to their students. The issue is on clarification and portrayal, not on doctrinal or jingoistic conversion.

- *Personal and professional development.* By participating mindfully in transnational programs, faculty are exposed to different environments and cultural experiences. This allows faculty members to appreciate the setting in which learners are embedded and to consider alternative approaches to making effective learning take place. Exposure to different countries and different student populations, if considered and reflected upon, can enrich instructors and suggest different teaching and learning perspectives. Efforts to learn the language and history of the place can reinvigorate those used to teaching, recasting them in the role of learners. Explorations of difference in educational, professional and personal spheres can lead to a deepening commitment to the ongoing enterprise of educating and exploring Otherness.

Stereotypes and Mirrors

The cross-cultural management course was designed and offered in response to a growing need for international business administration students to be aware of and sensitive to differences in managerial approaches and national culture. In the last 20 years, increased globalization and manager mobility have made it much more likely that business graduates will deal with those of another culture. Generally, there has been a trend to accentuate international environments in business education and to allow students to consider and reflect on them, hopefully gaining competencies in cross-cultural aspects of business, management and human resource work

(Johnson, Lenartowicz & Apud, 2006; Thomas & Fitzsimmons, 2008; Witte, 2010).

While the need exists for international awareness and exploration – and while attempts to introduce this into the undergraduate business administration curriculum are laudable – a number of difficulties have surfaced. Undergraduates sometimes prefer immediate answers (however imperfect), rather than deeper explorations of issues (however thoughtful) or more careful articulations of questions (however difficult). Additionally, many business faculty members lack cross-cultural training, or have had little experiential contact with other cultural environments. The result of these constraints, frequent but not inevitable, is that studies of cross-cultural management tend to be the victims of “quick-and-dirty treatment by practitioners and students who are looking for ways to simplify and make sense of the world” (Osland & Bird, 2000, p. 67).

“Quick-and-dirty treatment” also parallels our common behavior in cross-cultural situations. When we first visit a foreign country, it is quite easy to notice not only the similarities but also the differences in the ways that people talk about themselves, understand their environment, construct their national histories and consider their collective trajectory through history. The Czech anthropologist Ladislav Holy (1996) notes that “national identity, like all other identities, is always constructed in opposition to those perceived as the Other” (p. 5). Even on a short visit, if you listen to people and seek out their understandings about their country, you can catch a glimpse not only of the national identity that is projected but also of the oppositional Other that has been constructed as a foil against which to accentuate difference. Sometimes it is this initial perception – useful but superficial – that becomes the focus in teaching cross-cultural issues, or in explaining to students what might constitute national identity and its ramifications in cross-border management situations. There is an attractive clarity in this first blush of difference that leads so many international educational programs to accentuate the “sari, samosas, and steel band,” as Pasternak has it (1998, p. 260).

Transnational students ... have to be sensitized to institutional cultures and values and, for this to occur, faculty have to become critically aware of their own values and what they consider essential to transmit to their students.

The initial thoughts on national identity and cross-cultural difference are reassuring: national culture defines the Other and, in a sense, contains it. Initial responses to national cultural difference are often couched in terms of the exotic and the magical. In Slavic countries, for example, when I meet someone coming out of his office, I have to remember not to shake hands – it is considered bad luck to shake hands over a threshold. This is something that I learned when I went to say goodbye to a friend (a Dutch professor of Polish literature), who was a fellow student in a Czech language class in Prague. He looked at my extended hand and sharply pulled me into his room, explaining at some length the transgression that I had almost committed.

Likewise, when I buy four roses for my Czech hostess, the florist will probably suggest that “five” – or any odd number – might be a better number, unless it is my intention to lay the roses at a graveside, in which case an even number of blossoms would be appropriate. The florist will most likely suggest this because, for her, it is an intuitive cultural issue and she appreciates my foreignness. Equally, she does not want my Czech hostess to feel any awkwardness. Subtle nuances, but once experienced always remembered. Remembered too well perhaps; these are part of, but only a small and peripheral part, of what it is to be Slavic or Czech. But thresholds and the number of flowers in a bouquet often have disproportionate importance in the minds of the casual visitor. They often limit the excursion into the culture, providing clear but insignificant points of references that appear to be border posts, clearly and unequivocally delimiting national territory.

Obvious, exotic and magical difference can help us construct what have been called “sophisticated stereotypes” (Osland & Bird, 2000), which serve the dubious purpose of reifying superficial difference and prejudicing fuller cross-national engagement by reducing “a complex culture to a shorthand description” (p. 66). Stereotypes, of course, have a valuable function. In a world of buzzing complexity and limited mental processing capacity, stereotypes and heuristic judgments provide rapid solutions and prevent paralysis due to over-complexity (De Neys & Vanderputte, 2011; Macrae, Milne

& Bodenhausen, 1994). But stereotypes also act as anchors – remaining unchallenged, generally resisting revision and inhibiting a drift into deeper more confusing reappraisals (Epley & Gilovich, 2006).

Deeper ventures into a country, particularly ventures in search of national culture, have a complex and strangely paradoxical result. Osland (2000) found that long-term sojourners in foreign countries – typically managers in international enterprises – had a less structured and more nuanced perspective of national culture and identity. Often, what they experienced was that confrontation with a recognized Other evoked a sense of how little they really knew about their own culture. They talked about the resulting confusion of their own cultural identity, of questioned personal boundaries, of complexities in forming and sustaining relationships, and of work-related role conflict (Osland & Osland, 2006).

Moving beyond the trivial border posts of a country – residing there for a long time, learning the language, reviewing the politics, talking about identity and aspirations – result in a deepening complexity, which might be salutary for the individual but remains difficult to articulate to others. Such excursions into Otherness are often like T. S. Eliot’s “wilderness of mirrors” where images are illusive and illusionary: reflecting parts of ourselves that we had not considered, emphasizing enigma, and causing a disorientation that can be debilitating.

This has two implications. At a personal level, all incursions into Otherness constitute a continuum of awareness and confusion: a struggle between the superficial understanding and sophisticated stereotypes of the visitor and the confusion and new openness of the sojourner. The second implication is for the instructor – or the fellow traveler/guide in educational encounters – in cross-cultural management work. There is a tension between leaving students with their initial unfounded clarity about national difference or challenging them to become lost and despondent in the complexity and confusion about the country that they are trying to understand. Of course, the wise instructor will seek neither extreme; however, she will have to make a decision about the degree of complexity,

reconsideration – and often confusion – that her students are prepared, or might be expected, to accept.

Authenticity and Action Research

Cross-cultural management courses present their own interesting dynamics and challenges. These challenges are the primary concern of those who craft and initiate these learning experiences. Facilitating learning in this area requires specific disciplinary competencies and preferably experience of cross-cultural communication and engagement. But the creation of these learning environments also requires a consideration of broader educational and learning perspectives. An additional dimension, and one pertinent to this article, is that “constructing learning environments” is not simply a more politically correct or convoluted way of talking about “teaching”: there is a real and fundamental difference. Within the space that constitutes the learning environment, there is an opportunity for all participants to learn – to come to an informed understanding, to assess issues in a critical manner, to integrate and complement prior understanding, and to appreciate that to learn is to change. In this, there is no reasonable distinction between those who are institutionally labeled as students or as instructors – all those in the learning environment should hopefully learn and be changed.

One of the aims in creating the new cross-cultural management course was to provide the opportunity for new learning to occur, and it was understood that I also would learn through this experience. So, in a spirit of educational egalitarianism and democracy, the learning environment was constructed to allow for a collaborative flow of experience and consideration on the issues of cross-cultural difference and similarity. The aim was to create a learning space in which all participants would hopefully steer their own unique course between the allure of sophisticated stereotype and confusion of a cultural wilderness of mirrors. As conceptual aids in achieving this middle path, two elements were introduced into the coursework: the use of authentic examples and a consideration based on action research.

Authenticity, as related to learning experiences, attempts to introduce real-life problems and situations. Learning participants are encouraged to consider these authentic replications of an experienced world and the instructor (mentor/fellow traveler/guide) encourages students to appreciate the issues raised and supports their efforts to move beyond the specific to more general principles. Authentic experiences are characterized as: being grounded in ill-formulated problems and circumstances; having meaningful contexts; possessing depth, complexity and enduring relevance; involving cooperative relationships and shared consequences; and being perceived as real and worth investigating or solving (Lebow & Wager, 1994).

Using authentic experiences resonates with a more general instructional philosophy: authentic learning. Instructors who use authentic learning as a strategy in their learning environments tend to agree with Van Oers and Wardekker (1999) who understand it as: “the dynamic relationship between a personality-under-construction and cultural practices-being-reconstructed, which is aimed at developing an authentic and autonomous person able to participate in a competent, yet critical way in cultural practice” (p. 231). Authentic learning activities provide opportunities for deep (rather than surface) learning (Biggs, 1999; Rosie, 2000) and for learning participants to appreciate the relevance, complexity and transferability of the knowledge that they construct from their explorations (Choo, 2007).

It was hoped that grounding the new learning environment in authentic cross-cultural experiences would not only be of interest to participants, but also would encourage them to appreciate the fuzziness and counterintuitive aspects of much cross-cultural work. In the event, students were asked to read contemporary fieldwork and research associated with cross-cultural management initiatives in many different countries. They were asked to study these experiences and to try to understand what would have happened had the situation occurred in their own country. This, it was hoped, would encourage participants to appreciate and analyze cultural difference

and the ways in which they themselves are part of the cross-cultural process. It also was hoped that these exchanges also would allow me to more fully understand the individual and collective reflections of members of different national cultures.

The second conceptual ingredient of this course was the use of action research. Action research is a methodology which recognizes that (Corey, 1953) “it is impossible to know definitely in advance the exact nature of the inquiry that will develop” (p. 519). Rather than a linear model of research, action research moves forward in a series of continuing loops: incorporating new data, refining assumptions and predictions, and advancing discovery as new facts are revealed. Engagement in action research does not mean that the question is asked, the hypothesis made, the research done and the solution is available. Rather, it means that based on an acknowledged tentative collection of data, interim solutions are proposed, which are acted upon with the intent of obtaining new data, which will be reviewed and incorporated into prior findings, to arrive at another – hopefully more complete – solution, and so on.

As a methodology, action research de-accentuates the role of the researcher (instructor) and incorporates the positions and contributions of those involved in the study (course participants). It suggests and responds to a greater degree of democracy and participative collaboration in the investigation (Carr & Kemmis, 2005). Action research is open, tentative and responsive to new developments and feedback. Winter (1998) notes that it “does not aim to make an initial ‘comprehensive’ review of all previous relevant knowledge; rather it aims instead at being flexible and creative as it improvises the relevance of different types of theory at different stages in the work” (p. 370).

In my new course, an action research approach was considered advantageous because it recognized the limits and limitations of “hard data” (empirical, objective and value-free) in arriving at cross-cultural solutions. It encouraged students to articulate the kinds of additional information, reconsidered assumptions and changed action that they would seek

or suggest. Critically, it also allowed participants to look at actual cross-cultural management scenarios from the published literature and comment on these as though each participant was him or herself a subject matter expert in his or her own national culture. This required participants to identify and explore what might have been intuitive responses or assumed stereotypes in viewing themselves and others.

An action research methodology has been used in many situations where outcomes were not predictable, and where it was anticipated that changed behavior brought about by a sharing of initial research results would lead to new contexts. It is a methodology, but it also is a way of instigating change and reconsideration of initial practice. It has broad implications in change situations: Bridget Somekh (2006) has used it to promote deeper intercultural knowledge and understanding; Carolyn Holmes (2008) to stimulate an interest in research articles among social work practitioners; and others to develop content in higher education or to reformulate learning programs (Burchell, 2000; Krockover, Shepardson, Adams, Eichinger & Nakhleh, 2002).

Reflection on Things Learned

Course participants judged that the new cross-cultural management course worked well. Of course, problems were revealed and new instructional directions were suggested; however, the original design and its implementation seemed to have resulted in all participants leaving the experience with a more refined awareness of the extent to which national culture and identity

My own interests were in facilitating learners to appreciate cultural bridges, to negotiate them, and to understand through that process more about national cultural issues generally.

are critical issues – often unrecognized or incorrectly assessed – in cross-cultural work, especially in business-related contexts.

My own interests were in facilitating learners to appreciate cultural bridges, to negotiate them, and to understand through that process more about national cultural issues generally. Of course, I include myself as a learner in that enterprise. Of particular interest to me was the shift in student demographics that has slowly been occurring in our Prague program. Initially, the majority of our students were either Czechs or Slovaks. Czechs, in particular, are keen to point out that their country lies at the very heart of Europe; that Vienna is east of Prague; and that the Czech lands – for good and for ill – have always acted as a buffer, and sometimes as a bridge, between Western and Eastern Europe: blocs characterized by significant differences in religion, culture and attitude.

Over the years, however, our Prague program, has succeeded in attracting an increasing percentage of new students from Eastern Europe, from Russian and from the Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Khazakstan) that were once part of the former USSR. I was interested in understanding more about the national culture and identity of this newer student body. In the event, 23 students participated in this blended course – lecture presentations at beginning and end, online contact in between. Course participants came from six different countries – Russia (14), Czech Republic (3), Slovakia (3), Canada (1), India (1) and Turkey (1) – but did not include any other Eastern Europeans or those from central Asia.

Over the years, I have reflected on the impact – both personal and professional – of cross-cultural and international experiences. A number of these experiences have been subsequently shared in *All About Mentoring* (Starr-Glass, 2008; 2009; 2010), or published in the peer-reviewed literature. These reflections, together with the present ones, do not point to some sudden realization or quantum shift in understanding. Rather, they suggest that exposure to cross-cultural environments and situations bring about a reconsideration of assumptions, assumptions not previously

recognized – latent and nascent feelings, attitudes and dispositions that were only revealed and examined when brought into focus by a prevailing difference.

In this particular experience, my interest was in the set of values that the Russian students shared in their cross-cultural management explorations. They often explained that they considered that there was cultural convergence: that globalization was concerned not only with trade and commerce, but also with values and attitudes. However, often on reconsideration, they expressed some doubt about the globalization of cultural values and referred to their own value systems that have been formulated in the difficult and turbulent times since the implosion of communism.

These reflections are not so much about details but about pervasive issues that have shaped my international engagement over the years. A number of these seem to be of importance:

- *Otherness, while imperfectly communicated, does exist.* Difference in values and assumptions, particularly in terms of a national culture and identity, can be viewed as relatively small or large. Its degree depends on distance and its significance on acceptance and inclusiveness. However, Otherness is perhaps better acknowledged and responded to than avoided or ignored. Convergence of national cultural values may well be taking place, and such values are themselves being constantly constructed and reconstructed, individual national cultures, however ill-defined, have not vanished or ceased to be important.
- *Stereotypes are unavoidable but need not be limiting.* Stereotyping is an inevitable human response to uncertainly, complexity and ambiguity. It provides a fast, sometimes comforting place from which one makes judgments and reaches conclusions. It also tends to be resistant to revision and self-fulfilling, making the stereotype such an enduring feature of the landscape. But even sophisticated stereotypes can be recognized, questioned and transmuted

by degree into larger, more ill-defined versions of sources from which they have been extracted.

- *Engagement with international students demands awareness.* The awareness that seems particularly relevant is the uniqueness and individuality that the Other always possesses, but which those labeled as international students have in abundance. Whether on their own territory as transnational students, or on our campuses as visiting students, they deserve to be appreciated and understood for their own uniqueness. They also deserve our attention in matters of communication, crossing difference and inclusion.
- *Learning engagement with international students is dynamic and stimulating.* Of course, all learning engagements should aspire to be dynamic; however, the added nuances and subtleties of cross-cultural issues can introduce layers of excitement. The excitement is centered, perhaps, more on the instructor who has to explore and navigate new vistas and landscapes. This should not detract from the learning value of the enterprise; instead, it should add a freshness and vitality that might be all the more obvious simply because we have labeled our students as “international.” This dynamic and excitement also might be profitably shared with students.
- *Learning engagements should be inclusive and benefit all.* While there is a concern for the student, shifting to an awareness of participants can stress that power, authority and influence do not flow from the centralized instructor. I learn from my students in ways that they cannot perhaps appreciate. Sometimes that learning can be used thoughtfully in future encounters with other students: sometimes it can only change me, which also is advantageous. In the cross-cultural management course, a deliberate objective was to create added value for myself as well as for other participants. We might have learned different things, but the experience provided each of us with an opportunity to reflect on what we

thought we understood, realize that our knowledge was bounded, and make the attempt to push the boundaries and reconfigure our understanding. Put another way, if I did not learn anything from my engagement with students, what is the likelihood that they themselves learned anything?

The Value and Possibility of International Engagement

As our college moves toward a new challenge of openness and accessibility, faculty members might begin to consider how they may contribute and respond to these exciting opportunities. It sometimes happens that the discussion is centered on the technology or the logistics of change; whereas, in reality, the issue is more about how we will use increased connectedness to engage in more appropriate and effective teaching and learning. Connections, in an electronic or social sense, are important but they are only the stage upon which our action and efforts are played out.

As we move forward to further connectivity, it is important to appreciate that this increases potential but does not guarantee excellence. The old goal remains the future goal: to connect with new learners in meaningful, effective ways that facilitate successful learning and bring about educational gains. This constant challenge is simply made more obvious in international and transnational situations, where we are more conscious of the processes of communicating and crossing boundaries and borders. These boundaries and borders, different but just as real, also are confronted – but often unrecognized – in engagement with our “domestic,” home-grown learners.

This essay has attempted, briefly and perhaps imperfectly, to share my experience in designing and managing a specific course in a specific context. There were aspects of the design and conceptual framework that might be of value to others confronted with similar instructional design situations. More importantly, however, was the attempt to convey that engaging in learning experiences where difference is recognized – whether in terms of cross-cultural work, international education or transnational student behavior – can

be generalized and used to inform all of our teaching and learning work. There is value in international education: it acts as a hot-house for germinating innovative solutions to novel problems; as a forum for reconsidering basic and evolving aspects of our educational philosophy and practice.

The value in international education is not simply for our International Programs but also is available, through communication and sharing, for the whole college community of learning. Hopefully, some readers will themselves explore dimensions that they consider significant through the lens of international engagement in new learning environments. If so, they may be interested in sharing their ideas and course offerings directly with International Programs. To be present in educational engagements is to be open to change. Involvement in international teaching and learning is one of the most direct and inspiring ways of initiating personal and professional growth.

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Reports from the NEH Summer Institutes

MaryNell Morgan and Wayne Ouderkirk, Northeast Center

The National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Program in the Humanities for School and College Educators provides college and university teachers opportunities to study a variety of humanities topics from history to philosophy to political science to literature and languages. Faculty apply to the NEH to participate in a specific residential summer program across the country. More information is provided at www.neh.gov. (Note that most applications are due by 01 March.) Two of our colleagues attended in the summer of 2011, and here, they share their experiences with us.

The Role of Place in African-American Biography

MaryNell Morgan

I was honored to be one of the 25 applicants selected to participate in the 2011 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute titled “The Role of Place in African-American Biography.” The four week institute, June 13 - July 9, 2011, was sponsored by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, Williams College and the Upper Housatonic African-American Heritage Trail and was directed by Frances Jones-Sneed, professor of history, MCLA; Richard Courage, professor of English and literature, Westchester Community College – State University of New York and Robert Paynter, professor of anthropology, University of Massachusetts – Amherst. In this brief essay, I attempt a statement of the highlights of the institute, an assessment of its value to me and other participants, and an encouragement to my Empire State College colleagues to consider applying for an NEH Summer Institute.

Five biographies provided the primary focus of the institute, including those of Elizabeth “Mum Bett” Freeman, Agrippa Hull, Reverend Samuel Harrison, W.E.B. Du Bois and James Van Der Zee. Participants were



MaryNell Morgan

engaged with an extensive bibliography, from which particular readings were selected. In addition to the readings, the visiting faculty and field trips provided an intensive, engaging and enjoyable learning experience. As my project, I examined the concept of “place” as geography and “place” as social position through considering the multiple places that influenced the life and work of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

Like the directors, the participants came from several social science and humanities disciplines, as well as interdisciplinary programs, including history, English, literature, anthropology, political science, public administration, Africana studies, and women’s studies. Among us were graduate students, independent scholars, junior and senior professors from community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The variety of interrelated topics and the multiple lenses of the participants contributed to thoughtful and engaging discussions. On several occasions we voluntarily continued our discussions beyond our scheduled session. In addition, at the request of participants, an informal discussion session was added to our activities. An “esprit de corps”

emerged among the participants and the directors. We continue to communicate with each other; we invite each other to our various campuses, to conferences, and to educational and social activities.

I attribute the outstanding quality of this NEH Summer Institute to its leaders, visiting faculty, field visits, cultural experiences, location, and the participants themselves. The visiting faculty all made valuable contributions in their areas or expertise.

For me, the most memorable of the visiting faculty (and their topics) were:

- Leslie Brown, “Doing Local and Public History”;
- Charles Dew, “Slavery in the USA”;
- David Levinson and Emilie Piper, “Elizabeth ‘Mum Bett’ Freeman: A Biography,” and “Searching for Mum Bett: The Documents”;
- Gretchen Gerzina, “Lucy Terry Prince and Abijah Prince: A Case Study”;
- Jerrienne Boggis, “The Life of Harriet Wilson”;
- Gary Nash, “Agrippa Hull, Tadeus Kosciuszko and Thomas Jefferson”;
- Patricia Sullivan, special lecture at Clinton AMEZ Church, Great Barrington, Mass., “Lift Every Voice, Du Bois and the NAACP”;
- Deborah Willis, “The Tradition of Black Photographic Masters” and “James Van Der Zee: A Case Study.”

All the field trips and cultural events were excellent; they added a dimension of learning that could only be achieved through direct experience. We visited:

- The Juneteenth Celebration: Craig Harris performed James Weldon Johnson’s “God’s Trombones” at the Colonial Theatre, Pittsfield, Mass.;

- UMASS-Amherst; the W.E.B. Du Bois Library and the Department of Anthropology Archaeology Lab, and Historic Deerfield and the Places of Lucy Terry Prince;
- The Ashley House, Sheffield, Mass.;
- Berkshire Athenaeum Public Library, Pittsfield, Mass.; and
- Du Bois' Great Barrington, including the Clinton AMEZ Church, the boyhood site, the Mahaiwe Cemetery, and the birth place.

I have previously visited most of these sites, yet to go there with the leaders and participants in the institute was very special.

This was my third, and most outstanding of three excellent NEH Summer Institutes. Prior to joining the faculty at Empire State College, I was an NEH Institute participant in 1982 where we took up the theme of "Southern Black Culture" at Spelman College, Atlanta, Ga.; and in 1991, during which we examined "Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South" at Duke University, Durham, N.C. 1991 was my last summer on a traditional academic calendar. NEH Summer Institutes are scheduled with that traditional calendar in mind. It is a challenge to include a NEH Institute in our Empire State College schedule. Administrative and collegial supports were essential to making this invaluable experience possible. It might make you feel tired, but for me, that was far overshadowed by feelings of renewal and revitalization! I highly recommend it!

As a result of this work, my scholarship has been revitalized and my commitments to archival research and field experience learning have been deepened. Overall, to paraphrase poet Nikki Giovanni and musician Sun Ra, the NEH Summer Institute "The Role of Place in African-American Biography" was so outstanding that "even the mistakes were correct!"

Sustainability, the Humanities and the Empire State College Mentor

Wayne Ouderkirk

Last summer (2011), I was privileged to be selected to participate in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer



Wayne Ouderkirk

Institute. Sponsored by Arizona State University's Institute for Humanities Research and held at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz., the gathering had as its theme, "Rethinking the Land Ethic: Sustainability and the Humanities."

What follows are some of my own reflections on the institute itself, my experience there and its aftermath, and some thoughts about the role of such experiences for Empire State College faculty.

The institute, like all of NEH's programs for college/university faculty had the following general purpose:

Under the guidance of distinguished scholars, NEH Summer Institutes provide intensive collaborative study of texts, topics and ideas central to undergraduate teaching in the humanities. NEH Summer Institutes aim to prepare NEH summer scholars to return to their classrooms with a deeper knowledge of current scholarship in key fields of the humanities. (NEH, 2012, NEH Summer Institutes section, para. 1)

In particular, this institute focused on the great American environmental thinker, Aldo Leopold, and his land ethic, which has attracted widespread attention from environmentalists of all types, from back-country rangers to philosophy professors. As the institute's title indicates, the intent was to connect that land ethic, proposed more than 60 years ago (and analyzed, elaborated and interpreted ever since), to contemporary debates about sustainability.

One important theme that attracted me to this institute was its humanities focus. On its website, the co-directors observed that discussions of sustainability usually turn almost immediately to discussions of economics, climate science, and political and policy issues. Perhaps it was those kinds of foci that, in part, had made me wary of the concept of sustainability. I had previously avoided making use of the concept in my teaching and writing, instead staying within the more traditional "environmental" arena. But here was a major scholarly gathering that promised to broaden out the discussion to the humanities. There was no way I was not going to apply, and I am more than happy that I did so. All the nonhumanities aspects of sustainability issues are important, no doubt, but an exclusive focus on them obscures the fact that the humanities, too, have important contributions to make to our understanding and responses to sustainability – as they have for many, many issues that affect our human condition.

Neither sustainability nor Leopold's land ethic is exclusive to any single discipline. Both are interdisciplinary through and through; the institute was as well, in its design and in its participants. There were 25 participants, from 25 different colleges and universities around the country, from a mixture of academic disciplines: literature, religion, architecture, history, American studies, philosophy, anthropology, political science. In addition, there was a diversity of experience in the group, from three graduate students (a new possibility under NEH rules), to new assistant professors, to senior professors. (In fact, I had to make a fast psychological adjustment because some of my institute colleagues – not just the graduate students – were not only younger than our Empire State College students but also were younger than my own adult children!)

Four weeks in duration, the institute focused on a different humanities perspective each week. First was an historical examination (led by Julianne Lutz Warren of NYU) of how Leopold developed the land ethic, how it relates to our intellectual history, and how all that feeds into a fuller understanding of sustainability. Indeed, one of the themes we discussed was that Leopold's ideas, though formulated long before the concept

of sustainability gained prominence, are not only related to sustainability but also provide a formidable structure in which to situate that concept. Next was a week on indigenous perspectives on the land and sustainable use of it, through the lens of a Native American poet of the southwest, Simon Ortiz.

The third week, led by Bron Taylor of the University of Florida, focused on religion and sustainability, connecting to both Leopold and environmental ethics and to contemporary “green” religious developments and movements. Our fourth week centered on environmental ethics and sustainability, examining Bryan Norton’s arguments for adaptive management; Norton, himself, was the leader for this week.

If you look at the general NEH statement of purpose included earlier and at my description of the structure of the institute, you can see that there is a model at work that can be interpreted in at least two ways. If we emphasize the NEH phrase, “intensive collaborative study of texts,” the image of a group of peers studying and analyzing together comes to mind. If we emphasize “under the guidance of distinguished scholars,” a more traditional classroom model might come to mind. Different faculty at the institute can and do interpret their role and their structuring of the seminars in one of those ways.

Anyone who applies to an institute needs to understand that the approaches of the leaders can and do vary in those ways. This was my second NEH Institute, and at the earlier one (2001), the faculty were much more interested in collaboration, though they were all distinguished scholars. In my Arizona experience, collaboration was not universally emphasized. That is not to say that I did not gain from all the seminars, just that I had to adjust my expectations and approaches at different times.

Both of the institutes I have attended had a wonderful variety of activities built into them, all connected with the overall theme and with each week’s focus. In this case, in addition to the main scholar for the week, each week also featured at least one guest faculty member, as well as a field trip. For example, in week two with its

focus on indigenous culture, a prominent anthropologist of southwest indigenous peoples, Elizabeth Brandt of Arizona State University, gave a very interactive lecture on how the first people to live in the desert southwest did so sustainably over an extended period of time. Her discussion was all the more meaningful because it was outdoors, beneath the cliff dwelling at Montezuma National Monument, which was the first of our field destinations that day. The second one was a contrasting but fascinating attempt of modern westerners to live sustainably in that climate: Arcosanti, the desert creation of famed architect Paolo Soleri. After our guided tour and individual rambling around the buildings, we were fortunate to have an hour discussion time with Soleri, who at 92 is still witty, confident and committed to his vision. (Anyone can visit Arcosanti; go there if you have the chance!)

Two additional features of the institute deserve attention. First, each of the distinguished scholars gave a public presentation at the Flagstaff Public Library. These lectures were publicized on the NAU campus, at the library, in local publications, and in local stores and shops. Attendance by the community members varied greatly, but I think the effort to bring scholarly work to the public who support it is a wonderful notion that should be emulated as much as possible.

Second, unlike the institute I attended 10 years ago, a requirement of this one was to include in one’s application a description of a project that one would work on during and after the institute. The project could be either scholarly research and writing or a pedagogical project, such as course design. Our group was pretty evenly divided between those two categories, with some participants working on books, some on journal articles, and others developing sustainability-related courses or sections of courses. I was in the latter group.

When I saw this institute requirement in the application materials, I decided to offer as my project the revision of my learning contract/study/course, Environmental Ethics, which I had not really revised in a while. And I thought that this project would be one that I could easily complete

over the four weeks of the institute, which included in its schedule time for such work. However, once we began the institute, my assumptions about the project went out the window. I discovered, to my delight, that in addition to being excellent scholars in their own disciplines, my colleagues there were committed, talented, and in some cases, inspirational teachers who had much to teach me about course design, strategy and resources.

We had many opportunities to consult with one another on instructional techniques, materials, plans, and I found myself challenged much more than I had expected. As a result, I did indeed revise my course, but at the end of the institute I had only a general syllabus – though I had learned a great deal about planning a course and knew where I wanted to go with it. After I returned, I continued revising and redesigning. I offered the first version of the revised course in the September 2011 term as part of the Environmental Studies Residency. Although it was successful, I learned still more and again offered it, but with several revisions, in the January and March 2012 terms. I am grateful to my institute colleagues for their major contributions to my teaching.

Needless to say, I believe the requirement of a project for institute participants is an extremely valuable one. It provides a practical outlet for the intellectual work of the institute, as well as a mechanism that can increase the interaction of the participants, making the experience even more meaningful, which was certainly the case for me.

Indeed, for me, one of the most important results of both institutes I have attended has been to meet, interact with, and be professionally connected with a group of amazing colleagues who are passionately interested in the same things as I. The connections I made at the first institute have been invaluable to me in a variety of professional ways; some of the colleagues I met there have become lifelong friends, collaborators on scholarly projects, and friendly faces in the crowds at conferences and other events. I have no doubt that the friendships I made in 2011 will prove equally meaningful.

For Empire State College faculty, I think such experiences and connections are essential, and I urge anyone interested in humanities themes to apply to an institute that is of serious interest to you. (The topics vary yearly; visit the NEH website.) The institute experience differs from conference participation (which I agree also is professionally important) in being intimate, intense and extended, usually for a month! Time spent focused on the institute themes, with the continuity that comes from several weeks of attention, is an absolute treasure that we rarely gain in our normal Empire State College routines. The discussion of your own or someone else's ideas can last for days or weeks instead of an hour at a conference. Like this one, many of the institutes are interdisciplinary, so scholars from outside the humanities who have a strong connection to a theme also can apply.

Of course, I realize that some colleagues will rightly ask how one can manage to break away from regular Empire State College

duties to attend a month-long event like this. In both of my experiences with summer institutes, our college administration has been extremely supportive. Being selected as a participant for an NEH Institute is an honor for both the individual faculty member and for the college (participation is competitive), so both the individual and the college gains. The central issue then becomes how to manage one's college duties to accommodate the time away. With the college's recently instituted ability to schedule our teaching across different college terms, faculty should be able to take time without serious disruption to students. It also helps to have supportive colleagues in your local center or unit who can help strategize about such issues and offer appropriate help when they can. Finally, my experience is that our summer terms tend to have lighter enrollments, so the need for adjustments is less daunting.

None of that constitutes a magic solution to individual challenges in doing something like this. Nevertheless, I think the benefits to individual faculty in terms of professional development are invaluable and make the effort to participate more than worthwhile. Also, our students benefit from a mentor who returns from such an experience refreshed, with newly acquired knowledge and/or perspectives that inform one's teaching. And the college grows in stature by having a faculty member who was part of a prestigious national scholarly event. Everyone gains.

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Using Feminist Pedagogy in Mentoring Independent Studies in History

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Introduction

As a student for seven years and as an educator for now more than 14 years, I have found the college experience to be a space in which new ideas can be introduced and tried, where inquiry can be fostered and new insights can be gained. These aspirations have, of course, not always been achieved. I also have found the college classroom stifling of creativity and reinforcing of hierarchical power relationships between professor and student through pedagogical strategies that stress rote repetition and thus student passivity. Nonetheless, as an educator and feminist, I have remained optimistic. One approach to accomplish such a goal – and thereby, in my view, to create a forum for truly engaging intellectual discourse in a nurturing environment based on mutual trust and honesty that fosters the students' self-empowerment and offers learning experiences to both students and the instructor – is the application of a feminist pedagogy to teaching. In my capacity as a mentor and instructor using the individualized independent study model, I am able to apply feminist pedagogy directly to my interactions with my students. Independent studies are an alternative mode of instruction significantly different from the traditional college classroom or large lecture hall. Independent studies allow for an in-depth engagement with the student and her or his ideas and for the experience of self-discovery. According to Renee Sandell (1991), "feminist pedagogy is based on an alternative instructional model" (p. 180). Sandell sees knowledge construction as gendered and experience based. In my work as an Empire State College mentor in Historical Studies, I remain committed to such an "alternative" by offering students the opportunity to discover the connectedness between gendered identity and their own learning of history and to apply their understanding to a larger historical and societal context.

Feminist Pedagogy

To begin my discussion, I feel it necessary to offer my own perception of feminist theory and feminist pedagogy. In my view, the definition of feminist pedagogy is fluid and dynamic, based on each individual scholar's concept of feminist theory and its application to teaching. Hence, before engaging in the development of one's own approach and the actual teaching process, an instructor has to first develop and affirm her own understanding of feminist theory. Similar to the variations in feminist pedagogy, feminist theory also has multiple definitions and expressions. Consensus is difficult to achieve, as there are internal tensions within a dynamic movement that does not possess a central core of nationally accepted leaders. bell hooks (1984) addresses that issue in her book, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, when she discusses the ambivalence about power within the movement, as women refer to women as powerless victims, while at the same time advocating for empowerment and equality within a patriarchal society. This is an important aspect to consider, as mainstream society tends to categorize feminists simply as women who want preferential treatment in their relentless pursuit of power within currently male-dominated spheres. Feminism has to be seen as much more than just the struggle for pay equity and job opportunities, as important as these issues might be. In a more general sense, as Kolmar and Bartkowski (2005) put it: "Feminist theory is a body of writing that attempts to describe, explain, and analyze the conditions of women's lives" (p. 3).

Feminist theory encompasses aspects of some of the following points as discussed by Katherine Allen (1988), who in her essay, "Integrating a Feminist Perspective Into Family Studies Courses," focused upon three central feminist themes: the assumption that women are exploited; the commitment to empower women; and the use of a



Christiane Warren

perspective that critiques the intellectual status quo. I would add my own emphasis (further supported by Crabtree and Sapp [2003]) that feminist theory and pedagogy have to include the awareness of racial and class distinctions within society; therefore, one committed to such an orientation must advocate continuously for social change and social justice. An instructor who teaches through a feminist theoretical lens introduces ideas and realities to her students that might be uncomfortable at first, but are absolutely necessary to address in order to achieve a more egalitarian society. As Sandell (1991) pointed out, "feminist pedagogy seeks to transform the academy [through] creating a liberatory environment in which teacher and student act as subject and not as objects" (p. 181).

Practical Applications

Given this theoretical conceptualization, one then has to develop teaching practices that accurately reflect one's own beliefs based on research and self-reflection. It is helpful to use feminist educators as role models. Ellen Carillo (2007) in her piece, "'Feminist' Teaching/Teaching 'Feminism,'" outlines her own practices of having a collaborative working relationship with her students: not

lecturing, but asking questions more than answering them; not asserting her authority over the student, but working with them.

Carillo's approach reflects my current ideas and efforts. In my mentoring work in an individualized independent study context, I can apply my ideas of pedagogy in an ideal way. I meet individually with my students regularly for hour-long tutorial sessions in which we discuss the content of their studies, address any questions they might have, and also discuss the assigned readings. I also offer additional information that is not covered in the texts. My students and I are on a first name basis, which is reflective of one ingredient of nonauthoritarian teaching, a tenet of feminist pedagogy. I do my best to get to know each student personally and seek to develop an individual rapport. At times, I have to be mindful not to place content over process in order to allow for my pedagogical ideas to take shape and therefore to benefit the student in his or her particular learning process. As an historian, I realize how easy it is to get easily caught up in weaving the historical narrative, wanting (desperately!) to give the student all of the knowledge I have acquired, and wishing she would soak it up with the same enthusiasm I have. Yet, if one wants to teach from a feminist standpoint, one has to find ways to allow the student to become actively involved in acquiring knowledge through a more democratic process that opens both student and mentor to self-scrutiny, that encourages collaborative engagement in trying to make sense of the past, and that allows students to draw their own conclusions and interpretations. It is my responsibility to acknowledge those ideas as valid and important, even when they do not fully reflect my own perspectives. This is part of the challenge!

Teaching from a feminist perspective allows the student room for independent thought and fosters a quest for further intellectual inquiry. Providing such a forum is accepted by teachers and scholars who embrace a feminist orientation across the disciplines. Thus, for example, Michal Zion and Michaela Slezak (2005) in their article, "It Takes Two to Tango: In Dynamic Inquiry, the Self-Directed Student Acts in Association with the Facilitating Teacher," emphasize the need for the teacher in the sciences to

be a facilitator in the challenging endeavor of independent and authentic "inquiry." I would argue that their insights can be applied to students in any learning situation at any academic level.

The Four Domains of Teaching

According to Zion and Slezak (2005), inquiry learning and teaching have been formulated into four major domains: first, the teachers' beliefs about inquiry; second, the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge; third, the teachers' inquiry practices; and fourth, the students' learning from inquiry-based instruction (p. 876). These four domains can be introduced to the learning process with adult learners while maintaining a feminist underpinning. They pose a unique guide post for any instructor who emphasizes the importance of a student's independent knowledge acquisition. Thus, in my interaction in one-to-one meetings with my students within an independent study model, I try to put into practice my own belief that learning about history does not come only through reading a textbook, but by asking questions of oneself, of the author and of the mentor. No instructor should serve as the sole knowledge-keeper; she has to become a facilitator of discovery learning and allow students to bring in their own experiences and their own unique methods of knowledge acquisition into a collaborative and complementary setting that allows for a multifaceted discourse.

As an historian, I foster this discovery process through the assignment of different kinds of readings. Students learn from the reading of secondary texts as well as, more importantly, from primary texts. As a result, they are introduced to the ideas and thoughts of historians who have researched past events and have interpreted them based on different historical perspectives. Through the assignment of critical analysis essays, the students are presented with the opportunity to discern critically what the main point of the author might be, as well as to raise questions and concerns with me at our meetings. The readings in primary source collections are of particular importance, as they open up a window into the past that has been largely previously closed to them. My goal is to offer sources that show the

many ways in which women and minorities have been relegated to the margins of society and to let the students explore their own pathways to understanding this key tenet of feminist theory: that it is essential to learn about the experiences of women as well as other oppressed groups in American society and to gain insights into their empowerment. These ideas are often reflected in the papers students write that prove to be enlightening and often thought provoking both to students and to their mentor. By coming in close contact with the voices of the past and intimately working with the primary texts, students have a medium offered to them that provides the tools to practice intellectual inquiry, as Zion and Slezak's third domain suggests. For me, this method of supporting further inquiry also reflects another connection to feminist teaching, which can be understood as an open forum for challenging previously held beliefs that may have been part of the dominant hegemonic canon regarding gender and race oppression. In this way, my students can look carefully at topics and events thus far only marginally addressed (or even completely untold) in mainstream history texts.

Zion and Slezak's fourth domain is interwoven within my overall teaching approach. I implore my students to undertake rigorous research and thus form their own questions that they then seek to answer as they engage in further and deeper research. In all of my advanced-level studies, for example, students are expected to write a research paper on a topic of their choosing, as long as their topic is relevant to the study. The papers must have a clearly defined thesis statement based on independently researched, peer-reviewed, scholarly texts. I also ask students to include a discussion of a primary text.

Through these assignments, my students often write papers that question the status quo based on the learning experience they have had. As an ongoing commitment to causes of social justice as a core understanding of feminist pedagogy, in tutorials my students gain practice in questioning and addressing injustices and becoming more aware of deviations from dominant society's expectations. And, all along the way, they are participating in

knowledge creation. As Zion and Slezak (2005) stated: “Hands-on inquiry properly redistributes the responsibility of learning to the students and the student’s role changes from a passive recipient of information to a constructivist participant in the creation of understanding” (p. 876).

My understanding of the constructivist approach is that I have the role of a guide or facilitator of learning. My students’ median age is 34, and I have had students who were in their late 50s or early 60s. This population brings with it its own unique skill set. While some may not know much about history and are apprehensive to re-enter the college experience at a later point in their lives, they have a lifetime of knowledge that is invaluable and cannot be found in the traditional college student of 18-22 years of age. My adult students are eager to absorb new knowledge, as they are more committed to their learning than a typical 18-year-old. They struggle to juggle work, family and college obligations and want to excel at their studies. Thus, they come to a history study with a willingness to learn and an openness to engage actively in their learning process. My mentoring goal is to match this readiness with an expectation that my students become self-agents of their learning through constant inquiry into alternative theories and potentially challenging propositions that they are expected to address in their ongoing written work. Fostering independent learning revolves around clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success – a key component of feminist pedagogy.

Transcendence of Ideas

My pedagogical ideas are sometimes at odds with the general assumptions made by many of my students regarding college instruction. This is, in part, due to the fact that my students have very little knowledge or awareness regarding class, race and gender discrimination issues and do not believe that such topics apply to them in their daily lives. An experiment with inclusive and nonauthoritative teaching methods, along with a shift in content emphasis, is not what they expected – nor often what they wanted! I thus see part of my task as trying to interweave matters of race, gender and class into the historical narrative and to

urge them to offer their own interpretations and form their own ideas and conclusions. Although the contents and the form is often quite new to them, in so-called “hyphenated classes” such as African-American history, Native-American history and American women’s intellectual history, as well as African history, historiography and feminist theory and women’s studies, my students often respond enthusiastically with comments such as, “I never knew anything about this subject”; “This gives me a whole other perspective on American history”; and “It makes me rethink thoughts on race and gender oppression in our nation’s history.” My learning contracts in all of these studies are created along three basic feminist assumptions: that all women are oppressed; that the social system imposes a reality on their daily lives; and that feminists have a “double vision” that allows them to function in an oppressive society. Historically, women have to come to terms with a male-dominated system and survive in it. This has been very challenging and continues to be so even today. I want my students to see that those who have advocated for social justice have had to be able to move within the dominant society while working on behalf of women’s rights and a more inclusive and egalitarian society. My own contribution as a feminist teacher of history is to guide my students to a fuller awareness of women’s lives and to encourage them to apply what they have learned to the present day.

Methodology

As noted earlier, I think it is vital for any student of history to be able to listen to the past from firsthand accounts by interacting with the voices, thoughts and beliefs expressed in the past, uncensored by the analysis of historians. Thus my students are expected to closely engage in scrutinizing primary texts and interacting with me in a way that fosters intellectual inquiry and an open dialogue. I want my students to gain practice as historians by doing research in archives, by reading other scholars’ thoughts, as well as finally writing their own interpretation of history. As Jere Brophy (1995) in his “Essay Review of Teaching and Learning History” wrote: “Learning must proceed through simultaneous

processing of both the meta-level framework and the data-level information” (p. 99). In other words, learners need a larger context available to them in which they can place the specific “facts” they learn from both the texts and from discussions with their mentor. Above all, and in keeping with the feminist lens, there needs to be an open forum for this kind of work that is offered by teaching in a nonauthoritative way. Allowing the student to come to his or her own conclusions without interference or guidance from me means that the student gains the knowledge firsthand through his or her own approach to the words written in the studied materials. This is especially rewarding for the student as he or she has had significant input in what goes into the study, including actively participating in setting these learning contract requirements in concert with me. This purposefully limits my role as an authority figure and places me on a level that is closer to the student, as we both chart the course of the study collaboratively.

This purposefully limits my role as an authority figure and places me on a level that is closer to the student, as we both chart the course of the study collaboratively.

This approach is similar to what Beverly Cooper and Bronwen Cowie (2010) have found in their definition of so-called assessment for learning. The authors understand “assessment for learning” as revolving around strategies such as “clarification and sharing of learning intentions and criteria for success ... comment-only marking and interactive feedback” between the teacher and the student (p. 979). It is at times difficult to maintain the elimination of grading during the duration of any study. But, giving grades places me in a position of authority thus disempowering the students. Instead, I offer

extensive commentary on their written work as well as their other projects, but often do not give grades on each assignment. At the end of the term, I meet with my students to get and give feedback on the overall learning experience, which enables me to explain how I arrived at the formal course grade. It also gives the student an opportunity to voice her or his impressions and reflections on the entire experience. From this ongoing student feedback, I can then address possible revisions of future study offerings. I have found this process particularly rewarding in fostering students' self-esteem and self-agency as it promotes their active participation in the study and their self-advocacy. It also directly reflects and seeks to put into practice the feminist idea of creating an egalitarian space for students and faculty. Most importantly, I hope that students are slowly becoming the delineators of their own learning and I am gaining my own practice as the conduit through which they gain new knowledge. Our open dialogue becomes a means to center their newly gained knowledge within a context that addresses feminist concerns of equality and power and the formation of a community of learning between instructor and student.

Pedagogy for Fostering Intellectual Inquiry

The underlying feminist idea of an ongoing quest of having a questioning mind is reflected in other scholars' approaches to learning, even though they may not subscribe to feminist pedagogy per se. For example, Jeffrey D. Nokes (2010) argued that "Healthy skepticism is a useful attribute to historical inquiry" (p. 104). While his paper focused on the learning in the secondary classroom, much can be learned from his findings. I see Nokes supporting the idea of having students read conflicting texts and allowing students to grapple with those new ideas and coming to their own conclusions. That is what feminist theory expects to happen in society at large. In my studies, I can introduce my students to the

concept of an everlasting journey for more knowledge that questions widely-held beliefs and challenges these beliefs with a mindset of promoting actual change for greater social justice.

Zion and Slezak (2005) also see that instructors foster the honing of critical thinking skills and self-directed study that is necessary for my students in an independent study setting. This is of particular importance in the study of history as there are no pre-set answers, but rather multiple readings of texts and different interpretations of events and their significance that I want my students to see and feel. Reading history through the lens of feminist theory enables the student to reach beyond the already known and to discover the yet-to-be-accepted new knowledge through the ongoing struggle against discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society within and outside of academia.

Conclusion

I see the need to make the connection between contemporary feminism and feminism as it has been developed and expressed throughout history in multiple ways through the voices (often silenced) of women of all colors and classes. It is through the study of ideas of our foremothers that we all learn and continue to learn to form a greater union that fosters collaborative and egalitarian learning, and creates teaching strategies that reflect feminist pedagogy in teaching history in our schools (at whatever level) today. Being student centered and learner oriented is a core principle of feminist pedagogy. Such an orientation is applicable to teaching history in a unique fashion, and encourages students to become more actively involved in their own lives and the lives around them. It is invaluable to any informed citizen committed to the lifelong process of learning.

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Don't Bet Like a Girl, and Other Lessons I Learned on the Way to Being a Contestant on *Jeopardy!*

Cindy Conaway, Center for Distance Learning

I've been watching the "trivia"-based, nationally televised Jeopardy! quiz show most of my life and had always hoped I might qualify to compete on the show some day. My learning style really doesn't lend itself to memorizing lists of things; like many academics, I tend to know obscure facts and factoids and like to puzzle things out. However, it turns out that a wide range of knowledge is only half the battle for Jeopardy! success. As I began preparing to appear on the show, I discovered that successful contestants use a lot of strategies that I would have to learn and internalize. One of the things I have noticed for years, for example, was that when wagering (an integral element of the competition), women seem to bet less aggressively than men, and don't win even though they know more answers than their competition. I resolved that if I ever did get on the show, I wouldn't make that mistake. Once I qualified for the show – proving that I knew enough of the type of material I was likely to confront and could answer quickly enough – I became aware that I had a few strikes against me, including my gender, my reflexes, my age, and my lack of numerical agility.

This article is about how as an academic, a woman and a right-brained individual, I planned for and experienced my time on the show. It also is about how I treated it as a research project in my field of media studies – one most scholars in television studies know little about. I was never likely to get on the set of Gossip Girl or Parks and Recreation, and certainly wouldn't get to star in them even if I did, but this, I could experience.

Background

During my first year as an undergraduate at the University of Chicago (U of C), the "core curriculum" was changed. While still

required to take three one-quarter classes in humanities, social sciences, physical sciences and biological sciences, I could drop the third quarter of calculus I had been misguidedly placed into. Instead, I could take two additional quarters of French.

Fast forward to my fourth year. After a false start concentrating in behavioral science, I was doing quite well in English. I had covered 17th-19th century novels, modernism, theory, theater and nonfictional prose. I was working on a bachelor's paper about images of women in advertising and planning to work in advertising. The final quarter of French remained, and I was suddenly required to enroll in a class full of bright first years. Not only was I three years older than everyone else, and not nearly as fluent, the class met at the same time as Chaucer, a course I had been looking forward to taking. Seventeenth Century Lyric Poetry would have to cover the poetry and remaining pre-17th century requirements. The end result, no Chaucer for me.

Anyhow, although this always bothered me, it didn't keep me from getting a job in advertising or returning to graduate school and becoming an instructional designer. It didn't keep me, years later, from getting a Ph.D. in American culture studies and defending a dissertation on images of brainy girls in 1990s and early 2000s teen television. Not taking an in-depth look at Chaucer's works didn't keep me from becoming a tenure-track assistant professor at SUNY Empire State College, where I coordinate the media studies and communications area of the Center for Distance Learning, mentor students and



Cindy Conaway (right) and *Jeopardy!* host Alex Trebek

teach media studies. If anything keeps me from earning tenure a year from June, or being promoted to associate professor, it is unlikely to be because I never read "The Nun's Priest's Tale" in the original Middle English (or at all).

But ... part of my educational history was suddenly front and center in my consciousness as I stood behind the middle counter (contestants insist that they are neither podiums, because you don't stand on them, nor lecterns, because they do not hold books), holding my signaling device (not buzzer; it makes no noise), while taping an episode of *Jeopardy!* In the category "poetry" (which should have been a breeze for an English major), I was supposed to identify the poetry pioneer who wrote "Troilus and Criseyde." Well, since I hadn't had that Chaucer course, I didn't have the answer. It was a costly lack of knowledge. I've spent a lot of time thinking since then about how I learned the things I know. There are quite a few factors that go into playing each game of *Jeopardy!*, however, that may not rely on an individual's educational background.

How I Ended Up on the Show

I took the *Jeopardy!* online test from home in January 2011. The test is 50 questions in 15 minutes. You don't have to answer in the form of a question, but you do have to answer nonmultiple-choice questions correctly and within five seconds. No one tells you how you did, but the correct responses appear on the *Jeopardy!* website the next day. Rumor was you needed 35 to "pass." In earlier years, I answered in the low 30s and heard nothing. In January 2011, I was confident I had 37, and I must have, because in May I received an email inviting me to a contestant audition. That's when I began serious preparation.

At U of C, we were told constantly that what we were doing was "learning how to learn." My normal way of learning something new is through immersion and experimentation (this also is how I design courses and teach students). So my first goals were to find out how the show actually worked. I read 74-game-winner Ken Jennings' book *Brainiac*, big-money-winner Bob Harris's memoir, the official *Jeopardy!* book, and some blogs of past contestants. In February, I attended a group viewing of the match against Watson the supercomputer at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute as it beat Jennings and highest-money-winner Brad Rutter. I read the book about Watson, Stephen Baker's *Final Jeopardy*. I was interested to learn that a lot of what goes on at the game, and even the format of the game itself (one responds to clues in the form of a question, rather than answering questions) are due to the quiz show scandals of the 1950s and that the format of the game itself, as well as a lot of the rules, are the result of those scandals.

My audition was in New York City on a Monday afternoon in June. I made sure to look my best, wearing my newest navy cashmere cardigan over a nice gray T-shirt. We were to come in with five stories about ourselves typed out that could be used in the "interview" portion of the show. Mine included stories about my dissertation; my cashmere sweater collection; my childhood experience in Iceland, and the single word I learned in Icelandic – the word for foam rubber – svampgúmmi; how my parents got excited when they met Chris Whann,

a fellow professor at Empire State College, because, as a sports and fellow trivia nut, he could help us win the afternoon trivia contests on our holiday cruises (which we did); and how I call my cat, Holden, "not exactly college material," yet he often outsmarts the best of my ruses when it comes to getting him out of my bedroom.

When we arrived on the fourth floor of the Sheraton, bad Polaroids were taken and we were issued *Jeopardy!* pens to fill out application forms. There were 15 in my group, including five women, and only one obviously "nonwhite" person, a young Asian man. Several were auditioning for a second or third time. We were then given a paper and pen test similar to the prior online test. Maggie, the lead contestant coordinator at my session (and the most visibly in charge at the actual games), explained the rules, put us at ease, and explained the importance of answering loudly and following directions.

Following the test, each group of three played a practice game. The questions for all testing centers are the same. The audition concluded with interviews based on our stories. In most cases, Maggie seemed to go down the sheet, spending only a moment on each story. She also asked what people would do if they won a lot of money. About two thirds mentioned student loans, the rest traveling. Of the women (who I saw as more my competition), two appeared much younger than I am; the other two older. The younger women seemed like shoo-ins, with interesting stories, fast game play and lots of correct responses. The two older women forgot to answer in the form of a question and ask for the next clue when they got something right, which made me snicker to myself. I played in the last game. I got so excited that for the first clue I responded to, I saw only the word "complex" and confidently asked "What is Oedipus?" when the clue was about Napoleon. However, I slowed down and actually read the clues after that. I responded to clues about George Washington, a musical and several about obscure older TV. Although I had no problem answering in the form of a question, I, too, kept forgetting to ask for the next clue until prompted (which made me feel old!) but got better at that.

During the interview, Maggie asked me why I liked my job, and I explained how I liked to wake students up and show them that media has an agenda, and discussed the recent series of articles I'd published with my colleague, Sheila Aird, about how photos advertised new TV shows with actors of color on the periphery and that African-American men were nearly always on one side in what we'd termed "black guy corner." She asked about my dissertation. I explained how brainy girls on teen television in the 1990s/early 2000s had started off being portrayed as outcasts interested in reading, writing, math or science, but always got more interested in boys and friendship and seemed to forget a life of the mind. When she exclaimed, "I like what you do!" I agreed that I did too, and felt good about my chances. When asked what I would do with the money, despite my own student loans and love for travel, just to set myself apart, I said I would spend it on a mid-century modern "Egg" chair by Arne Jacobsen. Then we were all warned not to talk about the clues – since they would be used in all the tryouts for the year – and that they might call us any time in the next 18 months (or not at all).

How I Began My Preparation

I had, of course, been preparing, in a way, my whole life. We often watched *Jeopardy!* at home when I was growing up, and for the five or so years I've had TiVo, it's been set to grab all episodes (including reruns), so I often watched two or more episodes a day. I had been doing *The New York Times* crossword for decades, and "against the clock" for several years, and often did timed quizzes on Sporcle.com, a general interest quiz site. My favorite board game is Trivial Pursuit.

I felt good enough about the tryout that I thought I should start to prepare to get a call inviting me to appear on the show. The worst that might happen is that I'd learn something. I had learned that champions Jennings and Harris used flashcards. Roger Craig, who won this year's Tournament of Champions, used computer science to predict what topics might come up, allowing him to spend more time studying those categories and clues. I don't even know how to use the (apparently simple) code

he used to gather the information needed to run the software program he developed to use “text mining” of about 211,000 archived posers to “reverse engineer” the quiz show and solve “a nonlinear optimization problem: How do I study?” (Mucha, 2011). While his application, which clustered subjects into “bubbles” that would rise as he acquired knowledge, is intriguing, even if I had known about it before my game (his Tournament of Champions started airing the same week as my taping), I have neither the skills nor the scientific learning style to use those tools. I needed to find methods that would work for me.

With the exception of, perhaps, irregular French verbs, I was rarely required to memorize lists of things in college or graduate school, and was pretty sure flashcards would not be the best way for me to study. I had to find ways, however, to work on my weaker categories. Out of categories that come up frequently on *Jeopardy!*, I knew that my strongest categories would be television, film and literature. I knew less about history, geography and especially sports. I read *History for Dummies*, and *U.S. History for Dummies*. This was no time to dig back into *A People’s History of the United States* or in-depth books about Jefferson or Lincoln. I also played kids’ geography games online, dragging countries into spaces on maps, typing in names of countries and capitals. In many cases, I was reminding myself of things I’d passed tests on 30 years ago, but at least I had learned them once, unlike sports.

Of course, I continued to play along with the televised games I could get to, using the fattest “clicky pen” with the biggest flattest top I could find to simulate the signaling device, making sure to wait until Alex finished reading the clue before clicking, always answering in the form of a question. (The same pedants who insist on terms like “signaling device” and “counter” never call these anything but “clicky pens.”) I had read in a footnote of the book about Watson that the J! Archive (n.d.) had nearly every game for the previous seasons online, entered by fans. Since there did not seem to be televised games on Hulu or Netflix, this seemed like the best way to get the most experience, so I played games online in my spare time.

Refining My Preparation

In early October, I got the call. Taping would be November 8 and 9 in Culver City, Calif. at Sony Pictures Studios. Although I had to make some arrangements with Chris, my co-presenter for the paper we were giving on November 10 at the Sloan-C International Conference on Online Learning in Orlando, I accepted. I was warned not to say anything publicly, especially on Facebook, so I told Chris and my family, and just a few friends. The producers sent paperwork including legalese stating that I wouldn’t say anything publicly about the results until after airing, and another set of “prompts” for potential stories. I responded to many, including that my most precious possession was my grandma’s topaz ring, that I would be using this research as part of the scholarly component for tenure and promotion, and that what I really wanted out of the experience, along with fame and fortune, was for someone to hear about my book and want to publish it.

That’s when I really got serious. I had one month to prepare. I was just about at the end of a two-month reassignment dedicated to converting my dissertation to a publishable manuscript, but it became very hard to focus on that task. After a few days of frustration, with just a week left in my reassignment, and knowing that there was real money potential and a real deadline for my *Jeopardy!* appearance, it made sense to put off the manuscript preparation, because this was research, too. At that point, I started to prepare practically full time.

One month is simply too short to try to learn a ton of new information, and expect to retrieve it in the allotted five seconds in a stressful environment, and there are unlimited new categories that might come up in any game. Since I had never been interested in any sport, despite Chris’s availability to coach me, there was no good way for him to simply download information to me, so I had to decide, ultimately, that I wouldn’t even try. There are rarely *Jeopardy!* categories in which I can’t get at least the first two (easiest) clues right and at least hazard an educated guess

on the third, but a category on pro football or hockey would be among those where I would do best to keep my mouth shut. On *Jeopardy!*, the stakes for guessing blindly are high. Not only do you not get points if you guess wrong, but the amount of that clue is deducted from your total, so guessing is never a good idea unless you are pretty sure, particularly on high dollar value questions.

Instead of trying to cram in so much new information, I felt that my best course of action was to make sure that anything I did know, I could remember fast. One thing I had learned was that, although the question writers never use exactly the same clue twice, they have many concepts they return to again and again. It rarely takes long before a game comes up without categories like Shakespeare, opera and U.S. presidents. Anyone who pays attention to the show knows instantly, for example, that if you hear classical music and Finnish in the same question, that the answer is obviously Sibelius. If Norwegian: Grieg. If the question is about Russian rulers, you’re looking for certain parts of the clue to help you home in on the correct one – awful or bad, Ivan the Terrible. Open to the West and male, Peter the Great. Female and open to the West, Catherine the Great. The last one, Nicholas II. There are a few clues people frequently get wrong because they clearly don’t study in a way that exposes these repeated clues. Aside from when these “easy” clues are triple stumpers (not answered correctly by any of the contestants), I am amazed at how often contestants will add extra s’s to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *Revelation*, which come up at least once each season, and are ruled incorrect.

So I was counting on getting many of these sorts of clues in my games. In that way, studying by playing every available game (rather than by memorizing lists) was a good idea and a more right-brained version of what Roger Craig was trying to do. This would make me relatively sure to get commonly asked clues right. Sometimes I got the same clue wrong multiple times before finally having the correct question come as second nature. My goal was to have things I knew as automatic “gets” while not forgetting the more obscure facts I knew.

Information Isn't Enough – *Jeopardy!* Skills and Strategy

There is another component to successful *Jeopardy!* play, however. Not only does one have to know facts, one has to be able to decipher a lot of cryptic clues (which is a great deal of the reason programming Watson, the computer, was so complex). As the show has continued, the complexity of questions also has progressed, with more logic, quick analysis and synthesis, and insight required. As an article in *GQ* put it, “In 1991, the areas of knowledge contestants were expected to be prepared for were straightforward, classic, and broad” but now clues contain “Lots more jokes, lots more high-concept categories and questions” (Barthel, 2011). Practicing the format of clues over and over again also was useful because I got used to the sorts of wordplay and humor clues tend to use. It helped me, for example, to reread a category about “knots,” a subject I know little about, find the word “relative” in the clue, and correctly respond with “What is a granny knot?”

Aside from knowledge, I considered some of my strengths and weaknesses. I suspected I would have issues with the physical agility required for the signaling device, which is large and bulky. I cannot say for sure that this disadvantages women or older people, but it seems likely. I don't have complete statistics, but women simply seem to win less often and win less money overall than men. The 24 Tournaments of Champions in the Alex Trebek era have included relatively few women, and only three have won. In the 2011 tournament, for example, there were only two women, one the winner of the college championship. Both made it into the semifinals as “wild cards” (top scorers among “nonwinners” in preliminary games), but neither played in the finals round against Craig. Aside from there likely being a smaller potential contestant pool because of the ways women are socialized not to “act too smart” in front of men, my mom pointed out to me years ago that women seem to bet more tentatively than men, and after watching with that in mind, I had to agree. So did two Swedish scientists who recently did a study (Lindquist & Säve-Söderbergh, 2011).

Age also is an issue. Although I was in the middle-age range at my audition, most contestants on the show seem to be younger than about 45, putting me at the high end. While being older than average is good when something like older pop culture comes up (I watched yelling from my couch as three very young contestants had no idea what Foster Grants were), there is little doubt that reflexes and memory recall slow with time. This is especially interesting, as rumor has it that the average age of the nine million nightly viewers is around 65. Anyhow, especially against young men used to playing video games, and who spend time on trivia circuits and played quiz bowl in high school or college, there was no way I'd beat most contestants if we all knew the answers. I was gratified by the fact that when I played at home, I often knew “triple stumbers” – older TV or literature, or some of the more difficult word games that none of the contestants did – and hoped for some of those.

Clues may be centered on information relevant to the day the program appears. There are around two months between taping and airing. I had been given likely air dates, and knew, for example, that if I made it to the second taping day, it might be a good idea to bone up on Martin Luther King Jr., since one of the shows taped that day would appear on MLK Day.

I spent a morning reading people's blog postings about their experiences, and one of the things that nearly everyone mentions is the difficulty of the signaling device and how it has been the undoing of many who said they knew a lot, but just could never get the timing right. It's more a question of timing than speed. When Alex finishes reading the clue, a production assistant presses a button that ignites a series of lights on either side of the clue board that stay on for five seconds. Once these are extinguished, someone else can respond. “Buzz in” too soon and you're locked out. “Buzz in” too late, and another contestant gets to answer the question. The exact timing of these lights varies with the production assistant button presser, and over the course of a day. TV viewers can't see these lights, so that reflex was something I could practice only in the studio. One blogger said to read the clue, and try to decode it before Alex finished and then

press on his second-to-last word. My best bet would be to watch several games in the studio before I actually played, but I didn't know on which of the day's five games I'd appear, since contestant order is determined by random drawing.

Another significant strategy issue is how to wager in the last segment of the show called “*Final Jeopardy!*” Obviously, if I was way ahead I knew to bet conservatively enough to make sure I won no matter what, but there are many variations. The J! Archive (n.d.) described a complicated formula of what to do if you were in second place but had two-thirds of the leader's score, but the third-place person had at least half of yours, and so on, but didn't really factor in one's confidence on the category. In the last week before my appearance, I ordered a much older book called *How to Get on Jeopardy and Win* (Dupee, 1998), and read the section on wagering, but I was still concerned about making a really dumb bet and losing a game I could have won on knowledge and buzzer timing alone. Chris (who could not come because someone had to be in Orlando to deliver our paper if my flight was delayed) and I agreed that basically the most important thing was, “Don't bet like a girl,” but play to win. I read on someone's blog that 75 percent of all contestants don't win their first games, and out of those, most just win one, so my attitude was that even winning one would be great.

One thing I hoped might be my ace in the hole was my lack of stage fright. I grew up doing children's theater and drama club, and singing in the school chorus. Except for the lack of recognition for my talent, I was remarkably like Rachel on *Glee*. When I give presentations at conferences, people often remark on my poise. I was hoping that my comfort on stage would give me an advantage over competitors less used to performing.

Playing the Game

One of the many ways *Jeopardy!* creates its own reality is by taping five games each Tuesday and Wednesday, but asking contestants to bring multiple changes of clothes so winners can look like they're taping the next day. Alex changes, too. I

packed my three potential outfits (plain black, gray and black pants with pink pinstripes; navy, light blue and black cashmere sweaters; black, gray and white T-shirts, along with a sleeveless top in case the lights made it incredibly hot). Because I was to continue to Orlando, I had to check my large suitcase, but made sure to have an extra outfit in my carry-on bag. My flight was on time and six members of my family, who had traveled to Los Angeles to watch me play, came to pick me up with glittery “Congratulations” signs attached to the rental van to wish me luck on my appearance and took me out for a nice dinner.

On the shuttle to the Sony Pictures Studio the next morning, I sat with a friendly woman named Amy (out of 13 in the group, she and one other woman seemed to be the only ones older than around 35). The champion had won one game the previous week. Mostly, I tried to be friendly but reserved, not wanting to get into discussions about how I’d prepared or what my strengths and weaknesses might be. We all spent most of the morning in the Green Room learning the rules, getting our makeup done and filling out forms. There were three of my stories on a card – the one about my book, the one about Iceland, and the one about using this experience for my tenure packet. A contestant coordinator practiced each with me, and asked me which I preferred. I said, “The book.” He said, “Alex will like that” and highlighted it, but also told me that Alex doesn’t always choose the highlighted question. Maggie told us that 100,000 people had taken the test, 3,000-4,000 had tried out and that about 400 were chosen, “But you guys were nice.” Being one of the 400 *nicest* smart people in America was never one of my goals, but I

Being one of the 400 nicest smart people in America was never one of my goals, but I figured I’d take it.

figured I’d take it. Contestants do not meet Alex until just before the game, and spend no time with him outside of them.

We rotated in and out to practice using the signaling device and respond to some sample clues. I had trouble signaling, using my method of leaning my arm on the counter, but got a few questions correct. I realized later that I hadn’t paid attention to the lights. Cards are drawn randomly to determine the order of players, and I was thankful not to be picked for the first game. During the game, all nonplaying contestants are in the studio, but separated from the general audience. We were instructed not to even look at family members in the audience. My mom, dad, sister, brother-in-law, aunt and uncle plus two of their friends had traveled to LA to be there, and my cousin, who attends USC film school, came for the taping. They, too, were told not to look at or interact with the contestants.

As the games continued, I kept a “clicky pen” in my pocket, watched the lights and tried to get the hang of the timing. The studio was freezing. Luckily, I had brought a jacket and I wore it whenever possible. I had read that shorter people (I’m 5’3”) often stand “on a box”; it turns out to be actually part of the set that raises and lowers in the floor. My dad estimates I was 7 inches off the ground. My uncle (my dad and his brother never agree on anything) says more like 4. Considering that I didn’t break my ankle (but worried the staff) when I forgot and simply walked off during rehearsal, I’d say more like 4.

The reigning champion won the first three games. During commercial breaks (which are longer than on television) they fixed technical problems, and Alex sometimes reread clues for clarity. Then he patiently answered questions from the audience, although I knew from my research he’d answered similar ones a million times. Then they took the contestants who remained after the first three of the day’s games to the commissary for lunch. One thing I hadn’t expected was that those who didn’t win mostly left, making the group progressively smaller than the original through backstage, giving it a “Ten Little Indians” quality. After lunch, we rehearsed again. I still didn’t have much luck with the signaling device, but

remembered the elevator box. Someone new, Brandon, won game four, in an exciting match with a *Final Jeopardy!* about women authors. Like Stephanie, the woman I’d spoken with during lunch (who had studied English at the University of Chicago before transferring), I would have bet big on that, and also gotten it wrong (despite having read the correct response in *The World Almanac* a few days before the taping). I played the last game of the day against Brandon and Preston.

When I actually played, I held the signaling device with two hands, which allowed me to signal competitively. I could hear my heart beating, which I later suspected was because of the microphone, but did every relaxation exercise I could remember. In the first round, I answered some clues in the categories “From Page to Screen” and on “Words that Should Rhyme,” but had little luck with “Gluten Free Foods” (I am lactose intolerant, so could not respond to a clue about yogurt). I guessed wrong about which state license plate has the legend “Best Snow.” (I said Colorado. Evidently it’s Utah. Anyone who knows me knows I hate winter, so that’s an oxymoron.) I did, of course, know “The Empire State” was the nickname for New York but was beaten to the buzzer so couldn’t respond to that one. During the interview segment, I was pleased that Alex asked me about my dissertation, and that his follow-up questions allowed me to share some of my stronger ideas.

In *Double Jeopardy!*, I was pretty sure, based on my practice, that despite my distaste for poetry, I would do well on “Poets and Poetry,” but had never heard or read the poem described in the \$600 clue. I jumped to the \$1,600 clue, hoping for a Daily Double, on which I bet \$3,500, but then guessed that the language used in an area of Spain that led to the development of poetry in Europe was Catalan (it was Arabic) and lost that amount. I earned \$2,000 for knowing that Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron*. I couldn’t remember most of the questions, however, until I saw the show two months later. None of the nine family members and friends I had with me could remember most questions on the board – that’s just how fast a round of *Jeopardy!* goes and how much is going on during any given 22 minute game.

I was in the lead for a good part of the game but was in second place going into *Final Jeopardy!* The *Final Jeopardy!* category was “Presidential Running Mates.” I bet relatively big, assuming that all three of us would get it wrong, so I might, as the second-place contender with \$11,100, still win if Preston, in the lead with \$14,800, bet too big. The clue was about which team (we were told the response would be two people) had boiled lobster and prime rib au jus as their traditional inaugural lunch. My mind could make no sense of this, and all I could think of was the groaning boards of foods often mentioned in descriptions of colonial and early federalist times. That we were supposed to connect foods to states simply did not come to me in the short time we had. This was something most people would have to figure out rather than remember. Brandon, unlike Preston and me, did figure it out (and won, coming from third place with \$6,200, all of which he bet), but told me later he didn’t initially know and considered potential presidents from Maine before landing on the right response. My response of Washington and Adams was clearly wrong – I knew they were not “running mates” – but it was something I simply could not have studied, so it felt like a valiant loss.

The run of questions during my show appeared to be unusually cryptic, according to my parents and many others who have commented. Of the 61 possible questions, there were 12 “triple stumpers,” meaning none of us gave correct answers to about 20 percent of the clues.

According to the J! Archive (n.d.), my “Coryat score” – basically the amount I would have had if there was no wagering involved (\$14,600) – was higher than the other two. I got 14 clues right and two wrong (including a Daily Double). Preston did not get any clues wrong of the 14 clues he responded to, and guessed right on two Daily Doubles but had a slightly lower Coryat (\$14,200). Brandon’s Coryat score was much lower than either of ours (\$6,200), and he got 14 clues right and five wrong, with no Daily Doubles at all, but he won based on a hefty wager and sussing out the correct response. That’s why they call the show *Jeopardy!*

The day ended, my family went out for a steak dinner and spent the next day at the Getty Center instead of at the studio playing more and winning big money as I’d hoped to do. Then I took a very uncomfortable redeye to the Sloan-C conference, got a few hours sleep and gave a presentation on bureaucratic issues in using social media to teach online.

The Aftermath

I then spent the next two months keeping secrets. I briefly wondered if, having lost, I should stay silent altogether but realized that people I knew would watch the show. Also, my family assured me that I’d played really well, and that people would be impressed when they saw the show.

A few weeks before airing, I did share the news that I would be on television with my associate dean and the college communications office, although I did not share how I did. I was happy to give a presentation for my colleagues at CDL about my experience, and was grateful to win the exhibition *Jeopardy!* game set up by my associate dean, Janet Shideler. I have new Facebook friends from the experience, including some who shared their preparation stories with me (unfortunately, I did not have space to include them in this article), including Amy, who won two games, and with whom Chris and I had dinner in New York City. I got texts, emails and Facebook posts from a number of old friends and appreciate the fact that nearly everyone said the *Final Jeopardy!* was a killer, and that I’d looked great and “cool as a cucumber.”

Academia.edu informs me whenever anyone searches for my work, and I got around a dozen alerts after the game (and considering how frequently people spell my last name wrong, it seems like there might have been more). A number of co-workers said I’d done the college proud. There were articles about me (mentioning the college and based on an interview) in *The Saratogian*, which was picked up by the *Troy Record* and appeared on multiple websites including *Newsday*, and the *Albany Times Union*. There also were mentions in the *Tallahassee Democrat*, on all three of my alumni websites and on Florida State University’s Twitter feed.

Despite the fact that it is undeniably a bummer not to win (*Jeopardy!* doesn’t pay for the flight or hotel, and taxes are heavy, so I did not benefit financially. Unlike what many viewers think, I did not get the \$6,100 I had left at the end, only the \$1,000 third prize, along with some Aleve, which won’t come until May), it was a fun experience and it allowed me to explore a less-explored facet of television. I know that I could have studied differently, but I could not possibly have studied more. Plus, when we went on another cruise that December, my trivia team was unstoppable.

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Approaches and Disclosures II:

Three Photographers Revisit Themselves

Alan Stankiewicz, Suzanne Orrell,
Lee Herman, Central New York Center

It is difficult to pinpoint the day that the three people whose work appears here recognized each other as photographers, but it was certainly by the fall of 2010. At that point, obediently following Alan Stankiewicz, we decided to commandeer the gallery in the center in Syracuse to show our work – together.

But what work, exactly? We are a designer, a geologist and a philosopher, all of whom have done other things, even in addition to photography. Working to and from our multifarious experiences, all of us have, over decades, developed multiple portfolios that we have or have not shown to others. How could we pick images that would say and not say what we wanted to say and not say, now?

Navigating our differences and similarities, we met at the center and at our homes. We talked and ate and drank Prosecco. We critiqued each other's images, usually generously, and we considered ways to select among them to frame a show. Ultimately, we agreed upon no theme and marched accordingly, deciding that each should choose his or her own images, except for one image apiece that would be selected by the others: trusting, we are.

But how to display our selections? We stared at the gallery walls. We drank coffee and swore softly. We made our decisions and spent our cash and framed and hung our images.

In April 2011, our show, "Approaches and Disclosures," opened. We drank wine and swilled art-opening food. We talked with our friends and colleagues, an experience so illuminating and supportive that we are now disclosing again here, using a similar approach as the last time. Although our choices have changed, they are still in answer to no theme whatsoever. ■



**Top: Written Water
Series: No. 4 by
Alan Stankiewicz**

**Middle: Two Dried
Leaves by
Lee Herman**

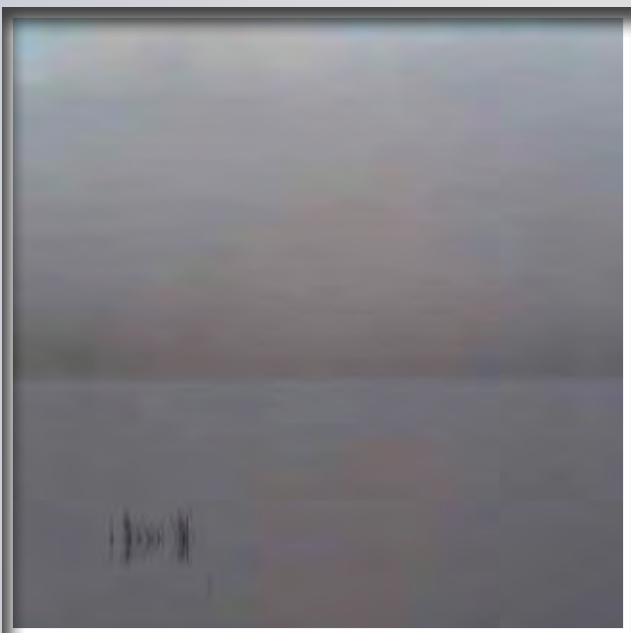
**Bottom: Untitled by
Suzanne Orrell**





Untitled, Indian Lake, Adirondack, New York

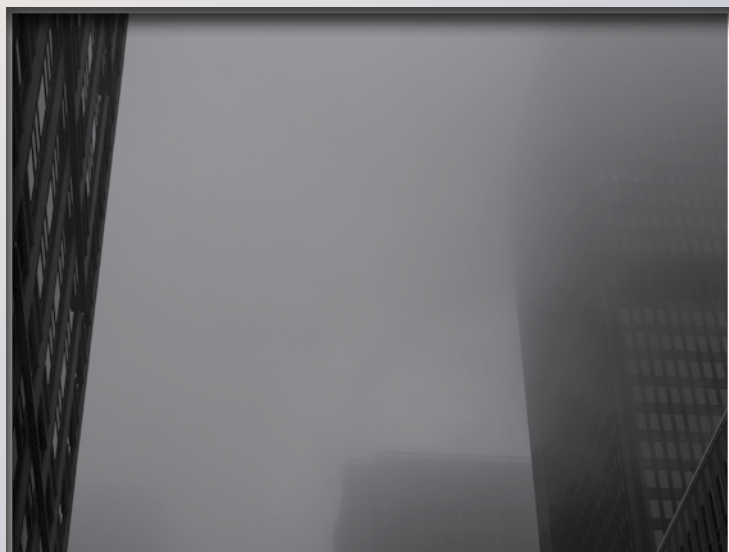
Alan Stankiewicz



Written Waters Series: No. 1



Untitled, Masai Mara, Kenya, East Africa

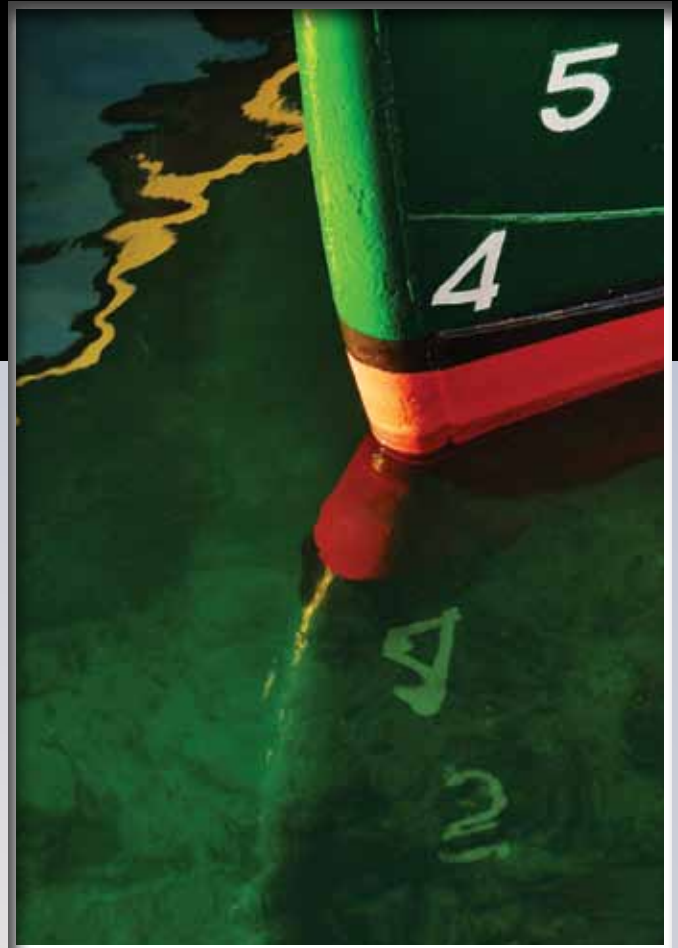


Untitled, Seattle, Washington

Suzanne Orrell



Glypta on Sunflower



Palindrome



Minotaur

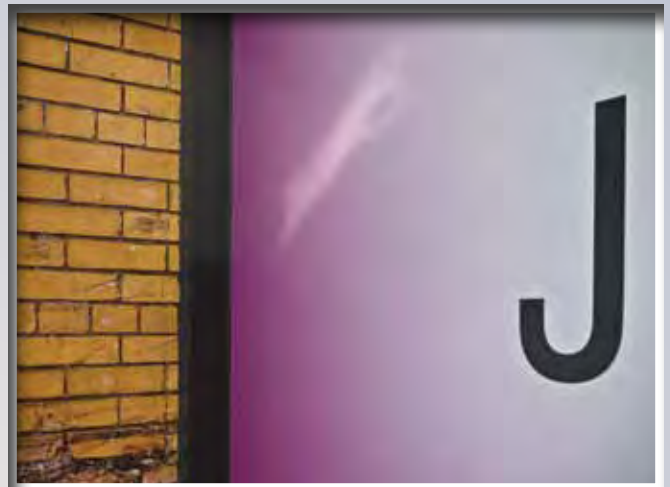


City Life



Glass Steel and Saffron, MoMa

Lee Herman



Brick Pink and J, Highline, NYC



Water Reflection, Skaneateles Falls



Tiger Lily

Policy Work(s): An Interview with Joyce Elliott, Part I

Ed Warzala, School for Graduate Studies

Joyce Elliott came to Empire State College in 1988, as associate dean of the Northeast Center. In 1993, she became the Northeast Center dean. From 2000 to 2009, she was the college's vice president for academic affairs and provost, and also served as interim president in 2007 - 2008. Joyce Elliott is currently mentor and area coordinator in Social Theory, Social Structure and Change at the Center for Distance Learning. Many thanks to Ed Warzala and Joyce Elliott for their time and commitment to this work. What follows is part I of a two-part interview.

Ed Warzala: Joyce, What is your academic background and education, and did your studies influence your career path toward administration and academic leadership?

Joyce Elliott: All of my degrees are in sociology – the bachelor's from Bates College in Maine and the master's and Ph.D. from the University of New Hampshire. I worked in the Maine state corrections system for a year right out of college, and then went on to the UNH graduate program with the idea of working in the corrections field at the policy level. Once I began graduate work, I changed course, became quite engaged in disciplinary study and ended up not ever pursuing the corrections policy angle. I went into college teaching and administration instead.

E.W.: Many individuals have an influential academic advisor or faculty member who helps to change or shape the direction of their studies. Was that so in your case?

J.E.: No, it really wasn't, not in terms of choosing the field to begin with. I changed majors four times in college, and ended up in sociology because it sustained my interest. I would say that in graduate school I had a fantastic faculty member in statistics, believe it or not: Bob Cabral. He was such a good teacher, and I learned so much about statistics, that's probably what tipped me toward a more applied research focus for

my doctorate. I found that I enjoyed it, and I was good at it, and he was such an engaging professor that he really sparked an interest in social science research.

E.W.: You talked a little bit about the issues that excited your intellectual curiosity, but we know that your interests now are in women's issues and have been for quite a while. Was there any seed of that interest when you began your college studies in sociology?

J.E.: There was no such thing as women's studies when I was in college, and I had only one female professor during the whole degree, and none in graduate school. I must say, I don't think I was truly intellectually curious until after I completed my doctorate. I was good at school and academic work – I found success there, I found it interesting – but I wasn't passionate about it. In the mid-70s, I was in Illinois working at Sangamon State University (now the University of Illinois at Springfield). I was a part-time, adjunct faculty member in sociology, and became involved with the newly emerging women's studies program. That's when I got excited about teaching, and research and theory, and political implications and activism. Though the discipline of sociology has an historical thread of support for social action, that was not really the emphasis in my formal studies in the field. So, really, it was women's studies, after the doctorate,



Ed Warzala (left) with Joyce Elliott

that engaged me in a very different way than I'd been engaged. Before that, I think it was more of an intellectual game.

E.W.: You said you were "successful" at college study; I imagine that you must have been a good student. Did you carry a high GPA?

J.E.: Not always ... (laughter).

E.W.: Bates College must have been pretty pricy. Did you earn scholarships to pursue college study?

J.E.: Yes, I did have scholarships, but I managed to lose the biggest one in my first year. I had a kind of a wild time and went about dropping my grade point average below what I needed to retain my scholarship. I ended up with a very strong average in my major by the time I graduated, but I had those early troubles and in that respect, I was like many young students away from home for the first time. I brought the GPA back high enough to get my scholarship back the next year. I went through Bates in three years and graduated when I was only 20 years old, to save money on tuition. There was no way I

could have gone to Bates without substantial scholarships, along with loans and my own earnings, and completing the degree in three years.

E.W.: So how and when did you become interested in higher education? Did your interest in sociology and social issues funnel you into administration in any way? Did you think you could accomplish more as an administrator? Was administration and leadership a way to achieve some social objectives?

J.E.: My background in sociology did not lead me to administration, but it sure has helped me understand and address organizational issues. Early in my career, I did not seek out administrative roles. Sangamon State had an unusual focus on interdisciplinary studies, innovative teaching and public affairs, and encouraged making a difference in terms of community change and the world beyond the university. It was a very open, fluid place, willing to engage faculty in administrative roles. I entered administration at a younger age than is normally the case, first serving as director of the women's studies program. I was later appointed dean and worked in the VPAA's office on the academic plan. I was an assistant professor, and stood for tenure and promotion in my second year as dean.

Prior to that, as a pretenured faculty member, I held significant roles in governance: I was on the senate, I chaired the personnel policies committee and led an overhaul of the faculty personnel policies. So, I got involved in things that were good preparation for administrative work and I was always interested in making processes work better. For example, we had lots of faculty on joint appointments across programs, and the personnel policies didn't accommodate that well. So we changed the policies and made them clearer and more supportive of people who were in what I believe is a challenging situation.

E.W.: So, to return to the point of disciplinary roots and your career in administration, was there anything else that was particularly formative in the beginning of your career?

J.E.: Well, in the early 80s, I was on the board of the shelter for battered women in Springfield, Ill. and that was an expression of my academic interests. I had studied the sociology of families and did a lot of work on domestic violence in my doctoral studies, working with one of the pioneers in the field, Murray Straus, as my dissertation chair and advisor. That kind of involvement in public service work was really part of what the university expected of faculty. In a way, it was much like the purpose of the Jane Altes Award here at the college, which recognizes people who use their disciplinary expertise in service to the larger community. My work in women's studies was a way that I could do what mattered to me and be involved in activism.

I also was in Illinois at the time that the Equal Rights Amendment was killed by the state Legislature. I spent a lot of time at the state Capitol in those days, sometimes just bearing witness to what was going on. It was an amazing thing to go into the legislative galleries and watch – no offense – a collection of aging white men turn it down. It was really quite something, and now we're years later, you know 30 years later, and we're still not there.

E.W.: Aging white males? You're making me feel guilty and self-conscious (laughter). But of course, you're right; we're not much further ahead in terms of legislation.

J.E.: And how could the ERA be anything but a no-brainer?

E.W.: Did you feel it was part of a personal or societal mission to change the institution that you were in at the time, and once you came to Empire State and assumed leadership positions, did you feel that balancing the proportions of men and women in administration was a public, institutional good that fed back to your values?

J.E.: It was always about more than just changing the "who" of the institution. For me it's not just changing who is in the position, but also changing how the work is done, how the institution functions politically and ethically. My work is informed by a feminist perspective on practice. It's not just about changing the cast of characters, it's about changing the

script, so that the workings of an institution are more humane, less hierarchical, less heavy-handed, I suppose. There are power dynamics you have to recognize and work with, and you have to, you know, be smart about that, but there are ways of doing it and other ways of doing it.

E.W.: It wouldn't do much good to preserve the structure and change the cast of characters and then still maintain the same ideology – a patriarchal ideology in running an institution.

J.E.: Right.

E.W.: Were there other professional career activities that preceded your coming to Empire State College?

J.E.: I was engaged in applied social science research on a part-time basis for hospitals, state agencies and community organizations. I came to Empire State College from Illinois in 1988 as the associate dean of the Northeast Center. I had an incredible group of colleagues in Illinois whom I loved dearly, yet, I also felt it was time to make a move. I'm from Boston and was interested in moving back closer to my family. I did not have any interest whatsoever in working in a more traditional institution.

E.W.: How many years of teaching did you have all together?

J.E.: Well, full-time teaching, probably six. I spent a year teaching full time at Illinois State University before I became full time at Sangamon State. So, a year at Illinois State and probably five years of full-time teaching at SSU and then I continued to teach part time while I was a dean there. At Empire State College, I carried a significant teaching and mentoring load while I was the associate dean and then dean at the Northeast Center, before becoming academic vice president/provost. At that point, I gave up teaching in order to focus my attention on the provost role.

E.W.: And was that one-to-one mentoring at that time?

J.E.: Yes, I did a lot of that. I did a lot of study group teaching as well, and co-led the 1990 Women's Studies Residency on "Women's Public and Private Lives" with Carolyn Broadway.

E.W.: That was before Web-based teaching had emerged?

J.E.: Yes, I led study groups and one-to-one tutorials. I had a lot of mentees: I inherited many mentees who were not succeeding with others and I would be the utility infielder for students in any field in any situation. So I mentored students like you did in Batavia, in business and communications, whatever. One of my favorites was a student developing a program in orthotics and another was in aquatic exercise. I mentored a few women's studies students and a couple in sociology, but not a lot. I did work with a number of human services students, as well.

E.W.: Well that's interesting. Let's delve into a hot topic on the current agenda of the college. What you said about your own teaching, helping to devise degree programs in "aquatic exercise" and "orthotics," suggests that you support the position that mentors should be generalists. Would you share your thoughts on the generalist/specialist debate within the college?

J.E.: Sure.

E.W.: There seems to be a trend these days and perhaps for several years of hiring more narrowly-focused faculty specialists. Some of this occurred under your leadership in Academic Affairs. These folks, and rightly so I would say, want to focus on their disciplinary expertise and are different in their orientation to mentoring and scholarship than what might be called the "traditional" Empire State College mentor. Has there been a shift toward the specialist? Do you agree with that?

J.E.: I think there has been something of a trend toward that. That's not to say that there haven't always been specialists and accomplished scholars in the college, even from very early on. Where there have been larger aggregations of faculty, it's been more possible for people to specialize in terms of which students they work with. At Metro, it's more part of the culture, there are long-term faculty who have been able to specialize in terms of the students they work with and that has been enabled by the presence of a larger group of faculty. Metro is atypical in this due to its size and the aggregation of colleagues with diverse

specializations. When you're in a unit or small center it's not really feasible to specialize so much in mentoring. With fewer faculty, you have to work across areas of study and, by necessity, you work with a much broader range of students in degree planning and program design. I think we still need this generalist perspective and skill.

My biggest concern is not specialization per se, but rather that there seems to be a dramatically greater emphasis on content versus learning processes. I think the faculty culture is becoming more content-driven, rather than driven by attention to opening the learning process for students and opening a spirit of exploration of content that is more student-driven, more reflective of the student-centered concept of the founding of the college. I find that to be the most difficult shift in the college that I've seen. It's more important to me than losing the narrative evaluations. (I might have been the only faculty member in CDL who voted against the new policy that eliminated narrative evaluations.)

E.W.: Is that right?

J.E.: I don't know, close. I don't know if I was the only one, but there weren't many of us.

E.W.: Well, there weren't many around the college either, I mean, I think it was 2-1 collegewide against preserving narrative evaluations.

J.E.: It was. The student feedback was much more mixed than that, and more positive about narrative evaluations. You know, that's over and done with, and I was not happy about that, but I am less concerned about that than I am about this sort of content-centered faculty orientation I'm seeing more and more in faculty culture.

E.W.: What do you think? How can we explain that shift, what do you think is driving that?

J.E.: I somehow think it's easier. It's the default position for faculty to go about delivering content and making sure that students get what is expected in the field. It's kind of like it's easier to lecture, the default value for teaching process, than it is to create more active ways for students to engage in learning. I know what people

expect in this field – I know my field, I know what my students need. It's easier to simply deliver that to your students than it is to invite your students to explore the field and learn what's expected, and why, and where they can build their own sense of educational mission into what they're going about learning. I'm not sure we're doing a great job of helping newer faculty, and sustaining in more experienced faculty, a kind of passion about student-centeredness and of the founding values and mission at the college, in that respect.

E.W.: I've wondered though, on this point, it seems as though across the college we've hired a lot of quite traditional, newly minted Ph.D.s. It's not age, but it seems like we used to be perfectly willing to bring in more life-experienced faculty, often those who earned degrees later in life, and perhaps they had slightly more empathy for the adult learner, and in connection, the great value of experiential learning. It's just my take, but this was still well in place when I came to the college and I'm seeing less of it now.

J.E.: I'm not sure I see that so much as a factor in the Center for Distance Learning. I think a lot of our new mentors are experienced people who themselves went on to complete a doctorate later in life, and so I don't think I see so much of that. I think something else may be operative in this.

The college was founded at a time in the country's history in which we were breaking conventions. There were the movements for civil rights and the anti-war movement and there was a huge shift in higher education in terms of opening access for people who had not been to college before. These gave rise to the movements for ethnic studies, black studies, women's studies, in terms of curriculum. There was a clear political impetus for developing those elements of the curriculum at least, and political connections for a lot of faculty even in more traditional disciplines. The movement toward social change and empowerment of those previously disempowered was certainly consistent with the establishment of an empowering institution that would respond to and support such social change.

We are bringing in new faculty who are very engaged with new learning technologies, and who understand their potential to

bring educational opportunities to the disempowered and foster social change of the sort we might have envisioned in the 70s. Still, we have been through 30 years of increasing social and political conservatism, I would say. I think we're mirroring that, as are other institutions in society. I think Empire State College is still unconventional and some faculty are engaged actively in social change, but as an institution we are not oriented so explicitly to larger societal and political developments. I do think the Occupy Wall Street movement is promising in this broader sense.

E.W.: An interesting case study, for sure, but as you were speaking, I was thinking that there also has been considerable growth in the college, and with that growth, it's much harder to keep a value system, harder to preserve core values. I've heard and read that the founders were more ideologically coherent and committed. It's a fascinating study of organizational culture and institutional change, really interesting.

J.E.: Growth may be a factor or it may be a red herring – I'm not sure. I think it's a factor in distance learning, but I'm not so sure about the regional centers. In the early days of the college there was a huge matter of institution building. That also was true of my former institution, which was founded in the same year as Empire State College. When I was there, it was still in the institution-building phase and people lived and breathed the place. I certainly did that. But that's not exactly sustainable for either the founding faculty or the people who come behind them. You can't give over your whole being to institution building for 40 to 100 years; it's just not possible. I don't know, I haven't done a study of organizational life spans, but there's something that happens over time.

E.W.: I do find it remarkable how well the college preserved its core values, yet I have observed significant change since arriving more than 10 years ago when I attended the new mentor workshops and other Mentoring Institute functions. Do you see the change as taking place over the last 10 years, too, Joyce?

J.E.: If I did, then I would be condemning my own administration (laughter).

E.W.: We could delete that question.

J.E.: No, no, no ... I think it's a fair question.

E.W.: Because the growth is in that period, too.

J.E.: Yes, but the growth is in the Center for Distance Learning. The regional and other centers are marginally larger in some cases and the forces driving conventionality are not about growth in those settings, in my view. So then it's about something else and I'm not sure what that is. I think we certainly have had incredible turnover in the administration of the regional centers. When I came into the college, regional center deans had been in place for a long time. There was some turnover in the associate dean role, but the associate deans were very close to the faculty, they did a lot of teaching and mentoring, as did deans – a fair amount of that – and there was a kind of academic leadership engagement by those folks. I see less emphasis on that in the dean role today, and I'm not sure about the associate deans. I don't know if they're as close to the academic program as before, as ready to lead discussions about educational philosophy and practice and see that as "part of the role," which I think it needs to be. Yes, deans have to be externally oriented to their communities, have to deal with budgets and enrollments and personnel, and faculty often don't want administrators to intrude into educational matters. But we need to expect and welcome deep engagement by people in leadership roles in conversations with faculty about educational values and academic quality. We need to sustain that space for this important conversation.

E.W.: I hadn't thought of it in that way, but it sounds right. Explaining how and why that happened would be a challenge, but I think you're right. My former GVC dean, Bob Milton, did keep that discussion on the front burner and he also worked closely with me as a new unit coordinator early on.

J.E.: I think that this has happened during my period in the provost role, certainly. A lot of the deans who were in place when I became provost had come through the associate dean role and so brought that academic focus, that intimate knowledge

of the workings of the academic program and the educational philosophy in practice into the role as dean. I found it very hard to bring new people in and support their engagement in that way.

E.W.: Is there now more pressure for deans to maintain their numbers, to manage, count and quantify?

J.E.: That was always there for the deans, really, always a huge pressure, I think; perhaps the most challenging element of the role aside from personnel matters.

E.W.: I wonder if the changing conversational focus in centers is a function of the focus of the regional dean or of the emphasis of the coordinating center?

J.E.: Well, it's both, since the coordinating center shapes the dean role to an extent. Still, there's no question that there is a connection between academic quality and retention and enrollment, and you can't sustain enrollment if the quality isn't there. We all know that stuff.

E.W.: Well this is a good segue into talking about some of the people you've worked with. Who would you name as your mentors at the college and how did they influence your career at the college?

J.E.: Actually, I would say my early mentors were other members of the associate deans group, and at the time, that was quite a sterling group. There were some really cool people there, certainly Anne Bertholf from NFC, Alan Mandell at the Hudson Valley Center and Chris Rounds at the old Central New York Center, Evelyn Wells at Long Island, Bob Carey at Metro. They were great colleagues.

E.W.: So they were already here when you arrived and you were the new associate dean?

J.E.: Right.

E.W.: So they brought you into the system?

J.E.: Right.

E.W.: And brought you into the culture?

J.E.: One of the differences, I think, is the meeting opportunities. We met, I don't know, four times a year for a couple of days and we got into very intense conversations as a group about the academic side of what

we were doing, the learning contracts we would actually have to review and sign, contracts and evaluations and how we did that, what the challenges were, what the worst ones were, what were the great ones, working with a mentor who was not serving students: How do you deal with that? How do you intervene? It was the down to earth, day-to-day quality of things and also the more philosophical stuff that we dealt with. The associate deans don't have that kind of meeting time now and neither do the deans.

E.W.: Well, that goes back to the question about what may be different now and why perhaps discussions about academic issues at the center level may be fewer and farther between. What you described is a sort of lateral or mutual mentoring, and exchange of ideas about best practice and philosophical alignment. I guess, when I asked the question, I was thinking more hierarchically... was there a president, was there a provost or higher administrator who was a mentor to you?

J.E.: The next time that I had a mentor who I think of as mentor, someone who I learned a lot from, was Joe Moore, and there was a big gap there. I mean, I had good people to work with across the hierarchy and I learned things and gathered things, but there was a burst of learning for me from that early associate dean group who really did function as a group of mentors, and then there was a burst of learning when I started working with Joe – a really different level of engagement with the college and what it is to be in the administration. Later on when Joe left, I drew a lot on Bill Ferrero's expertise and collegueship. He was just a very important part of that transition.

E.W.: Do you still keep in touch with many of these people or people from the early days? Who do you keep in touch with?

J.E.: Somewhat sporadically. I get word about people from other people. I happened to talk with Anne Bertholf the other day on the phone because we were both on a webinar. So we talked a little bit later that day or the next day; it was very nice to catch up with her. I do keep in touch with Bob Trullinger, who retired not long ago, and certainly, whenever I get to see Alan Mandell or Bob Carey or Chris Rounds, I'm delighted. I saw Evelyn Wells quite often

when I traveled for International Programs. I saw Beth Chiquoine and Joe Moore recently when I was out in Boston for some time with my family.

E.W.: You've held the positions of VPAA and provost and interim president of the college. What achievements in these positions do you want the historical record to reflect and do you want people to know about? What are you proud of in those roles?

J.E.: Well, I did a lot of policy work as the provost/VPAA, and I think that certainly the institutional take on that would be mixed in terms of whether some of that work should have been done or not, whether the right outcomes were achieved, that sort of thing. For me, a major piece of being an administrator is working to align the institution with its best values. So it's about creating more congruency between the actual workings of the place and what inspires students and faculty, and that's what the policy work was about for me.

E.W.: Are there particular examples? I know there are many, but what would be an example of maintaining that alignment between mission and core values and practices?

J.E.: I would say four areas in particular. One is the policies around educational planning, prior learning assessment and the degree program rationale. It seems to me that we needed a more consistent institutional take on what to expect of ourselves and our work with students in those areas, because they are so much at the core of what we promise in our educational model. I mean everything from doing things in a timely way and enabling students to create a plan that is a prospective roadmap with room for changing the focus, to making it timely so that students get PLA responses in a reasonable time, so they don't wait two years for an evaluator. I've seen the worst of it; I've seen how students can be utterly mis-served by poor process and inattention, and it seemed to me that as a matter of quality and delivering on what we say we care about, we had to make this better. Policy isn't the only way to make it better, and certainly we can argue that one of the reasons the ball gets dropped is because of the growth and the volume. Still,

there also is a need to say, "OK, what we think is reasonable is this, and let's see if we can make that happen."

Another area was about student grievances and student appeals that just needed updating and improvement. There had been several reorganizations before I came into the provost job, so those policies and procedures just weren't accurate anymore. So they just needed an update and more clarity. We needed to make sure we had these processes right for students and the college.

The third area has to do with the study outcomes policies, financial aid and satisfactory academic progress, all of which grew out of the financial aid audit that occurred when I came into the job. I was in the first three months as interim provost when we were audited by the state comptroller on matters related to full-time financial aid. It was a good two-year process of completing that audit, and then, truth be told, another three years of policy follow-up to address the issues that we were vulnerable on, including the absence of outcomes for student academic work. In any event, while not perfect, it's way better now, and some of the improvement has to do with that policy work. Some of these issues were related to the academic calendar and in part drove the change to revise the calendar. We are in a much better position to know about student progress now than we were 20 years ago, and it's actually better.

E.W.: Its interesting ... external demands have come into conflict in many ways with some interpretations of the tradition and core values, because as recently as 10 years ago there were no time limits in practice.

J.E.: There were time limits on the books – it was a year for an incomplete – but students, in practice, could take much longer. Even back in those days before the newer policies, I questioned the value of keeping an incomplete open in perpetuity for my own students that I worked with. I don't think it served them well. There is a point where it makes more sense for students to cut their losses and re-enroll, in terms of the continuity and coherence of the study.

E.W.: Having hard deadlines was not the tradition less than a decade ago. You mentioned four accomplishments, what was the fourth?

J.E.: Well, actually, the fourth one would be the personnel policies. The policy work initiated by the APC [Academic Personnel Committee] morphed into negotiations with the UUP chapter surrounding the faculty review process. I think we needed that – again, I guess it’s an alignment thing. We have certain values about how we want to treat people and be treated in this organization, and you know faculty review policies are a part of aligning an institution.

E.W.: Is that what you mean by personnel work, the faculty review process?

J.E.: Yes, that’s a big piece of it. But I also did a lot of work on professional performance programs and evaluations, making them timely, making them a reasonable lead up to the decision about permanency. I did a lot of work on that with HR and with UUP. We needed to deal with that. People have a right to fair and timely feedback about how they’re doing and some guidance about what they could do to improve or to advance or to develop. In this way, people should be treated well.

E.W.: The same is certainly true for administrators, too. Administrators deserve the same opportunity to improve and develop and I think sometimes we don’t look in that direction in the same way.

J.E.: Yes, there’s actually been a lot of work in developing people in leadership positions. When I was in the role of provost we did a lot of individual coaching with administrators, individualized developmental work. It sometimes was successful and sometimes it wasn’t. It was not very visible to people, and that kind of developmental effort really can’t be regardless of whether you’re talking about an administrator or somebody else.

E.W.: What were the most challenging and memorable struggles over policy and over the direction of the college that you would cite? What was the biggest?

J.E.: The grading policy would be a big one for me because of my close engagement in that, and it was lengthy. It took a long time and there was a lot of controversy about it, a lot of upset.

One thing that was always curious to me was that it was perceived by a lot of people as an administrative initiative that we would do this, have a grading policy. But the administration did not initiate this one. What happened was individual faculty around the college brought to APLPC [Academic Programs and Learning Policies Committee, which later became CUSP] concerns about inconsistent grading practices around the college. At that juncture, we did have grades of a sort, which we did not have when I first came to the college in 1988. We were doing retroactive grading, which I always found to be problematic. A student would individually request that grades be assigned to past studies, and the associate dean would work with faculty to retroactively assign a grade based on the narrative CE.

My personal preference was not to have grades at all, whether or not we had a narrative. I was more comfortable with a credit/no credit system rather than having grades or GPAs and that sort of thing. We were facing the reality that we were already awarding grades and doing it retroactively, which I thought was not really respectable. So that was one concern that other people shared, but the big impetus for change was that there was one center that believed that D level work was worthy of credit and another center that thought that D level work was not worthy of credit and students and faculty were working across those centers. How do you explain to a student or an adjunct or an outside party that you could get credit for a D performance in one part of the college but not in another? You can’t have an institution function that way. So that’s what brought this to APLPC. It was that very specific thing and then as we got into it, we realized we had a larger set of issues that we had to deal with and it became a much bigger piece of legislation, I guess, than anybody anticipated.

E.W.: So you’re saying the grading policy came out of the faculty for the most part and that makes me want to ask what the

proper balance of issues should be between the faculty and the administration, in terms of setting the agenda for the college?

J.E.: I would say faculty underestimate how much their concerns make a difference in the direction of the institution around policy issues. I think I’d give as other examples the work on degree planning, PLA and the faculty personnel policies. Faculty of the college in general were aware that processes for degree program review, approval for prior learning assessment, the success of students in education planning and the quality of the rationale essay were not at the quality they wanted to see. People were vocal. You couldn’t go to a college meeting without these issues coming up, and I had seen that from the moment I walked in the door of the college as an associate dean in 1988. So everybody is talking about something with real concern, distress, even angst, so an administration takes that seriously and says finally, “Let’s do something about it; let’s not have it continue this way.” That’s really what I think we did with the degree planning issues. We also knew we were moving to some new technologies to support this work, and we thought there needed to be some greater consistency across parts of the college so the technology could be designed in a way to actually support the work.

At that point in my life at the college, I had been in these angst-ridden conversations for 15 years. Of course, you can’t fix things entirely with policy. Policy is a statement of what you think is supposed to happen in some sense. We felt, “Let’s make an agreement about that.” Faculty were key in that, whether they recognized it or not, or whether it produced the expected outcome, which was what motivated it. We can’t all be this distressed all the time, so let’s do something about it.

It was really the same with personnel policies, faculty review policies. My observation over the years has been that the college has had a very benign personnel process for the faculty. But there has been a lot of fear attached to it, and new faculty coming in continue to be scared by other people about the process and so there was some value in clarifying it. Collectively we – labor and management – made some

statements about what we aspire to in the review process – let it be fair, let it be confidential – so that people would not be able to bring in hearsay information and attack somebody at the last minute in a review meeting. We wanted the process to be honest and transparent. If there was developmental feedback to give, it should be given.

E.W.: I personally saw the changed process as an improvement over the time when I was applying for early reappointments. I thought by the time my tenure decision came up that the system was pretty fair by comparison to other colleges where departmental factions sometimes get in the way of fairness.

J.E.: Why don't we finish talking about accomplishments; can we go back? Though I expressed concerns earlier about content-driven education, I would have to say that establishing the MAT program and nursing program were two major accomplishments of the college, in both cases involving a great deal of teamwork. We also closed two programs while I was provost or interim president: the Corporate College program and the FORUM program. The Corporate College program closing wasn't at our initiative – we didn't have a choice about it. The FORUM program was a strategic decision. In both cases, we did the right thing for the staff involved. We retained the people and gave them opportunities, we were upfront with people, and we helped them find different positions in the college to the extent that it was humanly possible to do that. I'm proud of how we went about it. I think that was good work.

E.W.: I think it's remarkable, perhaps extraordinary, how caring the institution has been in cases like the Corporate College closing and during the different budget cuts in certain periods of time, when positions were preserved.

You've provided some idea of accomplishments you identify with, but in more general, philosophical terms, what do you believe are the key responsibilities of the chief academic officer in terms of leadership?

J.E.: I think I would say the most important broad responsibility is to place students and the academic program at the center

of the institution in every way you can. In the budget, in planning, in public relations, in marketing, to be a force for the quality and value of the academic program and the student experience, to be at the center of pretty much any important decision at the college. Especially in an institution that is not like Penn State. You don't deal with residential life or with athletics; you're dealing with students and an academic program.

E.W.: Is it fair to say that maintaining the integration of the academic program and the core values was the focus of OAA [Office of Academic Affairs] under your leadership?

J.E.: Yes, absolutely it was a focus for me.

E.W.: Many around the college are concerned that there is precipitous slippage away from certain core values and that the organization is changing rapidly. Are you concerned with this?

J.E.: Well, I certainly worry about "slippage." I don't have, at this point, a good vantage point. I do think we have some great people in key roles who continue to work for the core mission and values. I would make a connection with the budget situation, in that I think it was easier to focus on more strictly academic matters when we had a very significant reserve in the budget.

E.W.: There's a great answer, the game does change with tight budgets.

J.E.: Back in 2006, you could make a decision to strategically invest resources in having academic support professionals in centers to help students – that was an investment in academic quality. You could do that when you had funds available to invest. Right now, that's much more challenging to do.

E.W.: You didn't mention that, though, in the list of your accomplishments, but to me, the hiring of academic support professionals was monumental for the college. That decision said that we care about student success and here is the evidence.

J.E.: There was a lot of improvement in center staffing, not just the academic support people. Joe, Bill and I and the deans worked that out collaboratively. We created a center staffing model that called

for certain positions to be filled, and we did that in conversation with the deans for the regional centers. We were able to invest systematically over several years in those positions and also filled those same kinds of roles (adapted differently) for graduate programs and CDL. We had a model of building staff with enrollment that was funded by solid enrollments for an extended period of time. So anyway, I think having a cushion just makes a difference.

E.W.: You were VPAA and provost during the Moore presidency, which is important in the organizational history of the college because it represents in many ways a departure from the founding, a founding that lasted for three decades. How would you summarize the Moore years for future college generations?

J.E.: I would start with when Joe's appointment was announced in March of 2000 and he was invited to come to the All College Conference and give a presentation to the assembly. I would say he hit a home run. He talked about Ernest Boyer and Jim Hall and the founding values and vision and the educational philosophy and he linked it all to a social justice agenda – and that is who he is, I think. People were gratified and pleased. He spent a year going around the college and talking to people about things and seeing every different place we had and I think he came out of that with an agenda. He had enormous respect for the foundations of the college. I think he wanted us to bring that forward in new ways and to deepen it. One part of that involved creating better work spaces for people, a huge effort around capital projects and buildings. This wasn't about wanting to become known as the facilities president; Joe just saw the places where our staff were working and where our students were learning and said, "We have to do better." He spent a lot of time on that.

Another thing that was important was his external work – I mean, he worked with the legislature, the executives, the opinion leaders that we had some connection with as a college, he connected us with more opinion leaders, he brought people onto the foundation board who were amazing, found ways to help them understand what this place is about and why it should matter to

them. Really amazing at that stuff. I think he made a big difference in how we were seen externally and was strategically very successful in those efforts. That's what laid the ground work for the facilities. That's what laid the ground work for the MAT program being approved, which was a huge thing because it required a master plan amendment and we had faced tremendous opposition to expanding our scope in the past. Same thing with nursing – it took those kinds of external connections. He navigated the politics of New York state, connected with people on both sides of the aisle. He didn't compromise us ever but found ways to work with quite a range of "influencers." On occasion, he stood up to very powerful people outside of the college with integrity and courage, and succeeded.

E.W.: Where do you think he learned how to do this?

J.E.: Playing basketball on the streets in New Jersey, I think. He's a tough guy!

E.W.: A tough infighter politically speaking?

J.E.: He made his way in the world without a lot of advantages, somewhere achieved a kind of sense of himself and a confidence that I think is kind of rare and he's an incredible strategic thinker. Strategy is great fun for him, you know, figuring out how to move this legislative player to align with that legislative player to get behind this capital project in somebody else's district, that's fun for him. It's also hard work and he puts the work in.

E.W.: He must have carefully studied and gotten very good advice.

J.E.: I think he's had some mentors in his life that he would talk about, but he's a strategic thinker and he has his guts.

E.W.: It sounds like you like him.

J.E.: Yes. There were times we were at odds, that we had differences, of course. But we also had long drives together across the state and we would talk business for a long time and then we'd listen to some kind of blues at full blast.

E.W.: That sounds like it must have been pretty good times overall. Based on your experience as provost, and all the other roles

you've had with the college, how do you think Empire State College is perceived by SUNY? What have been the challenges of leading Empire State College with regard to the college's place within the SUNY system? I'm interested in this as the college's representative on the University Faculty Senate where I often find considerable incongruence between the traditional comprehensive colleges in our sector and our own radical theories and practices. So, how do you see the college's place within SUNY?

J.E.: I think that adult learners continue to be an afterthought. I think this is the default mindset across the system. I can't speak directly about the most recent realities, but I think adult learners are still not at the core of peoples' thinking. Even with the recent emphasis on SUNY as an economic driver, adults are not at the center. There's no fundamental core understanding that educating adults is critical for them, their children, the community, the state. I just don't think it's there.

E.W.: No, the system focuses on university centers and bringing in large research grants. It seems that helping to employ adults, many displaced from their jobs by structural change in the global economy, doesn't matter very much.

J.E.: University research grants are important, and it's not the only way to drive economic development. If you think of the long term well-being, economically and socially, of the more challenged communities in this state, having adults get an education, earn a degree that gives them access to a better job and makes them role models for their kids, adult education is a huge, long-term economic driver.

E.W.: At university senate meetings, I meet with representatives of the colleges in our sector; sometimes I wonder why I'm in those discussions. I imagine when SUNY presidents meet, it must be the same for our college president and provost.

J.E.: When I was in the provost role, I'd been in the position long enough that I was one of the longer term people in the CAO (chief academic officers) group. We are associated with the comprehensive colleges – that's what our sector is. I served

on the executive committee for the CAOs, and then on the SUNY budget task force as a representative of the CAOs. There was a certain amount of respect, but it was person-based, it wasn't about Empire State College. It was about longevity and the value of the argument you might make and the way that you could link your college's agenda with the well-being of other colleges in the sector. I thought I was able to do that pretty well – particularly around the budget challenges and to make common cause with that group. When it came to relationships with the university centers, in some contrast, it was pretty evident the comprehensive colleges were being dismissed as a group, not just us. It's not just adult learners who don't have cache, but it's also the comprehensive colleges without the major research agendas. So in some ways, the teaching mission also is a detriment in terms of the politics of the system.

One can gain a certain amount of personal credibility. I think Joe had an enormous amount of that and I created some of that over time, in my own way. But the college is not there; we're not in people's minds. The piece that both of us have worked on in terms of financial aid policies and how the state treats adult and part-time learners is one of the regrets I have: that we weren't able to make more of a difference on that, though I think we made a beginning. Joe started that and I was able to carry it forward in the interim president role in relation to the Spitzer Commission on Higher Education, which of course fell apart when Spitzer left office.

E.W.: I cited your report on financial aid in my essay for the UFS Bulletin, and appreciated it very much.

J.E.: That was a moment where we had an opportunity to begin to change financial aid for adults, but the moment was lost by the dramatic exit of a governor, and it hasn't resurfaced. I regret that.

E.W.: Well, it's actually worse now because we're subsidizing the rational tuition policy and the so-called TAP-gap, and not as many of our students can qualify for TAP, and Pell grants also are either reduced or have been restricted in some ways. So financial aid for adults is actually worse.

I wonder if you think that the changing higher education marketplace might make us more important in SUNY going forward. I guess what I'm getting at is whether Empire State College might soon become SUNY's answer to the emergence of the for-profit models that focus primarily on adult learners? Do we represent a system capability for SUNY? Do you think history is on the side of alternative higher education, and might the 2025 initiative of President Davis to establish New York's Open University position the college well for a prosperous future?

J.E.: That's a good question. I'm not sure that we benefit in the near future, but in say 10 years, maybe so. I think in the larger landscape of higher education, yes. The system to me seems still to be focused on bricks and mortar delivery, with the exception of some community colleges. There are some pockets in other places and some master's degrees that either blend in online methods or use new learning technologies. Obviously, there's more creativity possible and we do some really wonderful, brilliant things. So far, though, I don't see fundamental change in the way people look at education in the system.

E.W.: What are your thoughts about the trend toward certificates as nondegree approaches to focused learning and credentialing? There are new demands in higher education related to structural changes in the economy and mass unemployment and displaced workers. There is a need for those people to retrain in some manner, or to get a specific skill that makes them competitive in the workforce.

J.E.: I absolutely agree with you that focused learning can help workers. I do agree that we have a role to play in educating displaced workers. I have not seen direct evidence that certificates have employment value. I think they are largely a marketing device for colleges intended to attract nonmatriculated and potentially degree-seeking students. For Empire State College, I am concerned that the generally prestructured nature of the certificates moves us away from educational principles, without adding much value for students.

E.W.: How do we get adult learning to the top of the SUNY agenda and get on the governor's agenda? It would seem that the governor recognizes workforce development needs and this chancellor wants to have a positive relationship with the governor. Some of the interests are aligned here, but I don't know how it'll all play out.

J.E.: There's some inertia in the state and even across the country. Several years ago, Hillary Clinton had a major legislative initiative about adult learners and it was just right up our alley, but it never went forward. It's tough to get across to people how important this is. It's hard to get across how building public higher education capacity serves people most in need better than advancing very large, for-profit, online universities like the University of Phoenix.

E.W.: Doesn't SUNY need something to offer as an alternative to predatory, alternative, for-profit models? Lots of people go to Phoenix, about as many as go to SUNY, so shouldn't a system of public higher education have something comparable, but of higher quality and much less expensive? Shouldn't SUNY have a response to the Phoenixes of the world?

J.E.: They will, in the long run, as the demographics change, I think. We're nearing the tail end of a boom that has increased traditional-age enrollment. If the bottom drops out of that then people will see the Phoenixes as a competitive problem, or they might see Empire State College and other adult-friendly institutions as an answer.

E.W.: Do you think Empire State College is positioned well compared to the other comprehensive colleges for this emerging demand from adults and displaced workers caused by structural changes in the economy? The numbers are quite significant: 15 million jobs are permanently gone and I'd like to connect this back to the question of a liberal arts education versus employment training models of education. So how does that all connect? If demands for alternative forms of education are on the rise, and the data bears this out, does that position Empire State College in a better place than traditional higher education?

J.E.: I think structural change in the workplace positions the community colleges well, as they are really the first-line response to dislocated workers. In terms of the more technical, industry-driven programs, I think we are, and continue to be, incredibly affirmative of community college education in the way we bring students in from that level of the system and into four-year degrees here. We do function primarily as an upper-division institution, and I think our role is most importantly one of providing degree opportunities at the upper-division level and in the wide range of fields that we do, and I think the liberal arts element of that is key.

E.W.: Can it put people to work?

J.E.: Yes and no. It may not be able to put them to work per se, in a direct and immediate sense, but it may put them in a position to sustain and grow in their work over the long haul. Does getting a degree in American literature get you a job? In so far as you need some kind of college degree to enter a lot of jobs, it can. Does it give you a longer term leg up for promotions and advancement and career flexibility and the kinds of skills you need to think? The degree in American literature is probably better than some other options. There is some research evidence about the longer term significance of a liberal arts degree for success in business. It helps in terms of advancement to higher management and I think that's a case that needs to be made publicly by institutions that do focus on the liberal arts. It's a case that needs to be made when "SUNY as an economic engine" is argued.

E.W.: It sounds like you're maybe a little concerned about all of the discussion of SUNY as an economic driver. Do you think that's overemphasized in "The Power of SUNY" plan?

J.E.: No, you absolutely have to make that case because that's the climate we're living in. I'm disappointed that it is the climate we have after 30 years of disinvestment in higher education.

E.W.: It's not just a climate though is it? Labor economists seem to have evidence that suggests that liberal arts education

alone is unlikely to get it done in the global economy of the not too distant future. They point to engineering, math and science and upper management education as facilitating employment opportunity.

J.E.: Yes, but who are the people in power and what kind of education did they get? The folks that are really in a position of privilege and power came out of an elite liberal arts educational background, by and large. They went to Yale and they went to Harvard. They got a degree in political science, it wasn't in business, it wasn't in accounting – so I mean there's also a scaffolding of the educational system. You can make the case about the immediate economic impact of a certain kind of degree

for a certain class of citizen, but you don't make that case for the daughters and sons of people in the U.S. Congress or in top levels of corporate America. That's not the education that those people are getting. I think there's a class stratification here that's playing out in what people aspire to in terms of the kind of higher education they're getting or promoting for others. I think there are some real issues there. Are we educating people for slots in an economy? Are we educating people to be critically thinking citizens of a very complicated world? Are we educating people to be able to think their way through a life path where they have some capacity to shape that path? Different kinds of education do act differently.

E.W.: We'll see, I suppose, how higher education adapts to its changing environment and how the college evolves within SUNY over the next decade or so.

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Note

I wish to thank Joyce for her generosity in agreeing to discuss at length and in detail her various roles in, and significant contributions to, Empire State College. Those who view the history of the college from some future time will benefit from Joyce's insights and will appreciate her deep commitment and dedication to the college and its mission. E.W.

Half of No

Karyn Pilgrim, Metropolitan Center

1.1

I was a jerk. The staff at the office told me so. “Holmes is such a jerk,” they’d say, as I passed by their desks on my way to the copy room. But I am not a jerk. To jerk means to tug or pull, which in relation to me now is nonsensical, though it may have been true back then. Something big happened on the trip to JFK. I’m not the same man, though I have the same name. I’ve let go.

Most people are shockingly inaccurate. As a copier for the Duplicate Department at Oh!No!, I saw those things: the generally unprofessional and inefficient manner of my peers. The sheer number of Angela and Rochelle’s typos on any given day illustrated this. Worse, when I pointed it out, as I so often had to, they looked abused and muttered things like, “What has the detective found today?” You’d think, from how they said it, wrong was right.

That airplane was a thing of beauty. The reason for its beauty was its orderliness. There were two aisles that ran the length of the plane, with 18 special seats up front that people in coach, where I sat, were not allowed to go. Each row consisted of eight lettered seats: AB, CDEF, GH. Those letters, depicted on little pictograms affixed to the luggage rack, made it perfectly clear where each person should go. I sat in 53A. There were 60 rows in all. I knew this because I counted the rows on my way to the bathroom at the end of the plane. The flight attendants were back there chatting, just like the general staff at Oh!No! but not nearly so loudly, and they smiled and asked me what I needed as I approached. Those flight attendants, like the airplanes they serviced, were made from a logical blueprint. In that we were alike.

A woman sat next to me, which made me uncomfortable in a familiar way, though it was certainly no fault of her own. She was

assigned her seat, and I mine, and these things happened. Mother wouldn’t have liked it, but she never liked anything, and if I hadn’t needed to earn a living, she would have kept me at home forever, to forestall situations like these. Fortunately, a man has to work – and women too, these days. So I didn’t take offense when this strange woman with black hair and green eyes took her seat. She was polite enough about it, saying nothing but “excuse me” when her elbow bumped my arm. She had very pale skin, like ultra-white paper. Like me, she wasn’t young or old. I had just turned 36, at 7 p.m. on August 20.

There were so many things to admire about that flight. My favorite was how the flight attendants stood in the aisles and demonstrated the safety measures as we followed along with the pamphlet in our hands. It reminded me of synchronized swimming, a sport I greatly admired. If the plane were to fall from the sky and crash into the ocean, it was not a hopeless situation. There were inflatable vests stashed under the seats, and even the seat cushions could be removed and used as flotation devices. If the cabin should suddenly run out of air, oxygen masks would drop from the panel above our heads, which we would then fasten over our mouths. The flight attendants performed an excellent mime of a parent applying his or her own mask first, and then the child’s. I thought about how I’d have to be quick in putting on my own before affixing the mask on the woman beside me. How grateful she would be, her eyes huge and warm as sunny clover above the mask.

Mother wouldn’t have approved, of course. She approved of very little, and for that reason she home schooled me. We had no TV. She was not a good home schooler, I have since learned. She gave very little thought to it, and purchased no books. For this reason, I taught myself by

reading material I found around the house. Instruction manuals, mostly. I appreciate them greatly for their logical procedures and careful wording. She was worried about the hippies, which was understandable given their terrible hygiene and disturbing proclivities, but wrong that they would have influenced me. I was far too rational for that. I have heard there are two kinds of people in the world: those who color outside the lines, and those who do not. I was among the latter at that time, taking pains to ensure that no stray mark of mine crossed over the boundary line. But I did appreciate things about women, and I don’t think this could be helped. Certain curves and swellings, like the continent of South America which was painted across the cafeteria wall at work. I always sat facing the map as I ate my brown bag lunch.

Fortunately, the woman beside me did not speak. I disliked the types who sat and gabbed, or probed and prodded, like the women at work. Some of the men were like that, too. Unfortunately, the woman beside me had ignored the safety demonstration, and didn’t even skim through the manual. The only thing good about that was that if something went wrong, she’d need my assistance.

Something did go wrong. About two hours into the flight from San Francisco to New York, the plane began to jerk. Then suddenly it dropped and we fell through the air for several seconds. It was quite terrible, and people screamed. The woman beside me grabbed my hand.

“It’s nothing,” I told her. “A temporary stall when the engine flips over.” This was not true. I know machines. What had happened was that the engine shut down, and after a pause, another engine turned on.

“I thought the engine had died,” she said. Her voice was pure, like a flute.

“No, no. Nothing like that. A routine mechanical maneuver.” It was quite disconcerting, her musical voice and her soft, damp hand wrapped around mine.

“I thought we were all going to die. I could see us plunging down and down, the airplane nose tilting straight toward the earth. I even saw how our hair would fly up and the wind stretch our mouths so we couldn’t even scream. We’d be screaming, but we wouldn’t make a sound.”

I didn’t know what to say to that, so I didn’t say anything. This was not the first time I’d held a woman’s hand. I occasionally helped women from busses when I saw they were struggling with packages, or wearing unstable shoes. I did this as often as possible, which wasn’t much. Once or twice a month.

Also, when I was 8, there was the girl with hair like glass who lived on the other side of our house. One day, her hand shot through the iron bars and snatched up mine as we stood on either side of the gate that separated our yards. We stood like that for 15 seconds, our gazes connected, as if we were the only people in the world.

“Was it...” asked the woman beside me, “a mechanical twitch?”

There was something similar between her eyes and the blond child’s, a glassy shine, as if she had a very high fever. When I had a high fever while mother was alive, she would make me lie in a cold-water bath while she placed ice cubes on my head, one by one. I thought about giving this woman a cold-water bath, but I couldn’t think about that without thinking about other things, so I focused on the way the airplane seats were so nicely designed with their panels of buttons on the arms to turn on the lights and tilt back the chairs, and so many other useful activities.

“Are you a mechanic?” asked the woman.

“No.” I knew that mechanics were not considered important in the way that CEOs and bankers were. “I’m a businessman. I’m always traveling on important missions for the company.”

“Really? I fly frequently myself and I’ve never encountered anything like this.”

“It happens. Not often, but it happens.” As I talked, I stared at the seat in front of me. Her eyes were too green, and they unnerved me. “There was the time I was flying to Brazil and the plane dropped 1,000 feet before righting itself. And the trip back from Japan, when it tilted at a 45 degree angle. And once when we were passing over the Gobi desert the engine exploded and the plane began to flail around. ...”

I had become rather excited, jerking my hand so that hers was jerking, too. She noticed her hand in mine and let out a sudden cry, like a cat might make if you stepped on its tail.

“Oh God!” She snatched it back to her lap and held it there as if it might escape. Something happened to her eyes; a shadow appeared that hadn’t been there before. “I’m so sorry,” she said. Her voice was no longer gentle. “I didn’t know I was doing that. Pardon me.” A red mist colored her cheek and she looked toward the aisle.

“Quite all right.” I stared at the seatback in front of me.

She unfolded her blanket and tucked herself under it, careful not to cross over into my space. She turned to the side so her back was to me, and covered her breasts with her arms as if I had taken some unfathomable liberty.

1.2

The airport terminal was a sight to behold. All of the people, coming and going, neatly divided into lanes with solid white lines partitioning the northbound pedestrians from those moving south. Dotted lines separated the rapid movers from the slow. There were signs and arrows indicating directions, and escalators and elevators swooping upward and downward and sideways, too. Lights blinked and loudspeakers barked, warning irresponsible late people to run for their flights, and lost people to hurry to the nearest attendant, and for everyone to say something if they see something and guard their packages with vigilance. I appreciated the organization greatly; its efficiency was a thing of beauty like the Greek Age with all their columns, and the Romans with their coliseums. Those things I learned about on TV. I had one,

though mother would have been spinning in her grave. Our present age, with its intersecting lines and whizzing arrows, was a masterpiece of efficiency that someone on a mission as important as mine was, would surely notice.

At first, I was uncertain why I was chosen. There were, after all, 35 people in the Duplicate Department. It was true, I’d been polishing my name tag, “Foster Holmes, Duplicate” for five years longer than everyone else. That is, except Eddy Balloos, the copy floor manager. He’d been there four months longer than I and never let me forget it. I would have liked to be promoted to Mastercopy. Everybody wanted that. And Eddy rubbed it in my face. “Mornin’, duplicate” he’d say as he passed by my station, seven minutes late, occasionally 15. I always started at five till nine. Nevertheless, in my 16 years there, I had never been promoted. I started as duplicate and this title duplicated itself, year after year. But the truth was, I was an excellent duplicate, the best at the company, and everybody knew it. So must the higher ups, I reasoned, and because of this, it was I who was chosen for this mission.

Angela, the orders clerk and Eddy’s girlfriend, came over to my machine and leaned against the tray where fresh copies were stacking, the plump curve of her hip pressed against the machine’s edge so that her flesh bulged around it. She had wild curly hair that never stayed put in her ponytail. That day, she’d left it down so it spilled over the front of her yellow shirt with its low lying neckline that would have made mother growl.

“You musta done something right, Jerko.” She grinned, rolling her large round eyes the color of pennies, and jabbed a manila interoffice envelope against my chest. “Take it.”

Snapping her gum, she wobbled off in that way of hers, hips trembling and colliding like two planets on the very same orbit. I thought about that sometimes as I stared at copy piling up in the tray, the course of those planets.

“Holmes!” she yelled over her shoulder. “Don’t come to work tomorrow.”

The contents of the envelope were one memo and one plane ticket, one way, to New York City. The memo was brief and clearly written, altogether an excellent set of instructions:

From: Office of Executive Director,
Oh!No!

To: Foster Holmes, Duplicate

Mr. Holmes,

The company is entrusting you with an IMPORTANT MISSION. Tomorrow, you will report to San Francisco Airport and fly at the stated time on your ticket to New York City, John F. Kennedy Airport. There, at the airport, you will ask to speak with John F. Kennedy, at which time you will present him with the briefcase the company has left for you in the mailroom, on the bench beneath your mailbox. This briefcase is filled with IMPORTANT MASTERCOPY. Do not open the briefcase for any reason. Upon receiving the briefcase, John F. Kennedy will give you a return ticket to San Francisco. It is urgent that you SPEAK TO NO ONE about this important mission.

DO NOT FAIL!

Oh!No! Executive Director

I knew nothing about this man, John F. Kennedy, or why he had an airport named after him. Maybe he was rich and had paid for it. Mother had never kept newspapers or magazines in the house, and I'd kept to that habit after she died. And though I had a television, in partial and guilty deference to mother, I only allowed myself three movies a week, usually from the Evening Oldies on channel 11. I had doubted my significance to the higher-ups, but this trip verified my importance, for I was being sent on a mission to a VIP, with Mastercopy, no less! This trip would do more than elevate my position; it would educate me, too. I was equally thrilled and worried.

It was not until after I exited the plane and was pulled with the crowd into an enormous room with huge machines encircled by moving belts that I realized my mistake: I should have asked the flight attendants – perhaps even the pilot – to contact John

F. Kennedy and let him know when I was arriving. Then we could have arranged where to meet.

I circled the room, looking for what I thought should be a tall man with broad shoulders and an expensive suit, a man who looked like he was looking for me. It didn't take long to find such a man. Unfortunately, there was more than one man like him: seven in all, tall and broad and muscular, though this was only apparent by the bulk of their bodies beneath their identical dark suits. As I passed by one of them, catching his eye, he'd stare back intently, studying my face. Something about his look prevented me from asking if he was John F. Kennedy. Instead, I reasoned that if he were my man, he would have noticed my briefcase and called me to him. Wouldn't John F. Kennedy stand apart from the crowd, dressed in a manner that distinguished him? I realized he might not be tall at all, or dressed formally. It was his airport, after all, so why bother with business attire?

I began to search for a man in the kind of clothing you'd find at home, a not so tall man with maybe even a bit of a paunch like Eddy was getting. I found plenty of these types, gazing at the metal machines with their mouths slack, wearing a look of boredom. Men dressed in sweatsuits, in blue jeans, in flip flops and shorts. So many of them, it was obvious my strategy was failing. I was already feeling a bit light headed with anxiety when luggage began to pop from a hole in the center of the nearest machine, each piece carried down a short belt to the main belt, and from there conveyed round and round, piece after piece, so I saw then why the room was called "luggage claim." People jumped to life, buzzing with motion, pushing and shoving, women shouting directions to their partners and children, or pushing themselves into the fray. I saw, with a mounting fear, that as soon as they identified and grabbed their suitcases, they headed straight for the sliding glass doors that lined the far wall, and passed under signs reading "TAXIS," "BUSES TO ALL BORROUGHS," "SHORT-TERM PARKING," "LONG-TERM PARKING" and "CAR RENTALS." Everything indicated immediate departure. What if John F. Kennedy left, too?

I must have panicked. I found myself standing in the middle of the room, waving my arms and shouting: "Attention! Attention! Will John F. Kennedy please come here?"

People around me were staring my way with looks of confusion, but not enough people could hear above the clamor, so I shouted even more loudly: "Attention! Attention!"

A large woman in front of me turned to snarl, "Stop screamin' in my ear, you freak."

A man laughed and said to the woman, "Some people oughtta stick to their meds." She cackled, which made him laugh harder, and I stood there feeling my ears turn red and my head grow light, on the verge of crying, of all things, which I'd never done before.

1.3

The green-eyed woman stared into the bathroom mirror, picking fluff from the airplane blanket from her long, black dress. She turned sideways to see if there was anything unsightly stuck to her hips, and noticing nothing, moved away from the mirror toward the door, thinking how tired she looked, but also how glad she was that she'd slept on the flight, after the turbulence that made her feel sick. And how glad she was, too, that sleeping had kept her from having to ignore the businessman beside her, who had made her feel like such a fool. Holding his hand! Get a grip.

Before exiting the bathroom, she checked her phone for a message. Nothing. She dropped it into her leather handbag and carefully snapped that shut, since it held everything she had, that she'd traveled with this time. On her last vacation, her "Jack-ation" as she called it, luggage had hindered her ability to just be.

Even so, she entered the baggage claim wearing a look of attention, and moved toward Claim B as the sign instructed. She lingered around the edges of the room, watching the people watching the empty conveyor belt, her gaze sweeping in a practiced arc past the exit doors, then back to the crowd. Over the course of its path she saw little to impress. A few women who could possibly turn Jack's eye, not that she was worried. Thin things with shiny

hair and newness stamped on their smooth faces. More and more, youth struck her as something achieved by a stun gun, and she gave it less of her attention.

The men were even more underwhelming. Something had gone missing from the pack, she thought wryly. Apparently Jack, with his common good looks, was the missing link. She snapped open her handbag and had the phone halfway out before realizing what she was doing. Out came the hand, snap went the handbag. She began to pace restlessly back and forth. Something was holding up the luggage. The crowd was growing restless, all the mirth of arrival leaking away till they sagged on their feet. She wove between the defeated arrivees, a strained look on her face that stood out under the harsh terminal light. But her hips were rounded in contrast to the line of her silhouette, and as she passed by, men turned furtively from their female companions to take a look. Her slow nonchalance made it clear that such looking would slide off her back like water off a duck, yet her glance brushed their faces like a soft finger might, and they shifted their stances and leaned in toward her.

The conveyor belt choked up its first piece of luggage. The crowd murmured, all eyes on the red suitcase. It was a tense moment, a long moment, and then a blue backpack hurtled out of the void, followed immediately by a bright green trunk.

She kept moving, weaving between a short woman with frizzy hair and short man in cargo pants one size too small. His eyes gripped her back like two flies.

“Dammit, Ralph. Help me out here,” the short woman barked.

This trip had been longer than most. She had added a few unexpected stops, on top of the already spontaneous path of her vacation away from Jack, her husband. Seattle. Portland. A quick jaunt up to see the Aurora Borealis, which turned into six weeks on a houseboat parked in a little harbor on Kodiak – that last, because she’d smiled at an old lady in a hotel in Juneau, for which she was invited to dinner with the old lady and her son, the park ranger, who turned out to be a fine specimen of male. He’d lent her his houseboat, a rusty ensemble that was clearly for dock-use only. She’d loved it, though. Even missed it now.

All in all she had to admit she’d been gone for six months, and that coming flat on the heels of a trip sans Jack to the Philippines. That one had been truncated, at least, out of boredom. Could a man in his early 40s change his appearance dramatically in half a year?

She turned around and smacked against a woman with fish hooks for earrings, true to size, but bright yellow. “Watch it.”

Her nostrils flared and her mouth opened halfway, froze momentarily, then closed. She moved away from the woman, in the direction of the sliding glass doors. But instead of exiting, she sat down by the windows and turned partially to the side, keeping one eye on the exit and the other on passers-by.

When the man from the plane pushed out of the crowd and stood looking at the doors, she turned her face to gaze out the window. She could see his reflection in the glass. She looked past it, at a fleet of yellow cabs with their foreign drivers standing in a circle, watching something or other on the ground

between them. They were laughing, their hands draped easily over a buddy’s shoulder with a familiarity unheard of for American men. Now and then, they would jump up in an excited manner and point at the ground. The woman wanted to see what it was they were watching, but knew well enough that if she approached, they would simply whisk her into a waiting cab.

When she looked again, the businessman was still there, his reflection perfectly clear in the glass, so that she could make out his tense expression. He was agitated, hopping from foot to foot. His arms hung down at his sides, hands like paper weights bunched into fists. Did he see her, she wondered? But he wasn’t facing her, exactly. His gaze was roving along the windows, the doors, the signs above the doors.

His hopping grew faster, till he looked like he might just spring into the air. A family of a mother, father and three children with hair rattled from sleep moved away from him, their mother shooing them to safety while the father followed behind, grimacing at the ceiling. Suddenly, the businessman shot up his arms. The woman spun around on her seat to face him.

“Attention! Attention!” he shouted.

People stared, bug-eyed, and stepped out of his path.

“I’m looking for John F. Kennedy,” he shouted. “Will John F. Kennedy please come here?”

*

Note

These are the opening three chapters of a novel in-progress.

The Obama Administration as History: First Waves of Interpretation A Sabbatical Report

Wayne Willis, Genesee Valley Center

Journalists used to say fondly that the daily newspaper is the first draft of history. Today they would have to add the contributions of news and opinion magazines, radio and television, documentary films, and the vast outpourings from the Internet. What all of these rapid response media can do is not only record events but begin to place them in one sort of context or another and interpret their significance. Thus, when historians come trailing behind, they will encounter not only lots of factual (or purportedly factual) information, but also a variety of past scripts for making meaning out of the data. This, of course, has always been true in the writing of history, and the historian is not limited to the versions of truth left by those who were there. But in constructing their own interpretations, historians are often guided by what contemporaries had to say, and modern communications are multiplying the number and range of voices clamoring for influence over the present and the future.

During my recent 24-week sabbatical, I set out to examine current debates concerning Barack Obama and his presidency that seek, explicitly or implicitly, to shape the contours of ongoing historical judgment. This project expanded upon the work that I had previously done to give my lectures as Scholar Across the College in 2009-2010 about whether Obama's presidency could become the 21st century "new New Deal" envisioned by progressives, such as Paul Krugman (2009). While I continued to follow daily commentaries in the mass media, I also read more than 40 of the rapidly accumulating Obama-related books by journalists, biographers, political activists, social scientists and psychoanalysts. Despite claims that the "Age of the Book" is coming to an end, I think it likely that some of this literature will have more impact on

the thinking of historians than much of the more ephemeral output of the media, largely because book-length exposition remains a vehicle for the kind of fully developed argumentation that may persuade later scholars.

My plan is to continue to track these "first waves of interpretation" at least through the early post-election analyses for 2012, which will surely bring forth either an abundance of postmortems on Obama's rejected leadership or an equivalent surfeit of vindication. For now, I would like to touch briefly upon some main themes in the historical consideration of Obama's presidency to date.

Perhaps the most striking claim made on behalf of our 44th president is that his ascent defines a period in history, the end of which is yet to be determined. Gwen Ifill (2009) and Katrina vanden Heuvel (2011) both refer to "the Age of Obama" in the titles of their popular books and this has become an often repeated phrase in Obama commentaries. Similarly, other writers have announced that we are now living in "Barack Obama's America." In this way, Obama's historical legacy was being elevated to the level of the most renowned presidents when his administration had hardly begun. Few presidents have been judged by historians to be important enough to give their name to an era. (Arthur Schlesinger Jr., for instance devoted several books to *The Age of [Franklin] Roosevelt* and *The Age of [Andrew] Jackson*.) Underlying the claim for Obama is the contention that his nomination and election constitute both a culmination of past progress in race relations and perhaps a turning point toward a new era of interracial equity and comity. Whether for this reason, or any other, historians eventually agree that the Age of Obama is an appropriate label for our time, the idea is up for consideration.



Wayne Willis

A closely related and more widely debated theme is Obama's potential to be a "transformational" president in ways that extend beyond race relations. In his speeches and writings from 2004 through the campaign of 2008, Obama (2006) sometimes encouraged this perception of his aspirations, calling for the creation of "sustained, broad-based political coalitions needed to transform America" (p. 248). He spoke of his desire to "remake America" through a "project of national renewal" (p. 40). What the specific content of this transformation might be, and how far Obama wanted to take it, became a leading matter of controversy. Clearly, Obama promised to bring change (often spelled with a capital C), but how much change was needed to qualify as transformative?

Transformation might suggest revolutionary upheaval, but no American president has ever advocated change of this magnitude. Instead, the concept of a transformational president, as formulated by political scientists such as James MacGregor Burns (1984) and Stephen Skowronek (1993), refers to the exertion of effective presidential leadership to bring about major, long lasting public policy changes affecting important

areas of American political, economic or social life. A transformational president, so conceived, succeeds in moving the course of public policy and political dialogue substantially (but not drastically) to the left, like Franklin Roosevelt, or to the right, like Ronald Reagan, with enduring results.

As some observers noted, Obama's policy positions in the 2008 campaign were standard liberal democratic fare, not dramatically different from his top rivals for his party's nomination. Yet it was Obama who endowed these positions with an *aura* of transformation (e.g., the "Change We Can Believe In" theme). For progressive policy intellectuals, such as Robert Kuttner (2008; 2010), this raised hopes that when Obama entered office amidst the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, he would seize the moment to embrace the bolder reform agenda proposed by the most left-leaning thinkers, organizations and public officials associated with the Democrats. Obama's choice not to do so was keenly disappointing to these elements and has led to a portrayal of his presidency as a wasted opportunity to win greater reforms in the health care system, workers' rights, financial regulation, full employment policy and other issue areas.

Having decided that Obama has fallen short of what he might have achieved in leading Congress and the public, these critics offer a variety of explanations for historians to ponder. Some, like Ron Suskind (2011), see in Obama a surprisingly insecure, as well as inexperienced, leader who lacked the confidence to make a winning case for left-of-center policies and was intellectually captured by Clinton-era advisers with ties to Wall Street elites. The psychoanalyst Justin Frank (2011) thinks that a "pathological" inability to express anger explains Obama's persistent, unavailing quest for bipartisan consensus during his first years in office. Other progressives agree with Roger Hodge (2010), who says Obama has essentially sold out, committing a "betrayal of the best elements of American liberalism" (p. 20). More forgiving commentators on the left, like Eric Alterman (2011), blame the structure and operations of the American political system as a whole, more than Obama himself, for blocking greater change. Alterman also points out that Franklin

Roosevelt "was pushed to the left by a genuine mass movement" of workers and farmers, while Obama has been "facing the opposite" in the rise of the conservative Tea Party (p. 147). Recently, progressives' spirits have been lifted a bit as the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon spread to other cities around the country, hoping to see it grow into a coherent leftward counterforce.

Although, as Alterman (2011) put it, their "thrill is gone" for Obama, progressives often concede that the legislative record in Obama's first two years places him "in the company" of Lyndon Johnson and Franklin Roosevelt "as one of the most consequential Democratic presidents of the last hundred years" (p. 145; p. 1). Several volumes of articles by academic political scientists reach much the same conclusion. Through close analysis of the challenges that the Obama administration confronted to build congressional majorities for its policy initiatives, these scholars often find the highly compromised outcomes (of Democrats bargaining mainly with themselves) to be the most that could realistically be achieved. They note that despite the resemblances between the crisis atmosphere of 1932-1933 and late 2008-2009, the overall economic and political environments were actually quite different and, in Obama's case, not so propitious for "transformative" change. They do not generally share the premise of progressive journalists and activists that Obama could likely have gotten a bigger and better stimulus package, or stronger financial regulation than the Dodd-Frank bill, or health care legislation that at least included a "public option" plan, if he had made more aggressive and inspiring rhetorical use of his presidential "bully pulpit." Still, Theda Skocpol and Lawrence Jacobs (2011) fault Obama severely for failing "to frame public issues successfully in major speeches" (p. 28) after he became president, with the result that support for his achievements declined rapidly among the public. By not providing "effective public leadership" for his policies, they contend, Obama "botched a central function of the presidency," one in which he had been expected to excel (p. 31).

Regarding Obama's endeavor to formulate policies that would attract bipartisan support, James Kloppenberg, the chair of

the history department at Harvard, takes issue with the progressives' critique. Far from attributing it to naïveté or neuroticism, Kloppenberg (2011) argues that "Obama has demonstrated an exceptionally sophisticated and sustained engagement with the history of American thought and political culture" (p. 2). Obama knows that "Democracy in a pluralist culture means coaxing a common good to emerge from the clash of competing individual interests," a process in which "no formulas ensure success" (p. xxxvi). In his book, *Reading Obama*, Kloppenberg writes a complex account of Obama's intellectual growth, attempting to show that the true "explanation of his commitment to conciliation lies in his idea of democracy as deliberation, his sure grasp of philosophical pragmatism, his Christian realism, and his sophisticated understanding that history, with all its ambiguities and ironies, provides the best rudder for political navigation" (p. 58). According to Kloppenberg, Obama's effort to govern in a post-partisan manner is "not a sign of weakness," but instead displays insight about "how the nation's political system was designed to work" (p. 83). He acknowledges that "as political strategy" Obama has taken "a calculated risk ... a gamble he may lose" (p. 83). However, given this analysis, Obama's pursuit of genuinely deliberative democracy might, if ultimately successful, be the most profound legacy of his presidency, perhaps not so much transformative as restorative of a tradition of *principled* compromise for the "common good."

But not all historians will agree that ideals of deliberative democracy, or civic republicanism, have ever been translated into actual political behavior on a regular basis in the United States. Indeed, in what might be taken for an implicit reply to Kloppenberg, the Princeton historian, Sean Wilentz (2011) has recently discussed "The Long and Tragical History of Post-Partisanship from Washington to Obama." Wilentz argues that transcending partisanship has long been more a wish than a reality and that, in fact, partisanship has "been Americans' most effective vehicle for democratic social and political reform" (para. 3).

Ironically, it is conservative intellectuals, pundits and politicians who give Obama the most credit for executing a transformative presidency. Conservatives routinely call Obama a dedicated radical who has successfully presided over a federal government “takeover” of major sectors of the economy, including health care, the automobile industry and the financial system. Obama, they commonly declare, is a socialist or fascist whose policies undermine capitalism and individual liberty, and are disastrous for economic recovery and growth. These charges come not just from talk show personalities, but from figures who are more intellectually respected among movement conservatives, such as Dinesh D’Souza, Jerome Corsi (Ph.D., political science, Harvard), former professor Newt Gingrich (Ph.D., history, Tulane), and Jonah Goldberg (2009), whose book *Liberal Fascism* has been hailed by Charles Murray, Daniel Pipes, and many other conservative luminaries as a major work of intellectual history. To support their Obama thesis, conservatives emphasize his involvement in the community organization movement founded by the self-described radical Saul Alinsky, his relationships with members of Michael Harrington’s Democratic Socialists of America, and past connections to other left-liberal groups. They dwell on lectures that Obama might have heard when he attended a couple of socialist scholars conferences while an undergraduate at Columbia University. D’Souza (2010) tries to link Obama to third world, anti-colonialist ideology through his Kenyan father and his youthful reading of Frantz Fanon and other black radicals. Conservatives maintain that these elements of Obama’s personal history dominated the development of his political beliefs and goals but have been ignored in the liberal media’s “slobbering love affair” (B. Goldberg, 2009) with him, allowing Obama to become a “Manchurian president” (Klein, 2010) of whom D’Souza (2010) counsels us to “be very afraid” (p. 56). Candidates for the Republican nomination have started to warn voters that Obama will be even more dangerous if elected to a second term, since this will be his last opportunity to unleash presidential power to fulfill his dreams of radical change.

The conservatives’ rendering of the Obama presidency will seem ludicrously hyperbolic, if not paranoid, to many who stand outside their movement. However, Americans increasingly live in differing “communicative and reality communities” (Skocpol & Jacobs, 2011, p. 28) that reinforce opposing world views. Argumentation that seems quite feeble to one camp looks powerful to another. Rather than being simply a cynical scare tactic, the conservatives’ interpretation of Obama fits neatly into a larger right-wing narrative of modern American history that depicts liberalism’s ostensibly failed “big government” programs and its “totalitarian” tendencies. Obama has now been accorded his place within this narrative and there is reason to expect that this is roughly how he will appear in later histories written by conservatives, just as a future incarnation of Howard Zinn on the left may view the Age of Obama as yet another episode in the stabilization of capital’s dominance over America. Whether Obama is eventually celebrated as a hero of pragmatic liberalism and deliberative democracy by historians who hang closer to the middle of the political road may depend on whether he gets that second term and what he is able to do with it.

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“True. Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than – learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we properly learn nothing from him, if by “learning” we now suddenly understand merely the procurement of useful information. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they – he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than the apprentices. The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs. If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. It still is an exalted matter, then, to become a teacher – which is something else entirely than becoming a famous professor.”

– Martin Heidegger (J. G. Gray, Trans.), *What Is Called Thinking?*
New York: Harper and Row, 1968, pp. 14-15
Original work published 1954

Thanks to Dawn Riley, Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, for suggesting this quote.

New Mentor Reflections, Part II

Jennifer A. Blue, Rebecca Bonanno, Sue Epstein, Michele Forte, Thalia MacMillan, Audeliz Matias and Sarah Hertz, Center for Distance Learning

Reflections of a New Mentor

Jennifer A. Blue

The new student file lies open on my desk. The *Student Degree Planning Guide* and *Undergraduate Catalog* lie nearby, pages turned down and sticky notes everywhere. The scheduled time for the phone call arrives. No matter how many scenarios I have run through my head, I know the actual call won't be like any of them! Am I scared? Am I excited? Yes and yes. Both are healthy, I think. As a mathematician, I find comfort in rules and definitions. Empire State College has few of these; rather, guidelines and recommendations abound!

I dial the number. The student answers. He sounds excited to go back to school. This is great news! We chat about his past, present and future, getting to know each other. Talk then moves to specifics about his degree. His area of study interests are in information science and information technology. Now I, the mathematician, am at a loss. I remind the student that what makes this college special is the ability to create one's own degree. Yet he wants to know exactly what courses he has to take for his degree. The guidelines fail me here. How to proceed?

Three deep breaths! I had training for this! I am able to regroup. I remind him I am new and, even if I wasn't, my part in this is to share his educational journey with him. The hour time slot I had allotted for our call is quickly coming to an end. We both leave the conversation with homework.

The student's homework is to review the *Undergraduate Catalog*, reading the title of every course the Center for Distance Learning offers and highlighting those that spark an interest. Then a few days later he is to look over the highlighted courses again. Perhaps he will see a theme in his interests,

perhaps not. Either way, it is a start toward identifying his desires and needs. We have another call scheduled for later in the week.

My homework is to learn more about what IS/IT degrees are, both in the eyes of Empire State College and of other schools. The student will have a similar exercise later, but for me to understand his journey, I too shall prepare.

I don't want to be the blind leading the blind. Am I alone in this feeling? I walk out my office door to the one next to mine. I am happy to see Michele is there and not on the phone or with anyone. Michele also is a new mentor. We chat. While Empire State College seems like a crazy place, we know things will all be OK.

I now have around 30 mentees, several in Planning and Finalizing the Degree, and one who already completed Planning and Finalizing and has submitted her degree program plan and rationale to committee. While each first phone call to a new mentee is still exciting, I am no longer scared to make that call.

So Many Questions ...

Rebecca Bonanno

In the last seven months since joining CDL as a new mentor, I've started dozens of emails and phone conversations with the following phrase: "I'm not sure if you're the right person to ask about this but. ... " I did it yesterday, in fact, and this time I was asking the right person after all. Now that's progress!

Empire State College is a highly complex organization and I can't say that I completely understand it yet. There are centers and units, areas of study and academic teams, area coordinators and conveners, committees and task forces – lots of organized groups of people doing the important work of making a nontraditional, student-centered college run well. We've all



Counterclockwise from top left: Sue Epstein, Rebecca Bonanno, Audeliz Matias, Jennifer A. Blue, Thalia MacMillan and Michele Forte. Missing from photo: Sarah Hertz

noticed that we use a lot of acronyms, like PLA and CBE (which seem to refer to the same thing). By videoconference from my location at the Metropolitan Center, I attend center meetings, faculty caucuses, area of study meetings, and curriculum conferences and I try to keep up with the flurry of information coming my way. Certainly, there is much that a new mentor must learn to navigate at Empire State College, which makes it hard to figure out who to ask about what.

I've managed by making an educated guess and trying not to get too anxious when I miss the target. Without fail, whoever I ask for assistance has been able at least to point me in the right direction. I can honestly say that each time I have asked a question – of a fellow mentor, my faculty "buddy," a support staff member, or an administrator – I have been treated with support and understanding. Not once have I been made to feel that I am asking a silly question or that I should already know the answer. After all, much of the time the answer to my question is the college's staple, "It depends." I've learned from my new colleagues that we, as a college community, are all in this complicated soup of mentoring and educating together and that the questions will keep coming. I am becoming comfortable with the idea that any institution that provides the flexibility

and student-centeredness that Empire State College does will necessarily be complex and, at times, confusing. I've always told my students that there are no stupid questions and now I am learning to believe it.

Seamless Conversations

Sue Epstein

When I accepted my position with Empire State College, I believed one of the positive aspects would be interacting with students in my role as their mentor. Within the first few weeks of starting, I was involved in the New Mentor Orientation sessions and participated in discussions on the role of the mentor and what I could anticipate in my mentoring discussions. Soon I would be assigned my first set of mentees.

So what types of questions did I ask in those conversations? How did I approach mentoring as a new mentor? I found the conversations frequently had me asking the following questions: "Tell me what you see on your screen now ... do you see the tab for 'Academics'? Just tell me when you find it"; "When you click on the course catalog link, do you see the section that says 'Business, Management and Economics'?" This is just a small set of examples of the types of questions I frequently found myself asking mentees, most of whom I interact with on the phone or online. My conversations seemed, at least to me, to focus more on the logistics of navigating the college website and finding the information than they did on discussing the mentee's expectations, plans and our work on their degree.

Luckily, for me, my initial orientation meetings also included conversations and training on Elluminate and developing faculty websites. With assistance (thank you to Lisa Rapple and Linda Lawrence), I was able to get my faculty website up, was trained on how to use Elluminate and was provided an Elluminate meeting room. I decided that, from that point on, I would tell my mentees they needed to have Internet access for our calls and log in to my Elluminate room. Now my mentees and I look at the same screen at the same time! We use my faculty website to explore links I have placed there that I believe mentees will frequently use (e.g., the CDL

course catalog). When we need information from other sources (e.g., the Empire State College site, DP Planner) I can bring that information up as well and share the screen with the mentee so we can both view the information simultaneously.

While this may seem like a small change, it has radically changed the conversations I have with mentees. I no longer ask "Can you find?" but instead say "Let's take a look at the courses together" or "Let's review the area of study guidelines." A few of my mentees have been able to meet face-to-face with me in my office. I find the conversations I have in-person and the conversations I now have over the phone are remarkably similar. In both, we focus on their expectations, goals and begin to discuss their degree plans. The difference is that we see each other face-to-face when we meet in-person. However, there is a camera in my Elluminate room, so my next change will likely be to add some type of face-to-face component to those virtual conversations!

The use of these two elements has allowed me to focus my conversations on the elements of mentoring instead of verifying and explaining the logistics of navigating the website – which makes the conversation more enjoyable and productive!

Mentoring ... The Final Frontier

Michele Forte

Since I am a television and movie enthusiast, I often try to make my hobby academic in nature. Given the rather questionable quality of the shows I often watch, it isn't easy.

That said, I wonder how I might title either a TV show or movie about my first six months of mentoring. I would definitely say it has been more *Clueless* than *Dead Poet's Society* – quizzical looks aplenty and not so much in the way of pedagogical enlightenment. Even though for 12 years I taught in a nontraditional program, the program – and my role as instructor – was still housed in a traditional university. Now, I find myself in a nontraditional role, in a nontraditional institution within a larger traditional framework.

I think I might title an episode of this nameless show *Collaborative Confusion*. I take comfort in being a part of a cohort

in my same proverbial boat, and I can say without hesitation that the consistent support from my collegewide colleagues is my most valued experience. To that point, what most strikes me about these first six months is how much my own steep learning curve mirrors what students new to Empire State College must experience. What do you mean I facilitate the development of a degree program? What do you mean I have the freedom to assign general education credits if they aren't in the GETA? What is a GETA? (Back to movies: To me, it sounded like something from *Star Wars*.) How should I know what a good concentration title might be? How do students get credit for life experience?

The students I work with as a primary mentor have the same questions and more. If I want to wax philosophical about the freedoms afforded to them as a student at Empire State College, they want to know how many credits they need, what will transfer and how long it will take to graduate. I don't blame them. I have the exact same questions and more when I first look at their files. I often have the feeling of free-falling through files, transcripts and conversations about potential prior learning. Some days, it feels like I can't keep anything straight, and I am often afraid I will ruin lives with one impetuous click of a DP dropdown box. It occurs to me, I might be a bit more dogmatic and controlling than I thought. I talk about dialogic models of education but then it appears anxiety fuels the desire for definitive answers. Hmmm.

As a new online instructor, I have had to learn how to thoughtfully establish and maintain teaching presence and convey something about myself and my pedagogical beliefs in the process. Sometimes it means entering too much on the bulletin board. Sometimes it means hanging back in discussions and sometimes it means redirecting discussions. Often, it means asking a more seasoned colleague for advice. I often miss the face-to-face engagement and the spontaneous connections arising from organic classroom conversations. I hope to soon incorporate more in the way of "live" office hours and chat sessions to bring some of that back to this online model.

As I write this, we have just completed our second New Mentor Orientation residency. I can now use some Empire State College acronyms like an old pro. (I often don't know what they stand for, but I hear that's not a requirement in our first five years.) It was great to see people from our July residency, and new collaborations were formed – case in point, the idea for this article. I remember asking at our first residency exactly what colleagues “looked for” when they first received a student's file: I wanted a *checklist*. Their answer then, as it might be now, was “it depends.” I am only now learning to be a bit more comfortable with that phrase. Being a mentor is a little like doing a puzzle or being an anthropologist. No wonder everyone said it takes three years to really feel like you sort of might know what you are doing here.

But back to television. Google tells me that *Mentors*, a Canadian show featured on Discovery Kids here in the states, ran from 1998-2002. According to the description, the show was about a brother and sister who have a computer that can summon historical figures to help them with a current problem. These figures appear for about two days, advise them and then retreat back in time.

I don't know how popular the show was and I never saw it myself, but I would sure love to summon historical figures to help with my own mentoring. I am confident Albert Einstein could help even me crack the Empire State College acronym code.

Mentoring: *Golden Girls* or *Ab Fab*?

Thalia MacMillan

When I think back about my time here at Empire State College, many phrases come to mind and, like Michele, I tend to relate these to TV shows that I love. When I describe my work to my friends, family and colleagues, the phenomenal British show *Ab Fab* comes to mind as I would describe work as “absolutely fabulous, darling.” Much like Edwina and Patsy in *Ab Fab*, I truly feel like I have had a ton of fun-filled, bewildering, sometimes confusing, yet exhilarating hi-jinks and adventures working with my colleagues, mentees and students.

Many may question if one feels disjointed working with individuals from a distance; I relish the fact that I never feel this way. While, at times, I will admit that I feel clueless in working with students, I have grown to realize that this is OK and I don't mind it; in fact, I relish it as it allows me to figure things out and better help people. I like watching shows on HGTV, like *House Hunters* and *For Rent*, because I see some of the same process in working with mentees (and because I like looking at the houses). On *House Hunters*, potential buyers weigh housing choices based on their wish list of amenities. When I make a connection with my mentee, I feel like I try to determine their wish list and help them to select courses or choices based on that. Much like *For Rent*, I also try to find creative solutions for my mentees, perhaps in the form of course selections or thinking about CBE. By hearing their wish list and trying to come up with creative solutions, it has helped to strengthen the interaction.

The final show that comes to mind is the *The Golden Girls*. Each of the ladies had a trait that made them unique and endearing in the show. If someone asked me which traits I'd bring to being a golden girl, it would be that I'm irritating and annoying. This is a good thing. When I worked in research and program evaluation, I excelled (if I can brag a bit) in conducting surveys over the phone and via email. Why? Because I wasn't afraid to call people and irritate/annoy them over the phone with a survey. As a CDL faculty member who is working at a distance, since I'm based at the Metro Center, having your two best traits be irritating and annoying is a downright necessity. By not being afraid to call or email people to annoy them with a question that I have, irritate them about something that hasn't happened yet, or just to call someone when I feel isolated, it has empowered me. I have learned that like the golden girls, I can't be afraid to lay out my own path and charge ahead. Well, that and the fact that cheesecake and chocolate will solve any problem.

Keeping Mentoring Personal

Audeliz (Audi) Matias

Before I joined Empire State College as a mentor in 2011, I engaged in mentoring in a variety of forms. I have mentored students

majoring in my area of expertise and other areas, students from underrepresented backgrounds as part of informal programs for several academic associations as well as for community colleges. Of course, I have also experienced mentoring as a mentee myself in many formal and informal settings. Thus, for me, the mentoring concept was not a new idea and I felt very confident when receiving my first set of primary mentees. After all, I worked at the Center for Distance Learning for close to three years before the new appointment and have a mentoring philosophy that has been my motto even before: mentoring is an ongoing process that can occur at any time and in any place. Well, this is not completely true.

The *ongoing process* piece of my mentoring philosophy has always been the driving force behind *Audi as a mentor*. Good mentoring should begin with listening and be followed with communication. It also needs to be instilled with empathy, thoughtfulness and inspiration. We are here to be our mentees' advocates and not their managers. Since day one, I knew part of my new role was to share information about the college and answer questions my mentees may have. However, I was more concerned about how to inspire, empower, encourage and provide support to my primary mentees, particularly since most of our conversations undoubtedly would take place at a distance. I needed a way to keep mentoring personal. As a scientist, I know that whatever I decide to do as a new mentor will probably evolve into something else in the future. Hence, with high optimism, I decided to explore different ways to add a personal touch to the process and to build a mentoring relationship based on mutual trust.

With the help of a friend, I embarked in the creation of a welcome video that, idealistically, would show new mentees more about me as a person. Fifteen recordings later, I concluded the office setting for the video was not really going to tell much about my personality – no offense to those involved in choosing the colors and furniture of the office. We then moved the filming to my backyard, surrounded by a comfortable environment and my beloved gardens. Well, that did not work either. After what seemed to be hundreds of recordings, the video idea with a happy Audi welcoming students and

talking about her academic and personal self was not a good idea. The film then became an animated video only showing clips similar to silent movies, where you can see my mouth moving but not much is coming out, with text at the bottom of the page expressing what I could not say. This experience certainly taught me to respect those who can be part of a video in a coherent and rational way, without rolling their eyes or forgetting what to say or being too obvious when reading from a piece of paper. By the way, several students have commented on how much they enjoyed the animated video.

Nonetheless, from my perspective, sending the video link to my mentees was better than nothing, at least for now. Students want to feel they are important as well, and I can't keep mentoring personal if I don't know things about them. I believe that when mentors understand and know more about a mentee's personal values they will be more able to respond nonjudgmentally to their mentee. So, I also added a survey to the welcome email I send when getting a new mentee. I called it the "Getting to Know You" survey. The survey is not about me, but rather about them: what they think are their strengths and weaknesses as learners, their professional goals, hobbies, pets, children and any other information they would like to share. It is great to be able to comment or ask about his or her life during our first conversation using the information shared. I have learned about how much they like to travel and take pictures, about their biological and foster children, and that I share common interests with some of them: local planning and development, and Latin dancing!

My quest to be personal was not over yet. How could I provide mentees with a warm figure they can relate to when we talk over the phone? I do not have a video camera on my office computer and most of the mentees are far away. What to try next? I decided to test the famous social networking tool Facebook. I started a professional Facebook account that only my mentees know about and asked them if they would like to join me. Of course, not everyone agreed; they wanted to be my "friends" and I learned more about some of my mentees than, perhaps, I should have (not to mention

that this approach can be time consuming and confusing at times). I am still trying to figure out what is the best way to utilize Facebook or other social and virtual tools to facilitate communication.

Fortunately, a handful of the most recently assigned mentees are local to the Saratoga Springs region, allowing for face-to-face time with them. Although I have focused my "mentor energy" on creating a relaxed, personal atmosphere with the mentees since the first contact, much still needs to be done. Yes, many of my students have succeeded to date; still, some mentees have been placed on academic warning after the first term, others have dropped from the college and enrolled at more traditional institutions, and several have not been in contact regardless of my numerous emails and phone calls. My journey so far as a mentor at Empire State College has taught me that keeping mentoring personal is not only about making the connection with students but also assessing my own goals and growth as a mentor. As I finish my first year as a mentor, I need to remind myself that mentoring is an evolving relationship that requires time and attention to develop. More importantly, I have to keep in mind that mentoring includes not only successes but challenges, and that a good mentor knows that they, too, need mentoring.

Of Mentors and Mountains

Sarah Hertz

Picking up the phone and dialing the number for my first-ever mentoring call, I felt a certain rush, an excitement, a "This is it!" moment. I recalled the very first time I had stood at the top of a (seemingly vertical) hill, strapped into ski gear, about to descend. In both cases, all I knew was that it would be unlike anything I had ever done.

Having joined the Empire State College faculty during the early summer of 2011, I was gratified to hear and learn about the emphasis on mentoring. Loosely defined, I view mentoring as "devoting every available resource so that every student is ensured every opportunity to grow and excel" – something that I feel is missing in the course advisement found in more traditional colleges. Starting to learn about mentoring, through orientations and a variety of

print and digital materials, as well as conversations with colleagues, I was struck by the realization of the enormity of the skills, the tools, and the education I would need to obtain and develop to become a successful and effective mentor.

As I embarked on my mentoring career, and began accumulating and developing those tools and skills, I also sought to develop a mentoring philosophy that can synopsise and encapsulate my goals as a mentor: "People over Practice." To me, this means the student and their educational goals are paramount, conformity and rigidity a distinct second. Although this idiom is very much still "under construction," my experiences as a mentor, together with the extensive resources and training Empire State College provides, have combined to form that all-encompassing (for me, at least) mantra. It was mostly the gradual cognizance that, from a mentor's view, the mentee is the locus around which all revolves, a sort of sun to an Empire State College solar system, if you will. My attitude is that for a mentee, being committed, diligent, and eager to learn was enough to grant them center stage, and it was up to me, as the mentor, to "rotate the solar system" if necessary to afford them maximum opportunity to fully utilize their potential. The college's framework provides just this: just the right blend of standards and flexibility.

In conclusion, perhaps it is fair to say that the skiing analogy is indeed somewhat apropos. On the one hand, unlike skiing, mentoring is a) a long-term commitment, anything but fleeting, b) uphill, and c) not a DIY or "go-it-alone" endeavor, as opposed to skiing, a solitary sport. On the other hand, perhaps the similarities outnumber and outweigh the differences. After all, don't both skiing and mentoring contain twists, turns and unexpected "bumps"? Require a single-minded and intense focus? Don't both have the ability to grant a true sense of accomplishment and always offer more to learn, new skills to acquire, and new peaks to conquer? Lastly, if by way of my humble offering of advice, when mentoring, as well as when skiing, stop every so often to simply look around and enjoy the view. It can be breathtaking.

Transformative Research in China: Insights into a Recent Research Journey

Kathleen P. King, University of South Florida

Pre-Journey Discoveries

I begin this unusual research article with a story about a discovery I made at least two months prior to my research trip to the People's Republic of China. At that point, I realized that many of the women in Hong Kong and Wuhan, China who agreed to be interviewed had lived through the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976 under Chairman Mao Zedong [often known in the West as Mao Tse-tung]). Since I had been a youngster in the USA during the time, there were two major factors that limited my knowledge of this specific history. First of all, during this period, the USA was still engaged in the Cold War and secondly, Chinese leaders had taken great care to shield their conditions and politics from the Western world.

Coming to this realization, I immediately conducted an Internet search for quality books about the Cultural Revolution. One of my discoveries was the book *Red China Blues* (Wong, 1997). I picked this one up first and was gripped by the compelling story. The author describes how as a Chinese-Canadian college student, she is enthralled with the idealism of Maoism and puts into motion a plan to study in China during the 1970s. During the next 40 years, she lives through the revolution, labors in the fields as a peasant, works in factories, and struggles with her Canadian privilege. During some point in her experience, the idealism begins to crack as she sees friends betray one another for the sake of party loyalty. Additionally, after living back in Canada for a while, she returns to China and witnesses the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests up close as a reporter on site (the Chinese government refers to this event as the June Fourth Incident).

The author deftly weaves the philosophy, aspirations, history, difficulties, conflicts and tragedies of China's history through the experiences of her life journey. One feels as

if the author is sitting in your living room, revealing the modern history of this ancient civilization through her personal journey. It was a powerful, personal and humane introduction to the experiences many of my interviewees or their parents experienced just 30 to 40 years ago.

The Research Project Continues

In spring 2010, I planned to commence an international research project about the life journeys and potential transformations of women leaders in higher education. However, at that time, I also had accepted a new position at the University of South Florida and became quite occupied with moving and settling family and household in a community 1,200 miles from my lifelong residence in the greater northeastern parts of the USA. We moved early in the summer (June), and by fall of 2010, I had agreed to present at a conference in Belize. My colleague there helped arrange interviews with the country's women leaders in higher education.

As a result, in November 2010, I found myself experiencing a profound research experience as these warm hearted and dedicated Belizean people welcomed me into their hearts and lives for 10 days of research, conferences and social gatherings. The experience not only yielded fascinating results about their women leaders' journeys (especially about the impediments they face and the gender realities that figure so prominently in their lives), but also changed me as a person and researcher. I realized anew the power of qualitative research and was struck by the outsider being brought "inside" by such generous people.

My new university has an internal grant competition for international research, and I was awarded one for spring travel to Canada. However, the notice of the award arrived too late to accomplish that trip. My third effort to use this same grant

for the dual purposes of presenting at a conference and conducting continued extensive research on my

international study of women leaders in higher education proved successful, and I prepared to go to China in the fall of 2011.

However, yet another significant change occurred based on insightful advice. As I spoke to the China conference organizer, she advised that if I wanted to study women academics and administrators in China, I really also should visit Hong Kong, as the experience would be drastically different while providing another view of the People's Republic of China. With her guidance, I began to try to contact women academics and administrators in Hong Kong to interview. My plan was set: following a week of research in Hong Kong, I would then fly to mainland China and conduct interviews and give lectures at the conference's host university. In total, the research trip would be two weeks – one each in Hong Kong and Wuhan, China. I did not personally know a soul in either place, but trusted that my colleague could guide me through making sufficient arrangements. I also knew from a previous trip to mainland China in 2009 that the Chinese were most hospitable and gracious hosts to invited academics.

Transformation of the Researcher in the Process

While I will discuss this topic more in depth at the conclusion of this essay, I want to introduce a most significant outcome of my research endeavor. More than just being a



Kathleen King

researcher who interviewed and gathered data about changes in the lives of others, I was deeply changed by this experience. In the terminology of Stake (2010) and Denzin (2001), this paper is in part an account of “interpretative interactionism.” That is, I have made meaning of the research experience for myself. This phenomenon occurred in both the Belize and China studies. I have therefore concluded that investigation of international transformative learning experiences may possibly foster potential transformative experiences among those conducting the research.

Much qualitative research methodology literature discusses the role of the researcher as an instrument, lens and participant in the research process (Creswell, 2003; Slotnick & Janesick, 2011; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2011). However, my thesis moves this dynamic further: rather than considering only our participation/influence in the research process, it also considers the changes that occur in us because of the research we conduct. Indeed, my approach flows from a specific orientation and philosophy of research – it is specifically both humanistic and feminist.

For example, based on humanistic philosophy (Elias & Merriam, 2004), I intended for the interview experiences to be beneficial for the people I interviewed. I used semi-structured interviews, but followed my respondents’ lead in the interview conversation in order to learn more about their experiences, insights, victories and conflicts. Especially because I was mindful of their potential discomfort with the questions I pose, I tried to develop a friendly, collegial and safe climate. From the start, I emphasized that my goal was to learn from them and stated explicitly my appreciation for their willingness to meet with me.

Drawing from the feminist methodology perspective (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Villaverde, 2008), my approach to issues of power included eliminating the disparity between my role and position and theirs (particularly when I may be perceived as outranking them professionally). I cultivated an equal sharing relationship with the interviewee for the purposes of learning together and sharing their stories

anonymously with other women leaders so that all of us may benefit. In our discussion, follow-up questions, notes and formal analysis, I also stayed alert for signs of barriers, conflict and hesitations. Women in different cultures experience very different gender constructions. Therefore, gently encouraging interviewees to explain details about their gender roles and expectations within various social contexts (work, family, community, specific educational organizations) was crucial to developing as accurate an account of a culture that I was able to construct.

In the next section, I will share preliminary results from the Hong Kong and mainland China research. Following this section, I will return to my current understanding of transformations, as this research study continues through in-depth analysis.

Preliminary Research Results: Time Machine Phenomenon or Chinese Women Leaders in Higher Education

During the two-week journey across the People’s Republic of China. I conducted 15 interviews – 10 in Hong Kong and five in Wuhan. Eight of the Hong Kong interviews were with professors and deans at two different major universities. The other two Hong Kong interviews were held with lead administrators at centers that research gender issues in Hong Kong. The five interviews in Wuhan included four professors and one administrator, once again from two different universities.

As I asked questions about their experiences of significant change (transformative learning) across their professional careers, several major themes emerged immediately. I believe these themes reflect realities that are in stark contrast to experiences of women academic leaders in many Western cultures.

One of the perceptions I developed through this experience is that for an American, discussing gender issues with female Chinese academics felt like I had been transported back in time. Specifically, at this point, gender equity/disparity in Hong Kong seems to resemble the same dynamic in the USA during the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, applying the same schema, the small sample I gathered in mainland China suggests

similarity to gender equity/disparity in the USA during the 1940s and 1950s.

In Table 1, I summarize the several salient, specific characteristics that differ in the data communicated by the participants. This matrix reveals findings not only about Hong Kong and urban mainland China, but also includes results from formal and informal interviews about life in mainland China’s countryside. Several of those individuals I interviewed represented this countryside perspective because it is where they had been raised; they wanted me to understand that city culture was quite different.

Overall, it was quite evident that Chinese professional women are responsible for caring for the children, home and for the elderly. However, Hong Kong experience is distinctive because of the presence of relatively inexpensive household help and child care as a result of the large immigrant population of single Filipino women. The Hong Kong culture has adapted to this dynamic and those I interviewed described feeling no guilt in arranging for these services so that the children and home are well cared for and they can fully address their professional responsibilities. In contrast, such arrangements are rare in mainland China. However, regardless of specific location, Hong Kong or mainland China, I was told that virtually all professional women must manage all their domestic and professional responsibilities well and without any expectation of assistance from their male partner. This expectation results in great angst and ongoing pressure on these women.

The women in Hong Kong reported that they must constantly cope with emergencies among their hired help and arrange hiring of replacements when necessary. While in mainland China professional women must somehow routinely balance all responsibilities alone, not only in emergencies. Coupled with what I repeatedly heard as the extreme perfectionism of Chinese culture and the call to be the “best” in all aspects of one’s studies, life, work and relationships, it was obvious that women shoulder significant additional responsibilities beyond that of their male counterparts and, as a result, experience pervasive and unrelenting stress.

Characteristic	Hong Kong	Mainland China City	Mainland China Countryside
Generally women solely responsible for	Child care Housework Eldercare	Child care Housework Eldercare	Child care Housework Eldercare
Professional women may	Mother may assist or employ help for assistance in these duties	Mother may assist No other option for assistance	Mother may assist No other option for assistance
Women may be more educated than their husbands	Carefully accepted	Never accepted	Never accepted
Women may be more successful than their husbands	Carefully accepted	Never accepted	Never accepted
Limitations on number of children	Not enforced	Strictly enforced	Frequently not enforced
Marriage practices	Generally couples make own decision	Often combination of traditional Chinese and Western traditions	Women still sold as brides in some areas
Many international residents and employees	Frequent	Seldom	Rare
Multicultural society	Multicultural urban cities	Middle range cities and greater focus on Chinese culture; open to international visitors	Very traditional Chinese culture
English taught	All grades; some universities teach in English	Now beginning to teach children English in primary grades	English learning is not widely available in the educational system

Table 1 Findings Regarding Difference Within People's Republic of China

Other sections of Table 1 reveal a variety of findings about the status and role of women in these varied areas, but three aspects are extremely distinctive. First, in mainland China women may never be more educated or more successful than their husbands. This axiom is absolute. In several interviews, women shared how they had women friends whose husbands refused to support their pursuing doctoral studies. Why? Because when completed, they would have reached or exceeded the same status as their husbands. Other interviewees revealed that female colleagues had traveled abroad to complete their doctoral studies with their husband's approval, but their marriages failed upon their return.

Gradually, I understood that there was an abiding belief that a man is shamed by his wife being more accomplished than he. He is to be the provider and authority in the home and at work. It is a cause of disappointment, despair and hardship for women that younger adults (male and

female) still struggle with this cultural belief. Moreover, because it is so engrained, the younger men and women I spoke to cannot imagine it changing. This struggle is indeed part of a broader transformative experience that involves these women's recognition that they are caught in a tight cultural web. Importantly, however, I did not find evidence of this same cultural tension in Hong Kong.

The second notable trend is that among those I interviewed, expectation of gender equity does not exist in mainland China, but is dominant among professional women in Hong Kong. There are laws in both areas to ensure gender equity in the workplace, yet most Chinese professional women with whom I was in contact laughed at the idea that these laws could be enforced. Personally, I found these interactions confounding. If there were laws to support gender equity, why could they not appeal to the law? The Chinese women I interviewed explained that it would be futile, and that employers could always develop a reason

to rationalize their choice of hiring a male over a female. The result is that in order for a woman to obtain a professional position for which she is competing with men, I was told that she must be 200-300 percent better qualified. Here again, the experience of extreme stress and the standard of perfectionism for women emerges quite starkly.

The third finding that emerged because of my research concerned the way that Chinese people now understand the Cultural Revolution itself. In mainland China, I was told in both formal and informal interviews that, unlike 10 to 20 years ago, people could now discuss the Cultural Revolution in private. Even now, they made it clear that it could not be criticized publicly (such as in the newspapers), but they could voice their dissent in day-to-day conversation. Many considered this change a great advancement. At the same time, the women I met felt shame at what had taken place in their country; they grieved for the

wrongs committed, but felt that in the future the “books” would be opened and they could eventually learn how many people had died. They optimistically believed that the actions of the current government in a so-called “New China” would result in more representation of and responsiveness to the people.

A most alarming related finding I uncovered was that the young professional women I interviewed realized that many Chinese, including their relatives, were still brain washed (their phrase) as a result of methods used during Mao’s rule. My only prior experience with this phenomenon was through movies and historical readings. It required several discussions for me to comprehend that the actions to which they referred affected members of their own families who were living during my lifetime. For me, this point was especially disorienting. Examples they shared included how party leaders told the people that a “natural disaster” had caused devastation that was actually the direct result of military action. The leadership used this strategy for many years, and people did not know otherwise. Although not widely representative, to my surprise, it appears I interviewed a professional woman who lived through these events and continues to hold these “party-line” beliefs.

More Than I Bargained For! Transforming the Researcher

Reading my account thus far, it should be evident that this research journey and study greatly changed my own understanding. Indeed, I had several experiences of what the transformative theorists would describe as “disorientating dilemmas” where information and experiences contradicted prior assumptions and understanding. In the midst of traveling through an ancient foreign nation alone and conducting research with people whose lives I was only beginning to understand, I had to sort out this confusion in ways that would allow me to be open to their accounts and, at the same time, remove my own cultural biases.

Both the China and Belize research has assisted me in developing interview strategies that are consistent with my philosophy of research and education. I approach

interviews and research journeys as more than mere data gathering. I recognize that I am entering the world of “the other” and need to respect their world, culture and understandings. Yin (2011) discusses these ethical responsibilities and calls for “professional demeanor” in all our actions as researchers. Personally, this commitment and realization manifest itself in choices I have made at many moments of these trips, in even the most mundane interactions: how I respond to people on trains, in restaurants, at shops and hotels; how I treat cab drivers, hotel clerks and new colleagues, and how I approach unknown foods, smells, environments and cultural cues.

In all of these circumstances and an infinite number of others, I need to set aside my cultural preferences and demonstrate respect and kindness. It is an ideal response at which I often failed, but it is a goal that I find necessary in order to be authentic as a humanistic and feminist researcher and educator.

While these behaviors are necessary in my daily activities, in the interviews I specifically discovered it valuable to orient myself to the participants as colleagues from whom I seek to learn. In addition, rather than only “taking” data from them, I felt a responsibility that our conversations should always be professional and should have benefit for the interviewees as well. I sought to affirm and validate their particular journey; I tried to delve into their understandings of conflict and to ask them to think about barriers, conflicts and victories. Likewise, I made efforts to sit with them and willingly feel the pain that often emerged in their stories and to look at life through their eyes and hearts. Through their interviews, the participants gave me so much; it was such a small thing to offer genuine concern and validation of their experiences as women and as professionals.

The lives of the Chinese professional people are different from those of Americans in innumerable ways. As I spent time with them in museums, cultural performances, gardens, banquets, shops and universities, I came to understand many of these differences and to recognize details, large and small, that affected their lives often profoundly. For example,

- the college dorms in this city used to be an army hospital during the Japanese occupation;
- their towns and cities have been ravaged by civil and international war for millennia;
- what we think of as the “Chinese culture” differs greatly among 56 different ethnic groups;
- cultural practices and beliefs in the city and the countryside vary considerably;
- they have a recent history of tremendous human loss, the result of actions of their own government;
- the women live under extreme pressure to be the absolute best in all things they do;
- they are taught as children that if they are not “no. 1” (in their own eyes and in the eyes of those around them), they are considered a failure.

The women I met were coping with influences and demands that are drastically different than my lived experience.

Transformation among Women Leaders in China

Based on my experiences with and interview of women leaders in Hong Kong and mainland China, their educational and leadership experiences do contribute to changing perspectives of their world and themselves. Even based on preliminary analysis of the data and reflection on our conversations, I have recognized several critical points that need to be addressed in the final analysis and future research. First, when I presented research about transformative learning to graduate and doctoral students and faculty, there was concurrence with my impression that a collective model of transformative learning is needed. As indicated in research among collective-oriented societies (especially Africa), their collective interrelationships, dependencies, pressures and dynamics are not well represented in the current transformative learning theories and models. I have already been approached by several Chinese professors to participate in a research project based in grounded theory in China to develop a model of transformative

learning reflecting learning in their culture. I strongly believe that this is something those of us from individualistic cultures cannot do; we must encourage our colleagues to help us understand the shortcomings and changes needed in our individualistic frame of transformative learning. The lens of individualism and collectivism change how we examine and experience many aspects of ourselves, our lives, worlds and relationships, that we need this orientation to be particular to the culture.

The cultural context of the current views of transformative learning was most apparent to me throughout the research that I did in China. Indeed, it was because of this shortcoming that the Chinese scholars surprised me by their intense interest in this theory. However, I believe their interest reflects the links between transformative learning and psychology, an area that the Chinese have only recently begun to teach and research. This situation provides a prime opportunity for future research.

Second, the professional women in both areas recognize that inequity in family and professional expectations is unfair and needs to change. They are on a precipice of rejection of traditional practices. Based on Mezirow's model of transformation, the women are at the point of testing new ways of acting, but the highly patriarchal society remains a great obstacle. Interestingly, the younger professional men with whom I spoke at length in mainland China agree,

but feel helpless and hopeless that change will occur. The women in both mainland China and Hong Kong believe it must change. The coming years will provide rich opportunities for longitudinal studies of this cultural change and shift in gender roles; linking these sociological patterns to personal transformative learning will provide powerful ways to understand women's leadership development.

Conclusion

In the midst of the overwhelming flood of information I absorbed and the cultural contradictions I felt in the Hong Kong and Wuhan interviews, I began questioning: "What is research?" Is it the data, the experience, the journey or is it the people? I understand better now that research in the social sciences requires building sharing and trusting relationships so that we might learn from one another. We need to treat such research with care and both delicately and quietly walk through the experience of "the other" to discover aspects of the world – including our own – to which we might have been blind.

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My Mentoring Creed

Eric Zencey, Center for International Programs

What Does it Mean to be a Mentor?

Each of us has to find an answer to that question in our own way, subject to guidance and correction by those in whom some authority is vested, either institutionally or through our own acceptance of their good advice. While good mentoring is to some degree personal and individual, I think there are principles of effective practice that are broadly applicable. These are rooted in the deep structure of successful learning – in a pedagogy, a philosophy of teaching and learning. Recently, an online exchange within the Cultural Studies area of study at Empire State College led me to put into writing some of what I believe to be the foundation of an effective practice of mentoring.

I believe:

Effective education is student centered, not faculty centered, not discipline centered. This doesn't mean the student is boss: It doesn't mean the student defines the curriculum or the criteria for success. It means, in the spirit of John Dewey, that no one learns anything until and unless they have understood it to be part of the solution to a problem whose immediacy they have been made to feel – by events, by tutelage, by inborn curiosity.

Problem-centered education is necessarily transdisciplinary. Dewey was insistent that the world in which we operate – the world in which we feel, think, act, evaluate and, therefore, learn – has no disciplinary boundaries drawn on it. This presents a problem to educators. Their expertise is validated within disciplines and success at mentoring (and teaching) requires expertise. Solution: Establish expertise within a discipline, but also become a generalist, which (to me, following Dewey) means becoming capable of using the refined products (facts, theories, interpretations, perspectives) of their own and others'

previous inquiry in a variety of disciplinary areas to address new inquiries suggested by the problems that present themselves for inquiry – and – resolution in the present. To me, being a generalist means more than specializing in several subfields within a discipline. And it doesn't mean thinking that I could teach any subject in the panoply of college or university offerings. The generalist is one who has followed real and compelling inquiries across disciplinary boundaries, and developed some useful and successful expertise in the process.



Eric Zencey

Because by long tradition academic expertise is validated by the authority of disciplines, transdisciplinary work looks illegitimate. The danger with transdisciplinary work is of course diletantism and the development of the kinds of spotty knowledge (and the retention of crucial ignorances) that plague autodidacts in any field. If transdisciplinary work has any legitimacy, the legitimacy must come from success – it must produce refined products of inquiry that resolve the problematic aspects of the experience that led to the inquiry; those products must be capable of being communicated to others for consideration, use, testing, validation. (In the past, failure to emphasize these

avenues of connection to the experience of others led some progressive educators to an excessive and essentially romantic celebration of the individual self as the validator of that self's knowledge – a stance that lent inadvertent support to the narcissism promulgated by an advanced consumerist culture, which is, itself, a cultural problem worthy of investigation.)

When it comes to mentoring, the most effective teachers are those who cycle between four distinct roles: authority, facilitator, linker, colleague. The first is the model employed in traditional education – the “sage on the stage.” (Few traditional institutions remain completely committed to this model of “I talk, you listen”; progressive institutions like Empire State College have succeeded in changing industry practice.) The second and third are the heart and soul of mentoring. (As to the fourth: effective education should eventually allow a student to enter into this kind of relationship with the teacher. In traditional schools, this magically happens somewhere in graduate school. Judicious granting of some elements of “colleague” status to a learner at some other level can be an effective teaching strategy. “What sort of examination would you give yourself if you were the teacher? How about demonstrating your mastery of the subject by working up a midterm in it?”)

In this context, “to facilitate” means, to me, to tutor a student's curiosity – to provoke, channel and guide it, which is no small task; to suggest (or to draw out a recognition of) connections, implications, fundamental assumptions in a student's inquiry; to support the learner's use of effective learning and problem-solving strategies for the subject matter – the problem – at hand; to challenge (gently) dysfunctional approaches, including abject ignorance and dogmatic thinking. Success at all of these requires disciplinary knowledge and expertise; but use of that expertise to short-circuit the learner's process of inquiry – to tell students

the “answers” – can be dysfunctional. Conversely, withholding needed information or knowledge can be dysfunctional. This is why teaching – mentoring – is an art.

The linker is the teacher who puts the learner in touch with a resource, thought, person, perspective or experience that, in the teacher’s expert judgment, will promote the learner’s successful pursuit of a satisfactory resolution of their inquiry. The teacher who has expertise across several disciplines will be more successful at this than one who doesn’t. It is a disservice to the learner – and to the learning – for the teacher to limit the student’s inquiry to just those areas in which the teacher is most expert. (That would be faculty-centered, not student-centered learning.)

Growth, for this kind of teacher, means expanding his or her competence to serve as a linker and a facilitator to student inquiry; that growth comes from being an effective (transdisciplinary, problem-oriented) learner him- or herself.

Traditional, discipline-bound inquiry demands that we define problems in ways that respect disciplinary boundaries. But those definitions may not correlate with the reality of the expression of the problem in the world. Inquiry that respects the boundary of the discipline that hosts it is likely to fail of its object, unless its object

is the resolution of a problem that has little application outside the discipline. That sort of inquiry runs the risk of being a mannered exercise of little practical import, productive of dissertations and articles and essays read by a handful of people whose tastes have been shaped to conform to the same cramped vision of success. Such work is likely to be primarily about other work in the discipline, making it little more than a self-important version of “whisper down the wind”: a very formal, apparently serious game played out over time in academic journals, where the point can hardly be more than paying attention to who said what about whom.

That kind of academic work has little relevance for the ongoing task of human life in culture, which, in part, is to meet the challenge of making meaning (and proceeding to successful outcomes) in a world that is both difficult, confusing, evolving and crisis ridden, and also nurturant, sublimely beautiful, and ravishingly capable of engendering human pleasures and passions and joys. Given the limitations on their work that the need for disciplinary legitimacy foists on them, it is no wonder academics are held in low esteem; no wonder that in the culture at large, “academic” is nearly synonymous with silly, irrelevant, misguided – abstract to the point of uselessness.

To the extent that the teacher, as learner, treats a disciplinary boundary as a border that must not be violated, he or she will find it difficult to be a fully effective learner, and will be that much less prepared to be an effective mentor.

New, a-disciplinary thinking in the academy requires new, a-disciplinary systems of validation, verification and legitimation of expertise. Sadly, we have yet to evolve those systems. Too many colleges continue to administer budgets through discipline-based departments, to hire faculty through discipline-based job descriptions, and to evaluate faculty against criteria for success promulgated by disciplinary practitioners rather than against criteria suggested by a perceptive reading of Dewey’s problematic world. This reinforces the notion that fully effective, realistic, transdisciplinary work has no place in the academy.

A college that wanted to distinguish itself might try to change that. A college with a progressive heritage would be well-placed to take on that task.

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On Narrative Contract Evaluations

Mentors from Across the College

Earlier this year, I invited a number of colleagues to reflect on the writing of contract evaluations. The goal was not to resuscitate the narrative evaluation debate, but rather to think about our experiences as contract-evaluation writers. In effect, I imagined this reflection as perhaps one component of our own PLA essay on mentoring. Thanks to those who took up this little prompt.

Alice Lai **Center for Distance Learning**

At the each end of the term, I would prepare to write final narrative evaluations. I always found focusing on completing the narrative compelled me to reflect harder on my teaching and course learning materials. Because an end-of-term narrative evaluation was required, could be read by the student's mentor and others, and was in the student's official record, I wanted the evaluation to reflect a student's learning from beginning to end. I also wanted to make sure that my evaluation was *coherent* when it came to the different levels of learning outcomes. I gradually developed a system (in a word processor file) for recording my formative feedback to each student's work throughout the term. It was organized by the student's name and then each learning activity. My feedback contained a very brief summary of the student's work (e.g., the title of the work, the most interesting/rigorous ideas) and my remarks and suggestions for improvement. Sometimes it also included my thoughts about the particular ideas that I found gripping.

When it was time to prepare for the final narrative evaluation, I would open up the record and re-read my feedback. How could I not think about my teaching while re-reading my feedback to students' work? I would tend to notice criticism more than positive remarks, such as short development of a certain topic, misunderstanding of certain key concepts, writing problems or

insufficient length. These shortcomings made me wonder if the assignment description was not clear enough to the students, if certain important concepts needed to be taught more rigorously or differently, if certain course concepts were just not interesting or too difficult to articulate, or if the amount or level of learning activities was not appropriate. Thanks to the final narrative evaluation, I was motivated not only to develop a richer system, but also to write each formative evaluation carefully so that at the end I could see a coherent picture of each student's learning. It was a task worth taking.

Bidhan Chandra **Center for Distance Learning**

Personally, I have always believed that timely and incremental formative feedback at regular intervals during the entire duration of the course is more useful for helping a student learn. To me, "formative" always meant during the learning process itself and not just when the learning contract or the course was over.

The idea of writing an "individualized narrative evaluation" was completely alien to me when I joined the college as a part-time lecturer in 1988. I had no prior experience in this thing that was so important to Empire State College. When questioned politely, one argument given to me by some senior faculty colleagues was that narrative evaluations were useful for students as they could use them as proxies for letter grades when they were applying to graduate school or for job applications. Remember that the system of providing letter grades in our college began much later.

With some guidance from a veteran of the college who also was my first "buddy mentor," the late Lester Levine, I began including narratives in the end-of-term contract evaluations. However, I always felt that it was hard for me to comply with this

expectation for all CEs as the large number of students with whom I was working was in group studies. How could I individualize narratives when most students' learning was almost 95 percent or more identical? Except for Educational Planning, there was a lesser degree of individualization possible in other courses. So, at the advice of some senior colleagues again, while I continued to provide detailed feedback on each assignment, I also utilized a "customized" cookie-cutter approach by slightly modifying the narrative's language based on each student's performance. The same approach continued to be used when I taught in the three FORUM programs and in CDL. Nobody questioned me and everybody seemed to be happy.

I will not greatly miss the end-of-term narrative evaluations. Most students never read them anyway except for looking at their letter grades. As I wrote before, detailed formative incremental feedback to students at regular intervals is more important. And, I have been following this practice for a long time. However, for the past few years, I have been experimenting with a "novel" system where I include very detailed feedback on every written assignment and then require the student to read the feedback carefully and send back a one-paragraph counter statement about my initial formative feedback's value in improving his or her learning. With some initial resistance to the "requirement" of the counter response mechanism, most students really appreciate this methodology as it forces them to read my comments more carefully and re-evaluate their own academic work. As several students shared their thoughts with me later, this approach was new and challenging to them but extremely helpful in improving their overall learning. I, myself, have observed marked improvements in their subsequent course performance. And this is what finally counts to me. Perhaps

we should all be doing this as an experiment and then examine whether we really miss the “narratives.”

Xenia Coulter
Center for International Programs
Narrative Evaluations: A Dialogue

Psychologist: So you don’t have to write narrative evaluations any more. How do you feel about that?

Me: Pretty sad. I used to really enjoy the chance to think about what my students got out of studying some topic with me. I’ll miss that opportunity – and the chance to practice writing about, you know, what we psychologists call, “knowledge acquisition.”

Psychologist: So you enjoyed writing them because it was a learning opportunity for you?

Me: Yeah – that sounds about right.

Psychologist: But weren’t these narratives supposed to be for the student? Or for the record when someone needed to know what the student accomplished in college?

Me: Oh, yes. I forgot about that. I don’t know if students actually read them.

Psychologist: You’re kidding, of course.

Me: Well, no. I honestly don’t recall a single conversation that I ever had with a student about his or her evaluation. Oh, wait – I do remember one time – maybe 15 years ago, a student called to complain that I wrote down the wrong number of hours she spent on her internship somewhere – something like that. That was back when students had to sign evaluations before they were submitted. (Pause) Hmmm ... given that I must have written hundreds, hey, maybe even thousands of these evaluations, that so little happened after they were written (other than relief that they were done) is rather strange.

Psychologist: Well, at least your supervisors, or maybe your peers – they must have commented on them, yes?

Me: Well ... actually no. I might have included a few in my early portfolios, but they were not required, and they were certainly not discussed. Colleagues were

mostly interested in reading contracts – early on to see how well they were individualized; and later, to admire their originality; and most recently, to vet the reading list – for example, I was criticized once by someone on the CDL assessment committee for assigning a New Yorker article. But the evaluations? Nah, I don’t think anyone in the college ever read them, or if they did, took them seriously enough to talk to me about them.¹

Psychologist: Wait a minute, then. If the students and colleagues didn’t read them, it’s hard to imagine that anyone else would either – like graduate school admissions officers or human resource managers. How were these documents justified for so many years?

Me: Look. I don’t really *know* that the students didn’t read them – I only know that they didn’t talk to me about them. It seems to me that they *must* have read them. *I* would have if I were them. Gee, a lot of them were quite positive, and I’m sure students must have liked seeing their work so carefully described and taken so seriously, don’t you think?

Psychologist: Let me get this straight. You regularly wrote detailed narratives as part of your job for 25 years without any external reinforcement. The only reward you received came from what you imagined someone like you might have enjoyed reading as a student. Do I have that right?

Me: Eh ... yeah. And you know what? I think the students, even if they didn’t thank me for them, liked them well enough to keep coming back for more. A narrative describing student strengths and making weaknesses into future goals, is a lot more inviting than the letter C.

Psychologist: So you think enrollments will now drop without them?

Me: Well, maybe not if those Cs begin to migrate into As and Bs.

Psychologist: And yet, if good narratives really could motivate students and stimulate mentors, I agree then that it’s sad that they are now gone. Too bad your college wasn’t able to figure out a system so that mentors might have wanted to keep coming back to write them.

Note

- ¹ With apologies to Richard Bonnabeau who, as director for academic planning in the small world of the Center for International Programs, does read and openly support faculty narratives.

Eric Ball
Center for Distance Learning

Two things I learned through the experience of writing narrative evaluations: First, I learned how to be more forthright about the dialogical character of peer knowledge construction and evaluation. Not being able to hide behind the pseudo-objectivity of “a B+ is a B+ is a B+,” I knew that how and what I wrote as an assessment of a student’s learning was itself open to interpretation and assessment by a student’s primary mentor or anyone else who might read it on a transcript. I was always learning how to communicate my own positionality (as well as the nature of my own legitimacy) as an evaluator to any and all readers. I was always learning how to articulate and construct the kinds of meaningful contexts that truly open, peer-to-peer knowledge processes require.

Second, I learned how to communicate to *students* in yet another mode. Apart from the very first time I would offer feedback to a student, *every* moment of evaluation was a “final” evaluation in that it sought to incorporate, implicitly or explicitly, everything else prior that I had decided mattered along the way with that student. However, knowing that the *student* knew that the capital-F Final narrative evaluation had a somewhat different status (and was literally open to a broader audience), enabled me to communicate with her or him in a different register, and with something more than simply a sense of “just the last piece of feedback.” So I was always learning how to communicate in multiple registers, and how to use this unique, institutionally-constituted moment, as a potentially crucial site for a valuable communication that was otherwise unavailable.

Steve Lewis, Hudson Valley Center A Beautiful Backache

I've been thinking about my old '65 Morgan 4/4, the cheap one: no wire wheels, ill-fitting black ragtop, clip-on side curtains, leather belt holding down the double-sided bonnet. That ridiculous shifter! And my old pals, Richard and Jim, pushing the British racing green beauty down Langdon Street in Madison, Wis., until I'd pop the clutch and skid off to campus.

You should know that I'm not one to dwell on the past, but while composing the dozens of end-of-term narrative evaluations for my students at Empire State College in January, that old Morgan kept cutting me off with a toot and snotty little wave.

I've probably written several thousand of these reviews in my some 30-odd years at this institution, but, of course, these evaluations were different, among the last I would ever write. No more wordy and ponderous assessments of student work, no more discursive encouragements, no recommendations for improvement. No thick, cumbersome transcripts. Just grades. Clean and simple.

I'm told that's what graduate schools want. What students want. What many of my colleagues seem to want.

My wife of 43 years wants to know whether I'm sad about the change. Yes, a little. Disappointed? Maybe, probably. Relieved? Well, you would think so, reflecting back on the cumulative hours/days/weeks/months spent trying to put into words what an A, B, C, D, F does a fine job of suggesting. But no, I'm definitely not relieved. Just a little sad. A tad disappointed. Maybe a bit angry.

The way you feel after getting blinded by the sun one afternoon on State Street in Madison, Wis., turning left and ramming your beloved, unreliable, oil-dripping Morgan headlong into a Chicken Delite delivery truck. The way you feel after walking into the garage the next day, the engine block like a soul hovering over the crunched green metal, the mechanic shaking his head with a smirk.

Frankly, I knew this day was coming years ago (FYI, I'm back to the death of the narrative evaluation, not the demise of my

Morgan), soon after the past president of this college got hired and looked around at the audacious educational experiment he had inherited and was appalled. Appalled.

He was appalled at what my old colleague Mayra Bloom called the weeds growing up in the cracks of this academic sidewalk. Appalled at the rampant inconsistencies from center to center, unit to unit, mentor to mentor across this college that eschewed walls of all kinds. Appalled at the notion of a college without distinct, discernible standards; without clearly established guidelines for constructing lesson plans or rules to follow when evaluating student work. Without rubrics! A wholly unwieldy college where every student, every study, was considered unique.

And, thus, sufficiently appalled, the new president moved quickly to construct walls, real and metaphorical. He wanted structure, he wanted standards, rubrics, real and unmetaphorical. No more of that '60s fiddle, no poetry, no imaginary gardens with real toads in them. He wanted to know that a course that would be offered in Buffalo would look like, feel like, act like, move like the same course offered in Albany or Manhattan. As Gertrude Stein might have said had she looked out the window instead of at the vase on the piano, a car is a car is a car. (Yes, back to the Morgan).

In 1965, even I knew that the Morgan was not simply a car. It was a beautiful backache: no springs, a hard wooden frame, inches off the highway. It was an elegant headache, needing to be pushed most mornings after the temperature dropped below 32 degrees. It was a transcendent heartache, breaking down weekly, sputtering, losing power, black smoke blowing out the exhaust pipe, those clip-on windows blown sideways whenever you got the bloody contraption going over 55 mph. At times it was little more than art, a dusty sculpture sitting in the gravel and weeds. And after the incident with the Chicken Delite truck, an unrequited love, a lost dream.

Like this college. For me, the past 32 years have been a beautiful backache of a dream of individualized education, sometimes smooth, often clunky, of countless heartening, heartbreaking face-to-face

conversations about the implications of education on individual destiny. A place that was not a place but a rarified space where my colleagues and I, for better and worse, sat in the passenger seats alongside students as they learned to navigate their own unique ways toward a more mature, more nuanced understanding of the planet upon which all of us are desperately trying to stay on the road.

So yes, here I am again, back in that ridiculous Morgan, Richard and Jim in the shaking rear-view mirror, fists raised, cheering as I finally chug off to my American Lit. class, a lecture on futility in Hemingway, only to make a left and plow into that Chicken Delite truck – and in the course of the next few days understand futility and despair and grace firsthand.

As old Hem said, "If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast." Same goes for that Morgan and narrative evaluations and Empire State College itself.

Sylvain Nagler, Northeast Center

How sweet to have atop my "to do" list four requests from graduating and graduated students to submit letters of recommendation in support of their application to graduate school. I labor over such requests, investing significant effort and time to make these recommendations informative and persuasive. So, I review the students' previous narrative evaluations, sample some of their past written work and, in some instances, get in touch with them to arrange for a time to chat. I also ask them to share with me their application essay. Assembling all this information I have compiled, I set out to summarize what I believe to be a fair and accurate description of the students' work, the learning they have achieved, the progress they have indicated and, sometimes, what prospects I see for them. I have, on occasion, received some feedback from the admissions office to which I have addressed the letter. Sometimes the response has been rather perfunctory, something like: "Thank you for taking the time. ..." Other times, the response has gone beyond such polite recognition to

include more particular appreciation for the informative quality of my letter, citing the richness of detail about the student, information that provides the admissions committee with relevant findings to aid in their decision-making process.

Also, on my “to do” list is a list of outstanding student CEs that await my attention. For those students enrolled in the November term, my task will be to select from one of four letters, i.e., A, B, C, or D, and one of two algebraic symbols, a “+” or a “-” ; in total, 11 letter grade options. Given that this is the first time I will experience this method of describing the nature and quality of student work in the nearly 40 years I have been on the faculty, I wonder to myself what that effort will be required of me. Apparently, many of my faculty colleagues are persuaded that a grade-alone evaluation is preferable to one that is a descriptive narrative, in many ways quite similar to those letters of recommendation I previously cited. For the record, I was among those “old timers” who strongly, even vehemently, disagreed with the elimination of narratives. Given the huge magnitude of this policy change, I only wish there had been more time for the exchange of views and experiences, more experimentation and much less of a rush to discard a fundamental value of how we engage students. More on that in a subsequent piece, perhaps.

The narrative contract evaluation process was nearly always quite instructive *for me*. It made me pause and reflect on my interactions with the students over the course of the term. Where did they begin? What was it like for them to move beyond their starting point? How well did they respond to feedback? Did the learning experience kindle in them an enthusiasm to learn more about the subject matter? About other subjects? What about their prospects? For sure, the quality of my writing and the depth of my investment surely varied from student to student. Still, when confronted with a blank page waiting for my narrative description, I was required to step back and do some serious measuring and analysis. Providing this feedback was not confined to a final written document. To the extent that I was successful in my work, these are

topics that the student and I reviewed on an ongoing basis. In the narrative evaluation, I tried to find an accurate way to highlight these observations (beyond a single letter and algebraic sign), and, most importantly all in a public document.

So, as I contemplate the evaluation tasks at hand, I cannot help but be bemused by the contrast in what we now demand of ourselves as Empire State College faculty (letter grades only) and what graduate offices of admission request of us (rankings and a narrative description). The college is now content to have an evaluation of a student’s term work squeezed into one of 11 letter grade options. How ironic? How far we have come. For what? For whom?

Steve Tischler, Metropolitan Center

(From a conversation with Alan Mandell on 21 February 2012)

I *loved* the idea of narrative evaluations as a way of sizing up what a student has learned. It just became evident to me that I couldn’t do justice to the task at hand.

The narrative has been important because it forced me, always, to re-examine the learning contracts I had created. For example, it forced me to think about whether the student *really* had done “advanced” level work; whether the student really had measured up to a “general education” goal.

Sitting there and writing these documents, I always had to ask myself: who exactly is this particular student? I always noticed how *different* my students are. So I was always taking stock of who I teach and, at the same time, and this always happened, thinking about who I am as a teacher.

Writing these documents gave me pause. Was I being fair, honest, clear? I noticed how often I rooted for a student who had made the most progress over the term – not always the person whose academic work was the strongest. I wanted to use the narrative to try to describe the whole story: problems, progress, areas of dispute – always looking for a fuller picture; always making an effort to try to capture the nuance in a student’s learning experience.

There were the harder ones. For me the harder ones were those I had to write for students who had the least curiosity, and honestly, those constitute a significant number of our students. I found myself approaching the writing of their CEs in the same spirit as they approached their studies.

Writing these documents often made me think of those students who, especially at the beginning of a study, were trying to make themselves invisible or who were just lurking around and then, over time, showed that they had a great deal to offer. I enjoyed describing what comes out of people, what’s more than meets the eye. I also could show the real respect I feel for someone who is willing to swim against the current.

I always knew that a lot is at stake in these transcript narratives, so I always wanted to be professional about the activity. What I included was my honest assessment. If I could stick to the “criteria,” I always said to myself, nothing I wrote would be inappropriate and I’d be putting into words what I thought a student really learned.

Mary Mawn Center for Distance Learning

When I came to Empire State College in 2007 and first learned about narrative evaluations, this was an approach that I had not encountered before. Honestly, it reminded me a little bit of my elementary school days when, at the end of each quarter, my teachers would include a few sentences on the back of my report card that provided additional insights and feedback on my progress to date. After glancing over my grades, I remember being eager to read these handwritten notes.

Fast forward many years later, I was now asked to do something similar at Empire State College. I quickly discovered that writing narrative evaluations was not an easy task to do. I needed to strike a balance between providing students with constructive feedback, while keeping a potential external audience in mind (graduate school committees, prospective employers, etc.). This was somewhat challenging, but I also saw it as an opportunity to provide outside readers with

some context for a given grade. This was particularly important when a student's final grade did not reflect their true capabilities.

Sometimes "life" can get in the way, and this can be especially true for adult learners who often juggle many commitments outside of school. This scenario played out during the September 2011 term, when life circumstances prevented one of my students from fully engaging in her studies. She ultimately completed this work about two months after the term ended. In the narrative evaluation, I was able to discuss her strengths and capacity for learning science and, even though her final grade was acceptable, I believed that she had the potential to do better. This scenario is just one of countless examples where the narrative evaluation provided relevant context beyond the letter grade.

While going forward, at least formally there won't be opportunities to provide "handwritten notes" on each student's "report card," there will continue to be ways to provide feedback to our students. At least for me, I need to keep in mind the lessons learned while preparing narrative evaluations. Grades provide only one piece of the puzzle; ongoing, individualized feedback completes the whole picture.

Cathy Leaker, Metropolitan Center A Brief Elegy for the CE

Weep no more, woeful mentors,
weep no more,
For Narratives, your sorrow,
are not dead,
Sunk though they be beneath
the DocPak floor

With apologies to John Milton (1637), I'd like to rather irreverently riff on "Lycidas," his justly celebrated elegy for his recently drowned schoolfellow, Edward King, as I reflect not so much on what I learned in the process of writing CEs, but equally or even more importantly, what I'm learning with their departure.

It would be unseemly, to say the least, to use a poem mourning the death of a loved one as a point of departure for yet another tedious lament about the tragic loss of narrative contract evaluations. Ultimately, however, Milton's poem is less about

personal loss (most scholars agree that King and Milton were not particularly close), than it is about the difficulty of committing oneself to one's craft, particularly in light of the triple threat of time, tide and transience. And here the connection between Milton's poem and CEs is, for me at least, pretty darn seemly after all. Because the question I kept asking myself after the faculty voted to abolish CEs was simply, "How do I – or even *should* I – maintain a commitment to Empire State College's core values – even as the vehicles through which those values are expressed continuously erode?"

So. Back to Milton. In a distinctly Miltonic "it's not you, it's me" tactic, "Lycidas" moves fairly expeditiously from the requisite outpouring of grief for King to the speaker's existential articulation of doubt, particularly in terms of a commitment to his vocation as a poet:

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted
Shepherds trade,
And strictly meditate the
thankless Muse,
Were it not better don as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade
(64-68)

In these lines, Milton's speaker asks a prototypic bang for buck question that I suspect many of us have echoed, albeit less lyrically and more crudely, as we toiled over our CEs back in the not always good old days.

Even as shadier grading pastures beckon, I want to linger for a moment on Milton's descriptors for that slighted Shepherd's trade: *uncessant care, tend, slighted, homely, meditate, thankless*. These words seem so apt when conjuring narrative evaluations, but they are not the kind of words I typically associate with grading, where words like *standard, calculate, precision, point total, score, percentage and distribution* seem more apropos. Yet I want to believe I can carry the Miltonic resonance of them with me when I log into the new system to post my final grades.

I say this because in the end, whether I'm slaving over CEs or adding up totals in a grade book, Milton's list of adjectives gesture toward my responsibilities not just

as a mentor, but as a mentor tasked with evaluation. Not that I necessarily like it that way. It has always been easy for me to slight evaluation in order to sport with the more "Amaryllis" aspects of working with students, like creating innovative learning activities, exchanging provocative ideas or even crafting lush and lyrical CEs that in the end may not say much of anything. Still, every time I started to write a CE, I had at least a fleeting reminder that the best of my mentoring comes down to that really hard, always uncessant, surprisingly strict, and remarkably homely (as in simple, unassuming, ordinary, intimate, homelike, but also, I admit, sometimes plain and unattractive) task of meditating on what exactly my students had accomplished, on how I could talk to them about the gap between those accomplishments and some other point (too vague to be a standard) toward which they were aiming, and finally, on how I could reasonably capture all of this in a way that makes sense to me, to my student and to the various audiences to whom we are each, in some way, accountable.

That kind of meditation can happen with grades, too. But I can no longer count on the weirdness of DocPak and the uncessant homeliness of prose to bring me face to face with the strict task of evaluation. I will have to be more intentional about my work, make a more conscious commitment to the thankless Shepherd's trade, just as Milton's "uncouth Swain" concludes his elegy (spoiler alert!) by rededicating himself to a more engaged, deliberate but not necessarily efficient poetry:

At last he rose, and twitch'd his
Mantle blew:
To morrow to fresh Woods, and
Pastures new. (193-194)

Reference

Milton, J. (1637). Lycidas. In A. Quiller-Couch (Ed.), *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900*. Retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/101/317.html>

Lee Herman
Central New York Center
Evaluating and Learning

A vista. A world of details holding worlds
of details. Too many details, endless
possibilities. Which ones to choose? They're
all true. Each chosen, a memento of
disclosure; each unchosen, an excision.

I must frame, inexorable limitation, a
necessary instrument of intelligibility. I
fix the frame and make the possibility of
composition. Is there a story?

It will be a journey for mindful eyes, a
journey about a journey already taken. A
gaze of lines and shapes, shade and color,
focus and brightness, blur and darkness: a
gaze beyond, toward what it could mean.
All these elements (not the elisions though)
disclosing the disclosures, some of them,
that were disclosed to me.

Within the frame I fixed, I compose a
memorandum of disclosure.

It is always full. It is never complete.
I mourn the absences I will forget. I review.
Is it well pondered, light writing? I am
full of the hope I hope to offer in a framed
thing that looks beyond itself. Then, I save.
It is finished.

A Mission to the Dominican Republic: What is a *Batey*?

Julia Penn Shaw, Center for Distance Learning

The Idea

Last November (2011) on a Sunday morning at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Albany, N.Y., Tony Malone (Dr. Anthony Malone, local pediatrician affiliated with Albany Medical College) said a few words about a projected medical mission planned for spring 2012 to the Dominican Republic to provide medical care for Haitian sugar cane workers. Who, he asked, thought they would like to come? Within a New York minute, I decided to go. Having been on missions before, one with the Presbyterians to New Orleans for reconstruction after Katrina, and one with Unitarians for a singing mission to support small churches in Transylvania/Romania, I already knew that I like being part of groups that contribute to a larger goal. A medical mission fit well with what I know about Emmanuel, which has a strong social justice presence in Albany, including a daily breakfast “club” for the homeless and a food pantry for the community. It also fit well with how I like to spend my “vacation” time.

Over the next month or two, I learned more details about the trip scheduled for Feb. 11 - 18, 2012 from both conversations within our group and by exploring various Internet sites. I learned that *bateyes* are company towns of sugar cane factory owners established in the 1960s with Dominican Republic government support to isolate immigrant Haitian laborers who are needed to work, but are not desired as citizens. Kristy Engel, the Baptist missionary supporting our medical missions, indicated that there may be as many as 5,000 *bateyes* in the DR and close to 200 in the vicinity of La Romana, our base. *Bateyes* contain most of the Haitians in the Dominican Republic estimated to be between 10 percent and 40 percent of the total DR population. The variation in these figures is an indication of how poorly these groups are served. The *bateyes* are enclosed, frequently having no electricity and possibly no running water,

because they are not served by the DR infrastructure. Meager education is only up to the fourth grade. Because the DR is one of the few nations that does not grant citizenship to people born within its borders, children born of Haitians in DR have no national identity (and DR identity is needed to attend high school). The need of these people is great.

There are two primary aspects to this mission – one long term and one short term. The long-term mission is construction: construction of a hospital in La Romana that serves Haitians as well as Dominicans; construction of community centers and churches in particular *bateyes*; and construction of the base site for mission groups coming to La Romana. The cumulative work of these groups is very impressive. Since 1987, brick by brick, the La Romana hospital has grown from nothing to two well-equipped floors, serving Haitians from the *bateyes* in ways that no other medical facility does. We were told that of the 32 people in our group, 22 of them would work on construction projects at the hospital.

The short term mission, and the primary goal of the Albany group, was to provide medical assistance and health education to five or more *bateyes* in the Dominican Republic during our stay there. A call came out for monetary donations to help cover the cost of medications, since we would need to pay for all meds we delivered, as well as clothing and eyeglasses. With my dean’s permission, I sent out a short announcement about the medical mission and the needs of the Haitian workers who would be served. I was touched and heartened that one small

announcement to CDL brought in nearly \$500 in contributions from my Empire State College colleagues, and also encouraged a CDL colleague, Chrissy Wall, to try to join our group. Although Chrissy was not able to adjust her schedule to join us, her support of the group was energizing. With respect to the significant financial contribution, I was proud to share it with the mission group, on behalf of my college.

The time between the initial announcement and final plans for the trip went quickly. Our personal contribution for flight and transportation to and from Newark airport would be about \$1,200. That was doable. Soon we should ensure that we had tetanus shots, hepatitis B shots, and consider whether we wanted a prescription for an antimalarial drug. A trip to my primary care physician addressed those considerations. We hunted for suitcases and clothes we were willing to leave there as part of our contribution, and shopped for medical

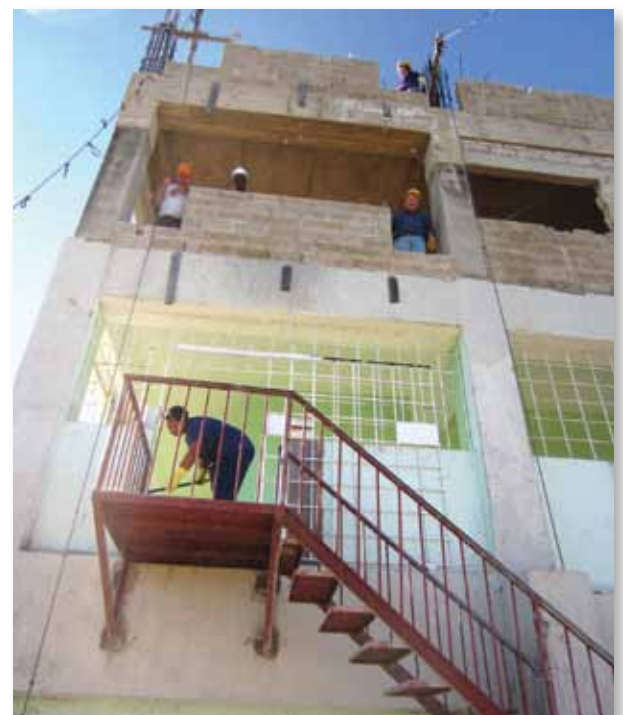


PHOTO CREDIT: TOM LIAHUT

Many small volunteer construction teams build a hospital

scrubs. Some of us started to learn Creole or brushed up on Spanish, while others less gifted in languages such as myself, read history books and tour books about Hispaniola, the island upon which both the Dominican Republic and Haiti rest. I focused on learning about the sugar cane plantations and the *bateyes* they contain.

The amount of work that had been done to prepare the way for this week-long mission was impressive. I knew that this trip was made easier by the work of others. The creation of the sleeping quarters over time at La Romana by the construction teams meant that we would not be trying to sleep just barely off the ground confronting huge cockroaches skittering through the tents as experienced by members of a former mission group. I could trust that Kristy had a pulse on the people and a longer view of what they need, so that our contributions would be consistent with other missions that have come before, and will come after. Medications had been purchased and sorted, and labels had been made, arriving in time for distribution into our many second suitcases.

My Personal 1 Percent - 99 Percent Gap

Emails about planning began to include members from Syracuse and Rhode Island, so our view of our group enlarged from our local seven to the total of 32. About two weeks before the trip to further prepare us for the experience, Tony and Marilyn Malone, our local leaders, invited the Syracuse group to join us, the Albany group, at their house in Latham so we could meet each other and begin making more detailed plans. This meeting helped us get to know each other and gave us the opportunity to ask the many questions that would make the difference between comfort and anxiety about a new experience that we hoped could make a significant difference to the lives of the people we would visit.

At this meeting we shared our motivations to join this medical mission to the Dominican Republic. People phrased it differently, but all of us had words that reflected a desire to connect to a larger community and to contribute to balancing unevenly distributed resources in the world.

In some way we all felt called to offer our gifts to a project whose form is yet in the making.

I said that I wake up each morning after a sound sleep in a comfortable bed in a warm room with no deep concerns or anxieties about my welfare, my finances or my health. I am an immensely lucky person and I know it. After the pleasant realization of starting a new day with few impediments, I then do have a point of discomfort as I think about the difference between my own well-being and the plight of so many others in the world who have only a fraction of my comfort. This is what I call my “gap.” Like the gap between the 1 percent and the 99 percent that has “occupied” our attention for the past few months, my personal gap is between what I need and what I have that I don’t need, and therefore, between my smaller and larger selves. I need only a portion of what I have. After all of my needs are met – my comfort needs (the warm bed counts for a lot), my status needs (not strong; I drive a 2000 van and live in a working class urban neighborhood) and my recreational needs (mostly books, swimming and a dinner now and then), there is still a gap between what I use and what I have to offer. It is that difference that gives me an urge, particularly in the morning when I awaken so comfortably, to reach beyond myself and think about others. The signs of poverty in my own neighborhood surely contribute to that urge. Recently there was an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about a couple who “tithe for poverty” (Troop, 2011). They save at least 10 percent of their joint income (an academic and a doctor) and donate it to services that directly serve the poor. The direct donation assures that no significant portion of the donation goes to overhead, advertising, notecards in the mail or other expenses not directly benefitting the intended recipients. I find this concept compelling. It is part of what motivates me to diminish my personal gap between my resources and the uses to which those resources can be put.

At this meeting, Richard Horan, an English-as-a-second-language teacher, invited his friend, a Haitian student at Hudson Valley Community College, to speak a bit of Creole and share Creole-to-English cheat

sheets with us. Tony showed us a photo/video story from the last mission two years ago. Many who had been in missions to this part of the world said that their lives were changed by the people they met. I expected this would be true for me as well. Although the upcoming trip still felt distant to me, I anticipated that my participation in it would diminish my personal “occupy” gap. I hadn’t even gotten on the plane, but already it felt good.

I expected some of what I learned to appear in different ways in the Human Development program that I coordinate at Empire State College. I hoped our interactions with individuals would allow me to see threads of behavior that I could identify as warp and waft of cultural contexts. I personally anticipated many challenges for myself, not the least of which would be the fact that my language training had been in Latin and German, not Spanish or French, which would be so much more useful here. I saw a frustrating gap between my desire to meet individuals and hear their stories, and my ability to do so, but foresaw that possibilities would open up once we arrived and got started with our work.

When I volunteered for this medical mission, I thought of it as I had my other volunteer trips – something I do on my own time. As the team started making plans, however, I began to see the relationship between this trip and my job as academic area coordinator of Human Development at CDL. I would be observing “human development” of a different culture with different languages at a different place. Although the trip would only be a week, it provided an initial opportunity to know the people from a somewhat inside view: their health; their communities; their multigenerational relationships; and their education (since I would visit the schools and meet the teachers, if possible). What place do Western theories of Piaget, Erikson, Bandura and Vygotsky have in these communities? Although their theories inform learning in literate Western cultures, what place do they have for largely illiterate populations? This experience reminded me of being pregnant: I could read all I wanted and talk with those having the experience, but it would not prepare me for what I would learn. It was comforting to realize

that all of my preconceived ideas would fall away once we were on DR soil doing what we came to do. We would have so little time there that, at best, we could only impact lives in soft and swift ways, but already I was expecting the trip to be long enough to impact me in deep and lasting ways.

Stories to Believe In

My first step was to buy books written by Haitians, so I hit Amazon.com, and bought children's books, novels and some history and travel books with the intention of leaving them there for the schools. Although I found the books of Edwidge Danticat (1994; 1998) to tell me much about Haitian culture that I needed to know, I found folktales to tell me even more. The most useful book for me was *The Magic Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales* collected by Diane Wolkstein (1980). I borrowed the heading of this section from her phrase, "stories they believe in" (p. 10). This book included 27 folktales that she collected from storytellers in Haiti. The tales were informative, but useful as well were the stories that she told about the context of hearing each story – the storyteller and his or her relationship to the audience. This gave me a much appreciated glimpse into traditional Haitian society. Many of the stories had evil stepmothers who deprived their stepchildren of food or even killed them. Animals played important parts as well as General Death, various hungans (medicine men) and what Wolkstein identified as the Haitian peasant trinity: Jesus Christ, Damballah Oueddo and Papa God. In the stories, societal order was maintained sometimes by local administrators, sometimes by the intervention of Papa God, sometimes by natural elements (such as the Magic Orange Tree), and sometimes by the cleverness of the protagonist. The collection also included some of the songs that accompanied well-known stories.

I related reading these folk tales to a question that was posed to the mission group: Is there a way, in the short time we had at each *batey*, to communicate a useful health or developmental message? What came to my mind was that once a story, or a song or a children's game, gets a place in a culture, it can become a reliable carrier

of cultural messages. Think of the staying power of the European children's dance game that intones: "Ring around the Rosy, a pocketful of posies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down." These words may or may not refer to the Black Death of the 14th or 17th centuries, but nevertheless, nursery rhymes demonstrate that particular stories and myths have a staying power that is not always conscious, but is somehow meaningful. Having learned of some of the health issues in the *bateyes*, I found myself envisioning a new set of "folk" stories for the current generation, with associated songs, that warned young people of the tragedy of AIDS, or the advantages of being educated before being pregnant, or the usefulness of listening to one's children and creating secure attachment with them, or the value of continuing to take a medication even when the symptoms are gone (hypertension, for example). This idea is not bizarre; I know our local Head Start has short catchy songs to help preschoolers remember to wash their hands and brush their teeth.

The creation of health-sensitive stories was obviously not an available option for us on this trip but other options were. Jean Burton led a skit at our first visit demonstrating how adults could respond positively to a child wanting attention. At later *batey* visits, a different pattern emerged: Victoria, a Spanish-speaker in our group in her 70s, played a wonderful role as storyteller using the colorful illustrated books that some of us brought. Perhaps because storytellers are attended to by all ages and perhaps also because adults were without education and stories were valued, groups of young women, young men and children gathered around Victoria and her daughter, Maria, every time Victoria sat in a chair beside our medical location and started to read. It was a wonderful sight to see – fewer warning health messages, perhaps, but certainly more joy.

The Reality: The Real World in the Bateyes

We arrived Saturday evening, Feb. 11, to a perfect Caribbean day.

Perhaps ironically, I did not take a computer or a cell phone on the trip: Ironic because in my home in Lansingburgh, N.Y. and

my workplace in Saratoga Springs, I live in a virtual world. As a CDL mentor, I engage students and colleagues through online courses, emails and phone calls, doing much of my most effective work through the World Wide Web using words to reflect images of realities. I expected that our mission site would be primitive with few amenities. The reality was that our accommodations were more than adequate for a mission camp, with electricity, gender-specific bunk beds in a pleasant well-lit dorm, an airy kitchen and eating area, and showers that provided warm water for the first few takers. Nevertheless, because I went on this mission with the expectation of having very limited resources, I called my family members and close friends before I left, believing that everything would go well and I would contact them again in a week upon my return.

Five Beautiful Young Women Without Names

Our first action on Sunday morning was to attend church at a nearby *batey*, Batey 80. Attire would be simple: as a woman I would wear a skirt, and both for respect and also as a fair-faced stranger, I would wear a hat. My broad-rimmed garden hat was my best choice of those I brought and had I put a woven flower on it, it would almost have passed for a bonnet. Protective of my health, I also wore solid shoes with socks – a choice based on prevention of round worm infection - not on fashion. To conserve packing space, my church shift also was my swim cover. Suffice it to say, I was not anxious to have photos taken of me while on this excursion.

But once I arrived at Batey 80, I wanted photos of most everything else. Our yellow school bus pulled in front of the Baptist church, "Iglecias. ..." This was one of the simplest but also one of the most powerful places of worship I have visited in my life, including many cathedrals and shrines across the world. More of a chapel than a church, the dimensions of about 20 feet by 25 feet were excellent for a gathering of about 60 people. Light came through the slatted windows onto a podium with boom box speakers proudly displayed on each side, set against a back wall with a large mural of a river of water from heaven

to earth skirted by trees, and a large dove holding a branch. Before us was a tall, slim, black man in a Western suit with open arms. He greeted us and invited us on a brief tour of the *batey*.

As we made our way over constricted, uneven, muddy, root-secured paths, we could see that in contrast to the neighboring domiciles, the church was well-equipped: the boom boxes, supported by an independent generator, were actually a status symbol for electricity. We did not know it then, but these were among the poorest houses we would see in any *bateyes*, with crumbling concrete and wood foundations and sides and roofs made of tin. Not everyone attended church and as we walked along the narrow dirt paths, we could see that for many people, it was wash day. Women and girls were outside on their stoops, attending to wet clothes in large plastic washtubs. Clotheslines with clothes (no sheets or towels) interspersed faded reds and blues among the green of the trees. Water could be heard from a short distance away, trickling from a common source about 6 feet off of the ground. The source had a small concrete block pad, immediately surrounded on all sides by packed dirt. Two women were there washing buckets. Two small donkeys showed their backsides to us while munching on grass, which was perhaps a bit lusher in the damp ground. A boy of about age 4 named Peter followed us as we moved about, and an old man or two

watched from a distance, nodding in response to my smiles and clumsy Spanish.

Watching my feet as well as my surroundings, I walked back with the others to the church. In my memory, our excursion had extended over an area about the size of a basketball court. We were now directed to the Sunday school being held at the back of the church. Children, clean-clothed and alert, sat in a row with their backs to the church wall, facing a young woman who looked about 13 but was actually about 17. Comfortable in an adult role, she was responsible for teaching the children Bible verses and handing out flat breads the size of cookies to those who responded well. We were told that was the first food of the day for the children.

Church was to begin. As worshippers, we sat in the simple pews. There were a few outlets on the side walls with three cell phones charging, suggesting that this was the



Sunday: A day for church

communications center for the community. The setting was quiet and comfortable, almost serene, until a line of singing children paraded up the center aisle of the church, accompanied by a sizable and very loud traditional drum played by a teenage girl and a rhythm keeper of some kind held by another girl musician. The music was so loud (even without the speakers) that it was hard to hear our vigorous singing and clapping. I found myself wondering whether the pattern of loud music that drowns out voices came from settings like this into some U.S. black Baptist churches, or did a U.S. tradition penetrate into this community? The question unanswered, I listened to the sermon, a mix of Spanish and English which, although more political than spiritual, served to bring us together.

I sat at the end of the third of six rows where I could watch both my fellow Americans and fellow *batey* churchgoers. I was especially intrigued by three young ladies who sat next to me. Postures erect and with perfect composure, they attended to the sermon. They could have been teenage models from the Bronx. Although centered in the *batey* that was their home, their style demonstrated an awareness of an outside world. I was amused as they tried to keep a young boy in check who sat behind them, mindful of the eye of this American stranger (me).



Sunday: Wash day

Evidently, I was not the only one intrigued by the self-possession of these young women, and after the service, some of us approached them as they stood in a tight group with two of their friends. Marilyn Malone asked them what they would like to learn in school. Two said they wanted to be accountants, one wanted to be a doctor, one wanted to do something else in the medical field and one wanted to be a lawyer. Had this been a setting in the U.S., all of these goals might have seemed to be eminently possible, but this was a different setting and we, the visitors, were becoming aware of the difficulties that these girls faced: There was no schooling in their *batey* beyond the fourth grade, and these students either needed to walk a total of three hours a day to learn in a neighboring *batey*, or take a bus that they could not afford. To go to high school and college in the DR, they each needed a DR citizen to adopt them or they needed to return to Haiti to get birth credentials – a very improbable option, especially due to the loss of records in the recent hurricanes there. The girls looked like they were in their teens, but when we asked their ages, they told us they were between the ages of 25 and 18: They were not girls but young women. This registered with us all because we knew that these young women were following quite a different path from their age-mates who commonly start having babies at about age 14 or 15 (frequently with a family of seven by age 35). The young woman who was 25 was not only taking a very different course from her *batey* sisters, but also potentially sacrificing having children, a strong value in her culture.

Meeting these young women our first day in a *batey* set the tone of the trip for me. As a person of action, I knew that I wanted to be part of a solution for women like these. I envisioned the young women each having a CD player for listening to a Spanish

bateyes? Were there Spanish versions of CLEP tests that they could take for college credit? What were the paths that connected the dots between these young women with academic needs and the financial and educational resources that could satisfy these

needs? I noticed that my concerns were about the education of young women. What about the young men? For the most part, they were on the periphery of our church experience. Perhaps they made themselves visible in other settings, but (not surprisingly here as elsewhere) more women than men were strongly associated with a church and the benefits it offered: boys, old men and the pastor were the exceptions. Gender differences were apparent with young men on the outside of the church “yard” waiting to quietly flirt with the young women who were within.

As a result of this trip, I hoped to be able to know these aspiring young women by name as I learned more about them, perhaps assisting with resources available to me to help them gain the education they seek and the new life that education could bring to them. There were five in this group. Five is a number that one can grasp. As an individual, it is hard to envision how to make a difference in the overwhelming

poverty we had already witnessed: Five young women, however, stood there ready for help; it is conceivable that they could be given the assistance they need, and perhaps in so doing, create a path for others like them. There also was an intense younger girl, a leader among the children, who stood



PHOTO CREDIT: EDITH LEET

(top) A church community supports young women seeking to become educated. (below) A family community supports a young man seeking medical help, transporting him to the medical mission on plastic chairs.



PHOTO CREDIT: MARK CHAFFIN

version of “The Teaching Company” and discussing lectures together, perhaps at the church that had quite limited but workable electric lights enabling these women to study in the evenings. Could our college be involved, providing “study groups” in Santo Domingo with young students from other

as close to this clique as she could without invading their space. She, too, I wanted to know by name. I wanted to see her have a life that she, herself, somehow knew she had the potential to achieve. So perhaps for me there were six young women without names who moved me on that first day in a *batey*.

The Yellow School Bus

We had other adventures that Sunday, but I will return us to the world of our comfortable mission space. As we sorted through medications, clothes and eyeglasses to give away, we also prepared for our work for the trip.

Five times during the next week, our medical mission group traveled in our yellow school bus to a neighboring *batey*, passing field after field of growing sugar cane and railroad cars stacked with stripped sugar cane poles. I stepped from security and sufficiency in my solid Rockport walking shoes onto various dirt surfaces, each with a visible mix of soil, puddles, sugar cane shards, and occasional remnants of animal dung. I wore the sturdy shoes to protect me from what I could not see in the dirt, especially round worm eggs. I also wore an invisible shield of DEET to protect me from malaria, SPF 70 lotion to protect me from the hot sun, clothing to protect me from exposure to scabies, and I took a container of purified water to protect me from dehydration. Fortunately, there were few insects, which Edith conjectured were held at bay by the colorful roaming chickens that might be eating the grubs before they became adults. There were no paved roads in any of the *bateyes*, some of which were difficult to reach by bus. Public buildings in the *bateyes*, such as a church or school, were generally made of concrete blocks and are no larger than 20 feet by 25 feet. Two churches in *bateyes* we visited had electric wires (without switches) for electric lights; one had a few outlets in side walls, and one had an above-ground water pipe providing running water. Individual homes with typical dimensions of perhaps 10 feet by 12 feet contained a small bed and single table in poor conditions, and perhaps a cupboard for kitchen supplies and other amenities in better situations. Homes were either assembled from scraps of tin roofing or constructed of concrete blocks. Poorer

houses had a window with a shutter that blocked the light when closed, and better houses had a window with a slatted shutter that could be adjusted for light and air. No private houses that I saw in the *bateyes* had signs of either electricity or running water. Communal outhouses, which were surprisingly clean considering the conditions, were usually in pairs, with each stall being large enough only for an elevated poured concrete block with a hole and a small container for waste paper.

Day after day, we were greeted by many Haitian residents who had anticipated our arrival. Again and again, I was moved by the small welcoming crowd. Most were young – children, adolescents or adults under the age of about 40. Almost all wore bright smiles and trusting eyes. Perhaps their open demeanor reflected their only protection, which was the shield of faith in us. As they stood there (there were no places to sit so even the oldest had to stand), I saw evidence of both hard work and pride in their elegant strong backs. Although many were without shoes, the clothes of all were clean. Groups of two or three might gather, and occasionally, particularly when encouraged, young girls played hand-clapping games with rhythmic words I could not understand. A primary source of activity was for people to watch each other. While we were there, I saw no apparent conflict among any of the people. Relationships appeared relaxed and comfortable, although social groups were defined by who stood with whom. There were no streets, but the packed dirt paths between the living spaces were generally well kept. Once I did see a girl of about age 7 clinging to a cast-off, undressed doll. I was touched to see Mark's photo of one other toy, a small dump truck made from a juice container or plastic bottle.

Seeing that lone much-beloved dolly caused me to recall a phrase that I sometimes use: "the tyranny of the material." What I mean by it here in Lansingburgh is that my life is filled with too many objects to manipulate, organize and use. It is associated with a comparable clutter of ideas in my head. The "tyranny of the material" in the *bateyes*, however, is quite different: It represents the absence of sufficient objects to maintain a constructive life. So few objects were to be

seen, and even fewer that would be classified as useful tools aside from the machetes that the men use to harvest sugar cane. Once I saw a boy sweeping the central dirt surface using a broom constructed of twigs tied to a branch. Many women in our first visit on Sunday morning were scrubbing clothes in large round plastic buckets, drawing water from a common faucet. Do clothes lines count as tools? In the more fortunate schools, I saw about 12 two-student desks, a file cabinet labeled "Bibliotechnica" (library), chalk for large painted boards that served as blackboards for group instruction, and a few notepads and pencils for the children. The only words I saw were Spanish signs on the churches (i.e., *Iglesias*. . .), Spanish words on the school walls (i.e., *Rincon de matematica*) and English phrases on T-shirts (i.e., "Life is Good"). Uniforms do count as tools in this society where what one wears designates who one is. Uniforms are restricted to those who have the status that the clothing represents: police, school children and medical people are all immediately recognized by their attire. Not only was there a dearth of medical supplies to address ailments, but also an absence of sufficient food to accompany the medications as prescribed to "take with food." How can people hack at sugar cane without flip-flops, at least, to protect their feet from the cutting shards on the fields? How can a 40-year-old mother of seven cope with hypertension without high-blood-pressure medications? How can a child be nourished when intestinal parasites sap so much of the nutritional value of the little food he receives? How can a grandmother teach her granddaughter to sew repairs on recycled clothing without eyeglasses to bring the stitches into focus?

The wonder of what I witnessed was the social cohesion and hope of people we saw in spite of their very real material poverty. There are so few outsiders like us to attend to their basic needs, so little to sustain their bodies, and so little to occupy their minds; nevertheless, each, almost without exception, maintained a physical posture of strength and an aura of dignity. I saw poverty – too much poverty, heart-breaking poverty – in the *bateyes*, but not the appearance of emotional impoverishment. Religious faith made a significant difference in the lives



PHOTO CREDIT: EDITH LEET

Victoria reading to children with the yellow bus in the background

of those we met. Faith and education were intimately connected through the Bible and hymnals, which were the only books I saw in any of the *bateyes*. The hope offered by faith helped the people maintain their dignity while living in the *bateyes*, and also provided a path into a larger world. It gave many girls the discipline not to get pregnant at 14 or 15, so they could continue on in their education even though there was no sign of the financial sponsor needed to enable that to happen.

I later learned that we did not see the weakest of the people because only those who paid a small fee to the health provider of their community (with a required eighth grade education) were able to come to the makeshift medical site that we provided. At each *batey* we saw about 100 people and at the La Romana barrio, we helped about 200 people. Some of the medical team made home visits to those who were too weak to move, and Phyllis, Raquel and Tom brought back heart-wrenching stories of witnessing the steadfast support from the caregiver to a malnourished and dying elder. If the level of relative wealth that we saw was the face of those who could seek the basic help we provided, I could not conceive of what we did not see.

Seeing what I saw, it is hard not to regret what I personally could easily have done to help more. I was very glad that I spotted reading glasses for \$1 apiece at Yankee Dollar, and brought 100 of them. They easily packed into about half of a

suitcase and we gave away nearly all of them. I wish I had bought 100 more. I would have bought 100 flip-flops, also at \$1 apiece. I could easily have packed another suitcase of clothes for women, having discovered that we had so few women's, men's and adolescent's clothes to share. The few books brought by Susan and myself brought delight to the children, adolescent boys and young women when Spanish-speaking Victoria, in a grandmother role, read them aloud; more books could have brought even more joy.

A Day in Our Medical Mission

I offered to write a blog for Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2012, Valentine's Day. Donna brought us all Valentine cards and chocolate Kisses to remind us of home before we stepped onto the yellow school bus, once again, to make our medical visit. How could I describe our experience? I decided to show you how we set up a medical site on this day in this particular location so that we all could visualize the reality of the work we did. Hopefully this schematic helps. On this day, the clinic was in a church. Envision the chapel as being the "pharmacy"; the waiting room in the middle; and other medical stations in a circle around those waiting. I gave each station a number so that I can describe them, but any single patient may not follow this exact sequence. The schematic looks tidy, but the reality was dense with people and high volume in three languages.

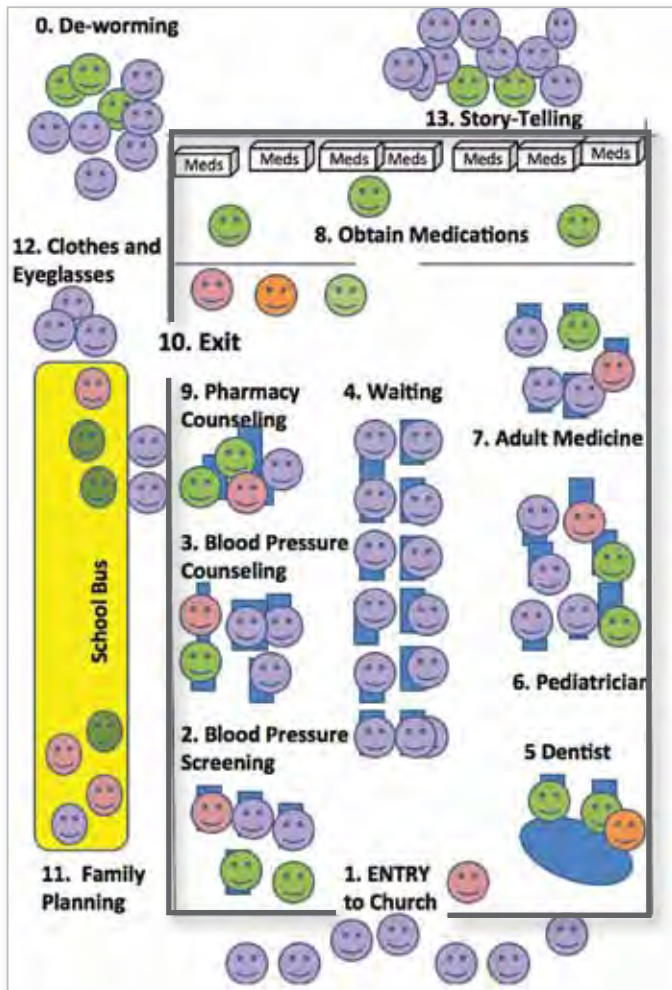
0. De-worming for roundworms and pinworms was available to everyone, whether or not they had the yellow card given by the health provider mandatory for receiving medical service inside the church. On this day, many women and children took the sweet liquid in very small disposable cups. Then a young man interrupted by saying that taking the medicine would kill or weaken you. The trickle of takers diminished at that point, and most men refused to take it. The primary de-wormers today were Mary Beth, a penitentiary counselor and Ashley, a college student, assisted by Maria, a nurse, and Victoria, her mother, both of whom spoke Spanish and served as interpreters here.

1. To enter into the mission, a resident needed a yellow card obtained from the health provider of the *batey* for a small fee of about 90 U.S. cents per family. We only saw those among the population who could afford a card, although many others came in hopes of obtaining clothes or eyeglasses. Roberto, a Haitian interpreter working on his high school diploma, managed the inflow of patients into the makeshift clinic.
2. High blood pressure is endemic in this group, as a result of diet and genetic propensity. An initial step for care was to take the blood pressure of the patient. Marilyn, an EMT, and Mark, a geriatric chaplain, did this work, assisted by Roberto. He ushered patients to that area from the entrance. Daily vitamins for the whole family were distributed here.
3. If necessary, the patient was next sent to Bonnie, a licensed nurse, for blood pressure counseling with Raquel as the primary interpreter.
4. The "waiting room" was a set of white stackable plastic chairs set up in the middle of the room.
5. Patients needing to have a tooth pulled or other dental work performed were sent to the local DR dentist assisted by Donna, a certified dental assistant. Patients, stretched out on a portable



PHOTO CREDIT: UNKNOWN

The Medical Mission "Clinic" on Tuesday, Feb. 14 in a 20 feet by 25 feet church in Batey La Gina.



CREDIT: JULIE SHAW

KEY

- Local resident
- Medical mission volunteer
- Local interpreter on staff (many from the Bateyes)
- Local doctor or dentist

Details about the Medical Services on Feb. 14, 2012

0. De-worming for roundworms and pinworms.
1. Entrance to the medical assistance.
2. Initial high blood pressure check.
3. Blood pressure counseling.
4. The 'waiting room.'
5. The dental area.
6. The pediatric area.
7. The adult area.
8. Pharmacy: Prescription distribution.
9. Pharmaceutical counseling.
10. The exit.
11. Family planning area.
12. Clothes and eyeglasses.
13. Victoria read children's stories in Spanish.

dental chair, were given only one injection of Novocain. No dental patients called out in pain.

6. Children were received by Tony, the medical doctor and pediatrician, and Loretta, a licensed nurse. Interpreters, Joanna and Ariel, assisted.
7. Adults were received by Tom, a licensed physician's assistant, and Phyllis, a nurse practitioner and nurse anesthetist. They were assisted by Hilda, an interpreter.
8. Prescriptions were efficiently addressed from the church chapel area by Steve, a licensed pharmacist, Esperanza, a licensed pharmacist technician, and Jean, a retired social worker.
- 9, 10. Pharmacy counseling (9) was given to patients when receiving their medications by Lauren, licensed nurse, Dr. Café, DR doctor, and Emillio, an interpreter and guardian of the exit door (10).
11. Family planning was supervised by Melissa, with a MSW, assisted by Louise, an interpreter, and Estella, a health provider. In the relative privacy inside of the bus, they evaluated pregnancy tests and offered family planning guidance. Families of seven or eight children of women in their 30s were relatively common.
12. Those with yellow cards were eligible for clothes and eyeglasses. Edith, a freelance writer, and Julie, an educator, organized and dispensed most of the clothes. Andrea, an interpreter who served as a makeshift optician, fitted patients with eyeglasses stored in a suitcase.
13. Later in the day in the shade at the back of the church/clinic, Victoria read children's stories in Spanish to an appreciative audience of many generations. Maria was there to support her.

Creating this schematic was a very useful exercise for me. It helped me to see the larger picture of which each of us was a part. It helped me to appreciate the tremendous organization provided by Dr. Anthony Malone (Tony, the pediatrician)

and his wife, Marilyn (blood pressure screener) who had primary responsibility for the medical part of the trip, assisted by Lauren, Loretta and Donna from Rhode Island who helped with procuring the orders, as well as designing and making all the labels used. This image shows how all of the pieces come together with grace. It is hard to describe the feeling of being a part of such a successful, meaningful and spiritual venture. I was transformed by the connection I felt with others on the team who also were serving on this mission – with the interpreters, cooks and staff (many of whom had been born in a *batey*); and with the people whose spoken language I could not understand but whose smiles, grateful touches and hugs communicated in a language of connection known to all of us.

My experiences of this mission came from the perspective of someone involved in the medical mission, although there was ample evidence in our comfort at the mission center and in our visit to the truly impressive clinic of the cumulative effort of the construction groups for the past 15 years. On this day, I will remember how a small group of people with love in their hearts came together to make a small difference in a very big world.

Back to My Virtual World

Not all of our time in the DR was in *bateyes*: we spent three exquisite late afternoons on a perfect beach. On our last beach excursion on Friday afternoon, we gathered in a large circle on the sand and recounted major events of our mission. It was a soft and fine finish to our quickly passing adventure. Saratoga Springs and Lansingburgh seemed far, far away. America is close enough in the virtual online world, but not close in the real world of wants and needs, of hunger and sickness, and of illiteracy and ignorance.

These are only a few highlights of the trip, but I can stop here. As I read what I wrote, I see some patterns that became a part of my experience on this medical mission: 1) My personal 1 percent - 99 percent gap that this trip helped me to address; 2) My protection by invisible substances against the world that the Haitians in *bateyes* experience daily, and against which they have no protection

except their community and their faith; 3) How the "tyranny of the material" has different effects in different parts of the world and the difficulty of balancing "too much" with "too little"; 4) The power of stories about Haitian culture that I read before I went on the trip, and the power of one storyteller with children's picture books sitting in the shade surrounded, always, by children and adults in listening awe; 5) The juxtaposition of my "real" and "virtual" worlds that this mission made clear; 6) The effectiveness of a very small group of organized and willing volunteers in helping others with very diverse needs: offering to almost 600 people a level of medical assessment and support, pharmaceutical aids, eyeglasses, clothes and family planning not otherwise available.

I had not been on a medical mission such as this before. I don't yet know how the group will follow-up on what we learned and make decisions about how we can continue to contribute to the well-being of the people we visited from the distance of our comfort. As we "decompress" and share experiences, insights and frustrations, I believe the stories of the young women and others will be remembered. We will see if, over time, we can initiate actions that will make significant differences in the lives of those whom we met on our special trip.

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Found Things: Manageability and Viability of Mentor Role (1976)

What follows is a section of a task force report, Manageability and Viability of Mentor Role: President's Commission on College Development. The report, issued in May 1976, was the product of a committee chaired by mentors Pearl Mindell and Rhoada Wald. Other members of the task force were: A. Nancy Avakian, Paul Bradley, Jack Burke, Tom Clark, Frederica Daly, Carolyn Forrey (Broadaway), John Jacobson and Fred Mayo.

The task force grappled with three major questions: 1) "In what ways does the college support its faculty in its academic and creative pursuits?" 2) "How does the college support and develop a working/ living environment that offers the necessary freedom and autonomy for faculty?" And 3) "How can faculty have a genuine influence in determining academic development and policy issues affecting both the teaching/learning process and decisions about their own destiny within the college?" The focus of the section of the report contained below is on "role flexibility."

Thanks so much to colleague Bob Carey for unearthing this document.

Role Flexibility for All Mentors

The question of mentor role flexibility at Empire State College suggests two notions: changeable priorities in the demands that a mentor must meet and shifting roles and ways of meeting the new demands. Both notions carry the connotation of maneuverability and imply that flexibility means freedom to change, to adjust working demands, to choose ways of growing as a professional, and to make one's own decisions about the demands made on mentors. The institutional constraints of the college, however, demand that any notion of flexibility also meet the requirements of cost-effective and individualized education designed to respond to student needs.

The whole concept of individualized education seems to militate against significant mentor flexibility. If a mentor wishes to spend time on scholarly research or grant writing in his or her field but must meet students in unrelated fields who have their own set of priorities, then the students come first. And individualized education increases the difficulty and increases the likelihood of finding a group of students who want to study in a mentor's chosen discipline. On the other hand, if mentor flexibility means ability and commitment to respond to the needs of students, then mentor flexibility is strongly encouraged by individualized education.

Mentor's willingness and ability to adapt to the needs of each student has become a cornerstone upon which this college is built. How else could a college designed to help students meet their own educational goals function? Yet the question of faculty development which includes a faculty member making decisions about personal and professional growth demands that the decisions about flexibility be made by the faculty member, not the student. This apparent conflict, inherent in the present structure and concept of the college, needs to be seriously considered.

The requirements of cost-effective education also present particular problems for mentor flexibility and the kind of faculty development that can be enhanced by such flexibility. The number of students that Empire State College mentors must handle and the number of stages in a student's college career present heavy demands for serious mentors. Academic advising, career planning, degree program designing and portfolio creating are all time and energy consuming tasks, not to mention the regular contract planning and writing, instructing, supervising and evaluating. At its best, the dyadic relationship between student and mentor can provide a challenging and exciting education; at its worst, the numbers

and press of other responsibilities can mean that students are left adrift in their intellectual growth. The larger the number of students per mentor and the greater the quantity of bureaucratic chores, the poorer the quality of that dyadic relationship. (Other personal factors also enter into the equation, but the numbers involved affect the personal factors too.) In light of these two constraints, the question of mentor flexibility remains worth pursuing as an important element of professional development. The way in which a mentor orients to work and the responsibilities given highest priority are an important aspect of professional development. The first issue is who establishes the priorities – the dean, the mentor, the student, the staff handbook, the mentor's colleagues? A second is the order of the priorities in actual work, and third is the reward structure for those priorities. If a mentor's job consists of counseling, instructing, reading, career planning and guidance, college governance, reading, contract writing and evaluating, administrative responsibilities, professional reading and writing, and scholarly development, then the ordering of these tasks becomes an important key to encouraging professional development. The mentor's own response to each of these areas, the support received for personal priorities and the priorities the college sets become crucial. If working hard on assessment or governance is rewarded and supported while scholarly research and publishing or attending professional conferences is not, then a mentor's flexibility in establishing priorities depends on internal strength. Such a response clearly indicates the lack of support for mentor flexibility in establishing priorities.

The second notion of flexibility involves the ways in which the demands made on a mentor might be met. The concern for orderly paper flow, the establishment of business office hours, the provision of

offices in an executive manner all suggest that Empire State College has adapted a business office style and set of procedures for a substantive process that operates on different procedures. For example, it is ironic to note that Empire State College offices are open for business hours 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. five days a week and closed on evenings, weekends and state holidays, while the college is committed to an educational process that does not conform to class schedules or business routines. We expect students to study when they want as they want but to see their mentor during banker's hours. Why not have a schedule of Empire State College offices being open 6 a.m. to noon more like college libraries than savings banks and more flexibility in mentor's use of office hours. If the Empire State College student population is diverse and includes many people who carry full time jobs such a schedule seems a reasonable way to meet their needs.

The other areas or ways in which faculty meet their mentor responsibilities relates to freedom in contract writing, advising patterns, counseling techniques, etc. How strict is the orthodoxy about how mentors should ment? Is it acceptable and encouraged to be a quiet scholarly person who does not shine at meetings and who tends to be slow at completing the paper work or is the ideal mentor the bright,

charismatic person who turns on his or her students and enthuses them to study? The diversity of ways that mentors can meet their responsibilities could be limited only by the variety of people attracted to the Empire State College faculty or it could be narrowly limited by our assumptions of "appropriate mentor behavior."

Some ways to help us look at the question of our implicit assumptions might include:

- consultants designing Degree Programs and mentors working with students on developing portfolios appropriate to those Degree Programs or vice versa
- round robin contracts in which a colleague writes the evaluation section for another's contract

Other ways to promote flexibility within Empire State College are:

- recognize the mentor as tutor role per se
- develop specialty roles (e.g., assessment specialist)
- exchange mentors from one Center to another
- exchange mentor role with administrative role
- encourage intellectual development within or among "areas of study"

- encourage mentors to develop satellites for reduced FTE
- encourage mentors to design and lead residencies

Some other ways to promote flexibility outside the college are:

- recommend mentors for consultantships at other institutions
- establish a speaker's program (at Center level and College-wide levels) to speak to businesses, government, etc.
- assign to mentors the task of publishing about specific aspects of Empire State College's programs
- bring about faculty/mentor exchange with other institutions of higher education in roles of teaching and administration
- bring about placement on editorial staffs of journals specializing in innovations in higher education
- sponsor mentor research on innovations in higher education
- host conferences in which mentors participate
- encourage on-the-job observational visits of mentors by individuals interested in the mentor role

With Freire ... In Brooklyn

Robert Carey, Metropolitan Center

A Review of:

Adult Literacy in a New Era: Reflections from the Open Book By Dianne Ramdeholl

Our colleague, Dianne Ramdeholl, has written a study of an adult literacy program, Open Book (an affiliate of Good Shepherd Services), that served students for 15 years in a Brooklyn community. It closed in 2001. While providing instructional services to people in the neighborhood, it understood itself to be carrying out a Freirean mandate: “to interrupt dominant scripts and rewrite roadmaps of power,” thereby enabling the adults they worked with to “tell their own stories – to become actors in a historical script that they themselves author.” The history that resulted, the history under review, functions as a “critique of dominant culture” (p. x). That critique is interesting and laid out in some detail, and raises questions about the kinds of change literacy programs can bring about.

Crucial to the Open Book story is the idea that “adult education has a pivotal role to play in preparing people to challenge unjust socioeconomic systems that increasingly dominate the lives of the vast majority of human beings and rob us of humanity by dehumanizing entire subsections of society, fragmenting our sense of responsibility for one another and the world we inhabit” (pp. xi-xii). Just how “pivotal” a role adult education programs can play in shaping individuals to reshape the fragmented world that the author describes is certainly worth considering.

As the author describes it in her preface, this oral history is a three-layered affair. The result of her 10 years of involvement, it is not so much a straight-forward historical analysis, as much as it is collection of ruminative pieces: an introduction that “sets the stage for conversation,”

then “an actual conversation among and by the co-constructors” (staff and students), and a third section in which the author “question[s], unpack[s], and “problematize[s] the preceding conversation” (p. xxiv).

The “conversation” that starts things off happens between John, the teacher-coordinator of the program; Virginia, one of the first instructors who had come from Women in Self-Help (another Good Shepherd program); and Cecilia, a graduate of Women in Self-Help, who worked in the program as a counselor. At the time of the discussion, the program was serving eight students.

The conversations, like conversations about starting anything new, highlight the hard work associated with beginnings, turns in the road, successes, and participants who found the program and became an asset to it. What is lifted up is a sense of “community,” the term in this case referring to the community of Open Book staff, students and volunteers. Whatever services the program was providing, one of its goals was to “model an alternative vision of society rooted in a more equitable, lovelier world that everyone at the program could co-create” (p. 5). The experience of community was as important as any skill instruction – “if participants’ voices were listened to in developing the culture of the program, it would then be a viable possibility for those participants to go out of their communities and be agents of change” (p. 7).

This central vision of the program as a community shaping students into change agents as a result of the students’ experiencing an empowering community is enormously attractive and flavored with a touch of the utopian. A good deal of the transcribed conversations moves back and forth across the terrain of



“community” and how well, or poorly, the Open Book community was managing to be that empowering community.

The model invoked in the book is an old one in American culture, a way of dealing with a political culture and society that is seen as fallen, destructive and dehumanizing. The work of “community” involved quite a bit of meeting time, exploring shared leadership – a “quest for agency and equity through shared governance and solidarity” (p. x). In other words, the program carried a very heavy interpretive agenda along with negotiating budgetary hassles and changes that were in play in the world of adult literacy programs – a world that we see, but only indirectly, as the book unfolds, but a world that gave the ongoing discussions about community and empowerment their urgency.

The politics of the period (welfare reform and, in the world of adult literacy program, the advent of the Workforce Investment Act and testing student progress) were easy to read as an assault on the poor. Two pieces by the director, John Gordon, (included as Appendix D and Appendix E) spell out the politics and controversies that adult literacy providers had to deal with during the 10-year period the book covers: attendance

requirements, testing and adjusting to the demands of the Workforce Investment Act, which made program completion and job placement a high priority.¹ All of these external forces were seen as stripping programs of the possibility of building and extending a nurturing community, and lend some discussions in the book and either/or finality, as in the following:

Currently, program directors are being forced to spend so much of their time struggling to keep up with the onerous and mounting pile of bureaucratic requirements in order to maintain funding – filling out forms, testing students more often, documenting goals (primarily employment), and following up with those goals (primarily employment) – there is no time left to struggle and grapple with the terrain we engaged in at the Open Book. The system is splintered, and we in the field are burdened with increasing demands. Programs have become so preoccupied with testing and performance measures, little time is left to focus on education, and even less for conversation that could threaten the status quo. (p. 90)

The idea that a literacy program could “threaten the status quo” or that testing (or some other form of assessment and progress) marks the end of the possibility of education seems a very large claim. There is much that can be said about the desirability or usability of particular ways of testing, but the question of assessing student progress remains. How well are people doing? Are they experiencing success in the program? Wouldn’t a program want to know if approaches to teaching are working, and whether teaching staff, volunteer or paid, are acquainted with best practices in the field?

Bemoaning the need to see if students are meeting their goals – primarily employment – raises the further question of how closely aligned the vision of Open Book as a source of forming change agents was with students’ goals to learn to read and write and get a better job or to help their children with homework. Could it be that some students don’t want to change the system but want very much to be part of it and enjoy what the system can provide? (Why not me?) We

do hear a few stories of students going on after Open Book and achieving personal goals (though in one case, questions of self-esteem and self-doubt linger). But we don’t really get a full picture of the program – Adult Basic Education, pre-GED, GED – the number of people served and where they went. That kind of information would make the program, in its entirety, more visible to us. Does the concern for community spur students to develop skills they need and want to master? How could that be shown?

The use of long swatches of first person reflection about Open Book and what it meant to a variety of participants, what it meant to staff and how participants became part of the program means that the reader is creating a narrative sense of the issues as the book proceeds. Some of those strands would not be unfamiliar to anyone who has worked in an adult literacy program, whether at the ABE level, or at the pre-GED and GED levels. There are the issues of self-esteem and of histories that are pock-marked by all the elements that shape the lives of the marginalized and overlooked in this society: getting by on low paying jobs, coping with inferior housing and having to send their children to neighborhood schools that, themselves, need help.

Many of the stories convey a fierce sense of neighborhood, not necessarily because the neighborhood is attractive and rich in resources, but because that is where you are known and some sense of community is possible, though one should approach the idea of poor neighborhoods as a particular kind of refuge with some care. Poor neighborhoods are first and foremost poor, and poverty isolates people in their shared marginalization and militates against the development of a sense of moving beyond imposed limits. The fact that many of the people in the program did profit by their involvement, did enlarge their range of comprehension, and became involved readers and active in their community, speaks to the possibility of change that such programs hold for people who attend them in the hope of forging a richer, more possible future for themselves and others.

In her last chapter, Ramdeholl makes a strong case for the relevance of effective adult literacy programs as being part of the

forces that must “work toward creating fairer, more equitable spaces, where more voices can be heard ...” (p. 104). It is a vision I find particularly attractive, but I also am aware of how many others have to be involved in working to create “fairer, more equitable spaces.” As studies by the Economic Policy Institute have reminded us again and again, inequality arrives at the schoolhouse door on the first day of school.² Educational institutions of all sorts can provide the openings – the possibilities for people to envision a more just and equitable society – but the work of creating that will involve political will and muscle. The fact that adult literacy programs exist at all is a measure of how far we are from being that society, but such programs remain a vital necessity for people to reclaim their lives as their own – a profound political act in itself.

Epilogue: Who Learns and Who Doesn’t – Some Parting Thoughts

When I took a sabbatical to explore the issue of literacy and the several issues that are attached to it, my first surprise was discovering how extraordinary an act this first technology (reading and writing) really is. The brain has to be shown how to read, and this is where the issues that Ramdeholl touches on in her book begin. Mary Anne Wolf in *Proust and The Squid* (2008) reports that by age 5, a child who grows up in a verbally rich environment is some 32 million words ahead of a child raised in a verbally poor environment. So a child enters school ahead or behind before the first day starts. Discussion of improving schools has to have an equally serious discussion about a jobs policy and support to families, topics rarely linked in discussions of why schools are failing or succeed. If we are going to argue about schools, we should begin with William Julius Wilson’s *When Work Disappears* (1996).

Ramdeholl’s emphasis on community has a good deal of relevancy to any discussion of educating people – but the community that I have in mind is one of households where husbands/wives/partners have jobs; they can buy a computer or enroll their kid(s) in a test prep course, or hire a tutor for a little help. If those kinds of households are not present in sufficient numbers – households where stories are read, and the ABCs are

sung (over and over), where there are a lot crayons and paper for drawing and doodling and learning to spell – schools, by themselves, cannot do the heavy lifting.

When I began tutoring in a literacy program, I decided to work with beginning readers. I am glad I did. You have to get into language as though it is a big Lego set and work on showing how lines on a page and a sound are a word, something that can be used to name the world. My students have rich vocabularies; they are bright and engaging. But their words do not stick to things; that is what the mastering of reading helps bring about. I also began to understand that even as people master recognizing words and attaining a certain kind of fluency, comprehension was a more elusive prize.

The next discovery was that this difficulty describes a good many college-level students. They can “decode,” but comprehension – being able to converse and explore what is being said – doesn’t happen. They are “aliterate”: able to read, but not engaged by the process, seeing it only as an assignment to be dealt with as best they can. No matter the number of “apps” they have on whatever gizmo is the newest and fastest, they are stuck intellectually. They are awash in information but can’t make it yield understanding, which then shows up in the kinds of writing they produce.

Lastly, Ramdeholl has, intentionally or not, raised the question of whose education is it anyway, and for what? The slighting of teaching people to be able to find a job that laces through the book is reminiscent of academicians desecrating the pragmatic focus of their students. But what is wrong with getting the credentials that might land you a decent job with living wages and benefits? If you have been outside looking in, now that you are inside, maybe other things can follow; certainly your children have a better shot at doing even more. I can’t find a flaw in that thinking, even though, child of the middle class that I am, I might want that person to read Dickens, Baldwin or Plato and understand what the Civil War was about along the way, if only to be able to show that they too have cards of identity; that they are the “right sort.” Academic success, even academic success that leads to employment has, in this country, a very

Freirean twist, because the person who pulls that off is already deeply into fashioning his or her own narrative and speaking in his or her own voice.

Notes

- ¹ Adult education has a long and varied history in America, but the immediate issue for understanding the changes that the program was coping with had their beginning in the Reagan years and came to something of a culmination in the Clinton administration. Funding for adult education programs had been part of the War on Poverty of the Johnson administration. The Economic Opportunity Act, Title IIB of Public Law 88-542 created state grants for adult education programs. Over the course of the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations, questions of reporting and accountability became a pressing issue: Who is learning? How do we know? During the Clinton administration, the NRS (National Reporting System) was created; the Government Performance and Results Act (1993) required federal systems to develop indicators of progress, a requirement that reached down to the states and state program, as well. The WIA (The Workforce Investment Act of 1998) gathered these several strands of development into one place, replacing the earlier Adult Education Act. It was not enough to care and provide services; agencies and their programs had to show results. See Literacy Assistance Center, ALECC (Adult Literacy Education Core Curriculum), fall 2010-2011, Module # 1, <http://www.lacnyc.org/profdev/alecc>.
- ² A case in point would be *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*, a study by Richard Rothstein (2004), published by the Economic Policy Institute. The Institute, according to its website, is a “nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank ... created in 1986 to broaden discussions about economic policy to include the needs of low- and middle-income workers.”

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Some Words with Dianne Ramdeholl

Alan Mandell: How did you get involved in this project and in the Open Book?

Dianne Ramdeholl: I was working in the area of adult literacy education for many years and I went to work at the Open Book and it was a pretty transformative experience for all of us who were a part of that program. It was an experience that continued to live with me for a good many years and shaped my practice. And so when I was thinking about a dissertation, one of the things that Stephen Brookfield, one of my professors, said was to look for the thing that was the fire in our belly and tap into that – it would be that thing that would sustain us. So I wrote a paper and Brookfield read it and then circled an entire page and said: “This right here is it!” And it was a page about the Open Book.

A.M.: One of the attractions about this program was its truly alternative nature. Was that part of what drew you to it?

D.R.: There was a sense in which the philosophy of the program was really, in large part, about trying to foster a democratic society and trying to model that philosophy through everyday actions and structures – and in this way to become a microcosm of a more egalitarian society.

A.M.: I was struck by one comment on the topic of democracy from the book. You wrote: “What happens when democracy is so intimately intermingled with power, space

and voice and when most of us in society have never had any firsthand experience of what a democracy could look and feel like?" (p. 70). It seems like this is what you confronted.

D.R.: And it is initially a daunting reality because most of us carry around a definition of democracy, which is very much the dominant definition of going to the polling booth and voting every four years, as opposed to really grappling with everyday decisions and co-creating space in which multiple voices and multiple access points for decision making involving multiple group interests can be enacted and sustained. We have very little practice as a society engaging with these concepts. That's partially why it is so critical to keep alive efforts and spaces that wrestle with this.

A.M.: One of the other themes of the book is how damaging schooling has been to so many people. This makes this democracy experiment even more difficult.

D.R.: It's difficult work in the best of circumstances; It's extra difficult because it involves being gentle and careful with people's selves. If this is going to work at all, trust and safety have to be nurtured. And people's imaginations for rewriting scripts and believing in different ethics – that's very important too. It attracts people who are more idealistic and who believe that another type of schooling and another type of society is possible.

A.M.: Such "trust" seemed to be present in the student voices that were heard throughout the book. It struck me that you wanted us to hear the voices, the reflections, of the participants themselves.

D.R.: Actually, the thing I felt was that *mine* was the voice that really didn't need to be there! I felt that the story was their story. I just happened to come along and chronicle it. It was there in all of its richness and all of its complexity. It was there; very much a multiple splended thing.

A.M.: Why did the Open Book die?

D.R.: Because the funding situation strangled it and structures were added that privileged standardized testing and dominant forces of assessment. These types of experiments often exist at the margins and that's both good and bad. The bad thing is that it makes such programs vulnerable; the good thing is that there is some small space created outside regular scrutiny to play around with more interesting notions of democracy and alternative forms of education.

A.M.: In your writing, you make the distinction between "charity" and "solidarity." I often wonder about this in the context of our work with students at Empire State College. How do you understand the difference?

D.R.: This is a complex question. For me, when charity is enacted there are notions that a person who is "giving" knows better – is better. In the paradigm of

solidarity there is a recognition of a common struggle, and that's not to say that everyone is doing exactly the same thing, but there is a way in which there is more mutuality and reciprocity. Those of us who are drawn to a solidarity model believe in what a place like the Highlander Center was trying to do and what Horton and Freire were committed to. There is something very paternalistic, ultimately more colonizing, about the charity model. It's perpetuating the same hierarchies that have done so much damage to one's soul.

A.M.: What do you think of the future of literacy programs that hold this larger social vision, this democratic vision?

D.R.: It's important that we be optimistic and believe in the power of these programs. They have tremendous power! However, looking at the ways that funding is operating at the moment, the picture is pretty grim. I think that part of the challenge is for programs to think about other ways to sustain themselves in the midst of these gigantic cuts.

A.M.: The process, the engagement, seems so important to your work – to our work.

D.R.: It's critical that all of us engage in something that is toward a vision of making the world a better place. It doesn't have to be literacy, but it should be something. If all of us did work, there would still be work to do. That's how much wrong there is. It's important that all of us do something, whatever context we're in.

Faculty-Librarian Collaborations

Dana Longley, Office of Educational Technologies

A Review of:

Teaching Information Literacy Online
 Edited by Thomas Mackey
 and Trudi Jacobson

While this is a discussion of the Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson edited book, *Teaching Information Literacy Online*, I thought I'd start by divulging my somewhat biased perspective in approaching this book, as well as my ulterior motive for writing this review. First: I'm a librarian here at Empire State College. More specifically, I'm assistant director for library instruction and information literacy. To shed some light on my perspective, here is a brief synopsis of my instructional philosophy:

Information can take many (some would say *infinite*) forms: ideas, concepts, conversations, text, what we see with our eyes or take in with our other senses or put out to the world around us by our actions; what we think or even dream. All learning, formal or informal, consists of interacting with information in order to input existing knowledge and output new knowledge. In order for learners to master their field of study, they must first (or, more accurately, concurrently) learn how to effectively interact with information in a variety of forms as needs arise throughout the learning and research processes. When students don't know what questions to ask, they tend not to ask any questions at all. In other words, they must "learn how to learn," which is where the importance of integrating information literacies into many different aspects of the college curriculum comes in.

One of the major goals of my position is to stimulate a collegewide discussion on the place and necessary levels of student information skills (or fluencies or literacies – the specific term used is not as important to me) at Empire State College. I would argue

that the Information Management section of our General Education Requirements (2005) is a start, but those "requirements" are outdated, too narrow, too focused on the written word, and are not addressed in a cohesive and coordinated enough way at the institutional level. At the individual level, the skills students possess are often overestimated by both students themselves, and by faculty and higher education institutions as a whole (Ferguson, Neely & Sullivan 2006; Maughan, 2001; McGuinness, 2006).

Given this, I pose some questions to keep in mind as you read this review (or better yet, the book itself):

- What are the core skills students need in order to successfully interact with information across a variety of media in their discipline and beyond?
- Is the college doing enough to equip students with (or provide them motivation and opportunities to acquire) the lifelong skills needed to master their area of study or otherwise achieve their learning goals?
- Are these skills being successfully carried over into the workplace (or other areas of their lives) after students graduate?
- Can we do better in these areas? If so, how?

Through the lens of an information literacy perspective, the mission of higher education can be seen as that of stimulating or enabling the interface between student and information. If effective, this interaction must be enabled in multiple directions (internal, external, via collaboration, reflection, etc.). For any such interaction to be effective (to enable any kind of learning), students also must have the skills to navigate and manipulate the inputs and outputs of the human-information interface in all its forms:

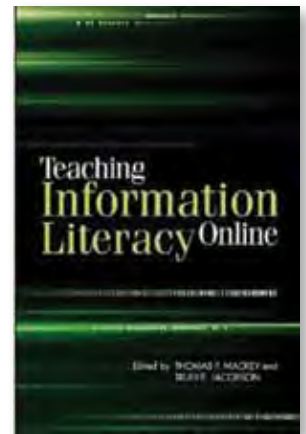
- Inputs: finding, reading, understanding, evaluating;
- Outputs: synthesis, knowledge creation, communication of knowledge.

One problem is that this input-output framework is a chicken and egg conundrum. You can't become knowledgeable in a field of study until you have the critical ability to navigate (and evaluate)

that field's always shifting information landscape. But it's also very hard to critically navigate that landscape without having some foundational knowledge: terminology, history and theory.

Combine this with the fast-evolving and myriad technological platforms that house and are used to navigate and communicate an exponentially growing and interconnected pile of information, and realistic solutions to the set of questions I posed above become even murkier.

In their book, *Teaching Information Literacy Online*, editors Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson (2011a), and the faculty-librarian author teams they have gathered together, attempt to tackle this question from a variety of perspectives. The book is organized into two parts based on the type of learning: 1. blended and hybrid; 2. open and online. It also methodically presents projects that run several different gamuts: from undergraduate to post-graduate, from a single class assignment to an institutionwide program, and from a casual faculty-librarian partnership to a



large, formal committee with additional collaborators. In all, the editors have done a very effective job of gathering an interesting and useful variety of contributions.

As I see it, the core of the book is based around four basic pedagogical assumptions – assumptions that perhaps aren't widely accepted, or at least practiced, in academia:

- Information literacy is a necessary and integral part of any learning;
- Explosions in available learning and information technologies and types of information require new or expanded information literacies or literacy frameworks, as well as new methods to help students acquire these skills (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011b);
- Constructivist frameworks need to be expanded into the networked world through increased interactivity and connection making (“connectivism”) (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011a, p. xii);
- Faculty-librarian collaboration is one of the best available tools for accomplishing the first three points.

Most of the eight projects documented in this book offer, to varying degrees, viable jumping off points for how Empire State College (or any college or university) might explore ways to more effectively tackle the problem of student information literacy levels. The central theme of all these projects is leveraging the complementary skill sets of faculty and librarians through increased collaboration. In every case, early and collaborative involvement of a librarian in the learning development process is stated as a necessity for seamlessly integrating information literacy into the learning.

Don't take this description, however, as meaning the book is for librarians only. In fact, I would say the target audience is primarily faculty and administrators, the ones in the trenches designing courses and curriculum where the collaboration of librarians and instructional designers can result in the highest return on the learning investment.

Here's a brief summary of the projects I found most useful:

- *Shakespeare is Not a One-Shot Deal* (University of Central Florida): a wiki as platform for students to collaboratively create their own topic guides. Reflection and flexibility are used to encourage students to “envision the larger context of the works being studied” and “to make their own connections ...” (p. 7);
- *Framing Multiliteracies* (University of Manchester): “a holistic course, designed and assessed in ways that encourage students to identify and connect their own individual context” that focuses on reflective learning and the impact of social media (p. 50);
- *Finding Your Fate* (Morehead State University): an approach that immerses students in primary sources through “fate cards” utilizing multimedia sources and role-playing activities to enable a personal connection to history;
- *Supported Open Learning* (The Open University): early librarian involvement in curriculum design to effectively integrate information literacy and maintain fluency over time in an evidence-based social work degree program;
- *Information Literacy by Design* (University of Connecticut): the use of a Resource-Enriched Learning Model for course development, which aims to “provide students with the ability to master processes rather than outcomes. The distinction is that the former can be repeated and replicated in other classes to foster new learning and can be applied in the workplace to truly fulfill the goal of lifelong learning in a substantive way” (p. 151).

Each chapter is organized according to a common template, which highlights related literature, institutional and interdisciplinary contexts, the faculty-librarian collaborative relationship, and project description sections (planning, learning model, impact on student learning, and assessment). This rigid organization serves as an efficient tool to place each project into the larger context of information literacy. However, it also constricts some of the author teams from more effectively presenting the work

and how it might be adapted by others. It ends up stuffing unique projects that might benefit from some creatively descriptive or presentation freedoms, into a formulaic, encyclopedia-like structure.

Beyond that quibble, I found the book thought provoking from a theoretical perspective, powerful as a tool for the promotion of information literacy, and informative as a set of case studies. I found some of the contributions (the examples of reusable learning objects, information literate avatars and working outside the org chart) less useful, too generic, or not relevant to our own learning environment. However, that response may speak more to my own focus and the unique learning environment at Empire State College than to the quality of those sections.

In the remaining chapters, another unifying theme was that of learning context and critical reflection. Just like the input-output model, context and reflection are interdependent skills: if you can't understand the context of any piece of information, you cannot reflect on what that information means for your larger learning/research need. If you don't know how to critically reflect on something, you are unlikely to be able to understand the context(s), which helps to define what that something is and how it relates to you or to your information need.

Sadly, attaining adequate information literacy levels, such as those discussed above, are a struggle everywhere. Here at Empire State College, I believe skills among our current and even some of our graduating students are lower than they should be for several reasons. First, it has been well documented that this is a continuing issue throughout secondary and higher education and that it impacts not only student achievement, job acquisition and lifelong learning, but also student retention (Blackburn 2010; University of Washington Information School, n.d.). Also, I see firsthand, day after day (on the library reference desk for the last eight years, on the Information Management GEAR [General Education Assessment Review] team, and in the workshops I give every term), how students struggle with so many aspects of their learning, especially the parts that

involve doing research. These struggles occur all along the research-writing process: from interpreting assignment instructions and finding a viable topic, to finding and critically reading and evaluating academic-level sources, to knowing how to quote and paraphrase and properly cite the sources used, to synthesizing information and using relevant sources to back up ideas.

The college does provide some scattered opportunities and support services for students to gain these needed skills, starting most importantly with individual mentors who work with students and design assignments that provide scaffolded support for students as they delve into the research process. In addition, directors of academic support, librarians, and other support personnel around the college offer various services and resources that chip away at the edges of this issue. Unfortunately, however, none of these learning opportunities reach all students who need them (or more than a small percentage of them, I fear), nor always *when* they need it. A short session by a librarian, faculty member or DAS at an all-day residency or in consultation for two or three assignments scattered among the totality of a students' career, unfortunately, may not be enough.

The ideal, of course, is to create diverse, sustainable, scaffolded, and coordinated learning opportunities that reinforce information skills throughout each student's academic career. Taken as a whole, this book offers a varied tool box of ways that this ideal might become a reality.

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Race ... RACE ... RACE

Nancy Kymn Rutigliano, School for Graduate Studies

A Review of:

The Handbook of Race and Adult Education

Edited by Vanessa Sheared, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Scipio A. J. Colin III, Elizabeth Peterson, Stephen D. Brookfield and Associates

It says something – something – that the United States president is a biracial man who identifies as black and is largely perceived by the world as black, that the racism-exposing motion picture *The Help* is gaining top honors in the film industry, and that interracial marriages are at an all-time high (Wang, 2012).

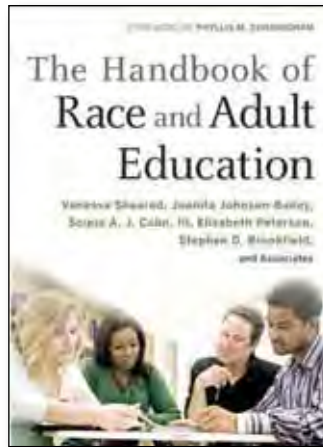
All this – and more – says something about race in this country, but what is that something?

The Handbook for Race and Adult Education (2010) is what its subtitle says: A Resource for Dialogue on Racism. The editors and 27 contributing authors take readers deep into that “something” that needs to be, wants to be, and must be voiced about race today.

As Phyllis M. Cunningham, distinguished teaching professor emeritus, Northern Illinois University, writes in the Foreword:

Many people today believe we have moved beyond racism, pointing to the major achievement in electing an African-American president. And though we have indeed come a long way since the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, the sociopolitical and the personal structures of racism have become so entrenched over the years that they continue to resist destruction.

Therefore, agreeing that racism is still with us, the authors set out to offer an opportunity to engage in a discourse on race and racism and provide strategies for dealing with the issues in practice. (p. xxvi)



This agreement that racism still exists becomes both the saber and scalpel the authors and contributors wield to penetrate denial, unearth falsehoods, expose complicity and bring to light new strategies for combatting racism. Although “adult education” is in the title, this book is applicable far beyond our educational world. It can serve as a basis for authentic discussion in organizations and enterprises, professional associations, religious institutions as well as in coffee shops, beauty and barber shops, and nearly every arena of life.

Skillfully organized, *The Handbook on Race and Adult Education* has four major parts. Part One, “The Myth Versus the Reality,” includes raw, sometimes gut-wrenching stories from contributing representatives of Native America, African America, Chicana America, feminism and Maori New Zealand. In her chapter “Transforming Teaching and Learning: Teaching Race,” Nichole Ray presents the struggles and importance of building a “safe space” for herself and her students to nurture authentic expression of ideas, beliefs, and opinions instead of simply didactic conversations. Leslay Ngatai builds on Ray’s chapter with her own, “Who is this Cowboy? Challenging the Cultural Gatekeepers.” She writes:

No one wants to talk about racism. In academic environments we talk about cultural diversity, ethnicity, multiculturalism and inclusivity. Situations, policies and even people are either culturally sensitive or culturally inappropriate. We pat ourselves on the back for politically correct, culturally responsive support programs ... But why do we need them in the first place? What are they born of? What is the real problem? No one wants to talk about race.

What is missing from today’s university environment is heart, and without the heart the brain can’t function. On a spiritual level our students are exhausted, our universities bereft. It is to the heart that indigenous pedagogies speak, bringing a unique voice to our educational world. (p. 91)

This section of the book concludes with a reflective essay by the primary authors who make this powerful statement: “Race reflects who we are and racism reflects acts of negation, denial and aggression against a people because of the color of their skins or the sound of their voices. Understanding the difference between the two means that we acknowledge that race and racism are not either/or; they are both/and” (p. 99). This becomes the prelude to Part Two, “Problematizing ‘Whiteness,’ Supremacy, and Privilege: Their Impact on Race.”

Provocative voices of both white and nonwhite authors make the case in this section that “whiteness is still widely taken for granted and thus remains invisible” as an issue to be confronted; addressing “whiteness” is essential if racism is ever to be eradicated (p. xxvi). Doug Paxton, a white male, writes, “Engaging in a dialogue about race is not just an exercise in white shame and guilt. A dialogue on race can help us heal our humanity and relationship with the world ... we must

come to understand the paradigmatic water in which we swim” (p. 130). The authors of Chapter 9, “White on White” present their dialogic practice called “critical humility” that fosters open communication about difficult issues.

Critical humility embodies a delicate and demanding balance of *speaking out* for social justice while at the same time *remaining aware that our knowledge is partial and evolving*. ... We hold the assumption that we who benefit from white skin privilege have the responsibility to confront racism in ourselves and in society. We also feel that white people need to find ways to engage questions about race with one another. Rather than relying solely on people of color to inform us about racism, we need to accept responsibility for and direct our own learning about racism as well. (pp. 146-147)

The case for “critical humility” fuels Part Three of the book. More theoretical than the other sections, it is a treatise on Critical Race Theory and answers the question, “Is it possible to end racism?” affirmatively. Critical Race Theory, whose genesis came from the legal field in the mid-1970s, treats race as a social construct, dissects racial reform efforts, and offers educators and activists a lens through which to understand racism and what is needed to loosen the stranglehold it still has on society. Its two primary tenets are that: (1) the nature of race and racism is ever-changing; and that (2) racism is not necessarily the product of biased actions but can be the artifact of seemingly liberal, neutral, or normed rules and actions (p. 168). The authors of this part of the book present compelling, sometimes opposing, viewpoints on CRT as a tool for positive change. Mary Alfred in Chapter Twelve offers CRT for introspection and asks people of color as well as whites this question: “Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?” She suggests that “any campaign to end racism must also involve the insiders who operate in disguise” (p. 170).

The suggested approach of Socratic inquiry and dialogue leads into Part Four, “Reframing the Field Through the Lens of Race.” Of particular interest to

us as mentors, educators, professors and facilitators of adult education, this section offers approaches in educational practice to combat racism. The contributors, a diverse group of scholars and education activists, challenge adult educators to examine their own racial identity and to critically reflect on how it shapes their pedagogy. The contributors’ soul-baring experiences of multifaceted racism build the case that, as Gandhi said, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.”

In addition, this section of the *Handbook on Race and Adult Education* gives credence to Elana Michelson’s 2011 article, “Autobiography and Selfhood in the Practice of Adult Education,” in which she builds a case for that which jars introspection and self-awareness and for the importance of life narratives as a tool for engagement:

For many reasons, the writing of life narratives is likely to remain central to the practice of adult learning. They are important and effective in multiple ways. There must, however, be room in our practices for narratives that are jarring, unsatisfying, and/or structurally and emotionally jagged. ... [W]e must allow stories that acknowledge how a life can be messed up in ways that are not only apparent, or how an attempt to break away from the constraints of the past is only partially successful, as I believe it always is. (p. 18)

Part Five, “Individual and Collective Responses to Race and Racism,” includes the primary authors’ reflective conversations of what they have learned through their work on this book. They make the compelling case that “having a leg up and an opportunity to work hard is not something that all people are afforded. In part, we believe that racism has played and continues to play a significant role in whether a person or a people can believe in life chances and finding opportunities” (p. 336). Each author in this section writes of ways in which racism occurred in her or his life or was perpetuated by something he or she did. The oftentimes slow process of overcoming the impact of these acts can lead to new ways to approach what, for many, has become a stalled and draining conversation to be avoided vociferously.

The Epilogue addresses the wide-ranging implications for curriculum, programming and research. Four paradigms, one presented by each of the primary authors, are offered for further exploration. “Africentrism in Practice” is presented as a mode of inquiry that challenges racial assumptions especially deeply-embedded beliefs about the nature, intellect and capabilities of African people. A thought-provoking Africentric Scholars Credo is offered. “Womanist in Practice: Giving Voice” is introduced as a framework educators may use to move the discourse in their classrooms toward a more democratically and just learning environment in all dimensions, including race, gender, class and language. “Black Feminism in Practice” involves transformational learning through dialogue that instructs behavior, gives voice and encourages risk. Liberatory pedagogy, as informed by Freire’s (1972) critical pedagogy, suggests that instructors should claim their authority and share power in a manner that does not mirror the power structures of society. “Recognizing and Challenging White Supremacy” makes the case that white epistemology still dominates the field of adult education and should be challenged. A common thread connecting the authors in this section is this: “With obtaining a greater sense of understanding comes a sense of responsibility that all of us must engage” (p. 331).

Throughout this book, while there is a call to “reimagine” a world where racism is absent, what is fervently argued for is the need to confront the person in the mirror – one’s own thinking, behaviors, assumptions and actions – and to work diligently to ferret out any “someblings” that keep racism intact.

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“Compassion and love are not mere luxuries. As the source both of inner and external peace, they are fundamental to [our survival]. Moreover, they are the very thing that gives meaning to our activities and makes them constructive. There is nothing amazing about being highly educated; there is nothing amazing about being rich. Only when ... we establish understanding between ourselves and others ... do these attributes become worthwhile.”

*– H.H. the Dalai Lama, Ethics for the New Millennium,
New York: Riverhead Books, 1999, pp. 130-131*

Thanks to Lynne Wiley, Genesee Valley Center, for suggesting this quote.

Managing and Mentoring in Lean Times

Christopher A. Whann, Metropolitan Center

A Review of:

***The Fall of the Faculty:
The Rise of the All-Administrative
University and Why It Matters***
By Benjamin Ginsberg

***Good Strategy, Bad Strategy:
The Difference and Why It Matters***
By Richard P. Rumelt

These are hard times at colleges – publics and privates, for-profits and nonprofits. The pressures of demographic busts, financial crises and budgetary exigencies have created or exacerbated myriad challenges for faculty and administrators around the United States. In our roles as leaders, managers and mentors, we are under internal and external pressures to do more with less. We have obligations to our students, our colleagues and ourselves in our personal and professional lives. We must provide ever more services to ensure that students can meet our high expectations for them while we have fewer resources to distribute among them.

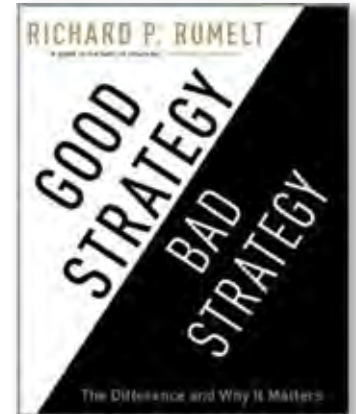
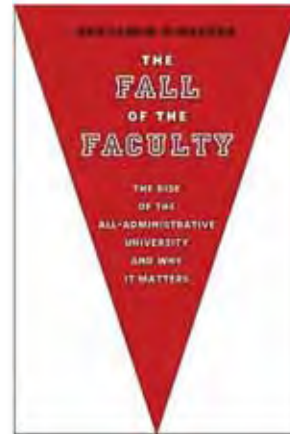
Mentoring and teaching can be very labor intensive processes when done well. Because they are labor intensive, they take a lot of time and money to sustain. In lean times, when resources are hard to come by, it is especially urgent to monitor where the resources are going so they are not diverted from the important tasks of mentoring and teaching that are before us. Members of the college community need to engage in a process of clear headed analysis of the situation we are in, and diagnose ways to optimize the allocation of resources to serve the institution's mission.

Strategic plans can help. They also can harm. They can sharpen our focus or they can distract us from making genuinely hard choices in times of real scarcity. Better talent management can help, but the

failure to recruit and manage talent can have long term consequences. Better budget management can help, but short-sighted budget management can dig holes too deep to escape.

Some recent works address elements of the challenges we face in higher education. Richard Rumelt's *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy* (2011) focuses on the critical action elements of strategy formation and implementation. He warns us against strategic planning processes or plans that fail to address essential organizational change. Benjamin Ginsberg's *The Fall of the Faculty* (2011) is a polemical commentary about the rising number, proportion and growing relative power of nonfaculty members at colleges, changes that do not serve, or actively threaten, the core mission of higher education. Rumelt's book was short-listed by the *Financial Times* as "Best Business Book of the Year" for 2011; Ginsberg's book has received wide coverage in the educational press.

Most colleges are not "for-profit" businesses (save the colleges like Apollo Group-owned University of Phoenix), but they are not meant to be "for-loss" either. Large complex organizations, no matter what their tax statuses, also can share similar problems and challenges. For at least two decades, the shrinking pot of taxpayer support for public university systems means that colleges operate within stricter fiscal parameters than they once had to. As such, old ways of running things are no longer adequate, especially from the outside perspectives of boards of trustees, state legislators, voters and the media. From the inside perspectives



of upper administration, faculty members are often seen more as creators of problems than solutions to them.

Large organizations need strategies. Sometimes strategies are implicit. Choices are made to conduct "business as usual." In flush times, that may not be an obvious problem. In lean times like these, unexamined choices are profoundly dangerous. Creating strategic plans can be a useful way to focus one's choices, if they involve genuine choices to be evaluated.

So where does strategy come from? Why has it become such a hot theme? Leaders of every big company or organization seem to talk all the time about the strategies they have, or the "strategic visions" they have, or the strategies they are developing or implementing. Many people have the mistaken impression that strategy is a new idea from business. That is not so. Strategy is an old topic for those who were trained in history (think Thucydides' 2,500 year old *History of the Peloponnesian War*), or international relations (think Carl von Clausewitz's almost 200-year-old *On War*) or economics (think Nobel Prize-winning Thomas Schelling's *Strategy of Conflict* from the 1960s). In business, strategy as a discipline or planning tool is actually newer than those older sources, but it does build on those much earlier notions. Walter

Kiechel (2010), in his important work *The Lords of Strategy*, lays out the evolution of strategy as a common tool in business. Dating from the 1970s, consulting firms like McKinsey and Company, Boston Consulting Group and Bain and Company, and faculty members like Michael Porter at the Harvard Business School have led the rigorous development of strategic thinking as a tool for companies to sharpen their focus and compete more effectively in the marketplace. There are multiple schools of thinking about strategy. The consulting firms developed ideas in strategy as ways to clarify planning for their corporate clients, but strategy quickly moved into top-tier business schools and has become a standard capstone course in most schools – whether it is called by the more general names of business policy or strategic management, or applied to particular business subfields like marketing strategy, entrepreneurial strategy or global strategy.

Porter, rightly, is among the most famous scholars and consultants in the field. Richard Rumelt, at the UCLA Anderson School of Business, is in the top tier of the field as well. Porter was trained in engineering and then in industrial economics; Rumelt was an engineer before migrating into business.

Rumelt's *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy* (2011) is a signal contribution to the field. Strategy, ultimately, is about choice. Consider this point he makes after explaining why Lord Nelson's British navy won the Battle of Trafalgar against larger and ostensibly superior French and Spanish forces:

Good strategy almost always looks this simple and obvious and does not take a thick deck of PowerPoint slides to explain. It does not pop out of some "strategic management" tool, matrix, chart, triangle or fill-in-the-blanks scheme. Instead, a talented leader identifies one or two critical issues in the situation – the pivot points that can multiply the effectiveness of effort – and then focuses and concentrates action and resources on them. Despite the roar of voices wanting to equate strategy with ambition, leadership, "vision," planning, or the economic logic of competition, strategy is none of these. The core of strategy work is

always the same: discovering the critical factors in a situation and designing a way of coordinating and focusing actions to deal with those factors. A leader's most important responsibility is identifying the biggest challenges to forward progress and devising a coherent approach to overcoming them. In contexts ranging from corporate direction to national security, strategy matters. Yet as we have become so accustomed to strategy as exhortation that we hardly blink an eye when a leader spouts slogans and announces high-sounding goals, calling the mixture a "strategy." (Loc. 166-177)

Leaders with a strategy must identify challenges and map out an approach to address them. Too many leaders fail to do so. Rumelt (2011) says many leaders:

... say they have a strategy, but they do not. Instead, they espouse what I call bad strategy. Bad strategy tends to skip over pesky details such as problems. It ignores the power of choice and focus, trying instead to accommodate a multitude of conflicting demands and interests ... bad strategy covers up its failure to guide by embracing the language of broad goals, ambition, vision, and values. Each of them is, of course, an important part of human life. But, by themselves, they are not substitutes for the hard work of strategy. The gap between good strategy and the jumble of things people label "strategy" has grown over the years. (Loc. 211-22)

For a strategy to be "good," it should have a kernel of three things – a diagnosis, a guiding policy and a coherent action (Rumelt, 2011, Loc. 252-265). Without these elements, it is by definition bad. Bad strategy is not some innocuous thing. It can misdirect energy and resources and waste valuable time. Rumelt reminds us that strategy is not just setting goals and trying not to offend people; it is problem solving (Loc. 269-273). Choices are difficult; making people happy or being inoffensive is easier than making them angry by doing the right thing. But the end results of choosing

inoffensiveness over hard choices are never good. In lean times like these, they are truly dangerous.

Bad strategy is pretty easy to identify. Rumelt (2011) tells us to look for four hallmarks, which one does not need any special expertise to find: fluff; the failure to face the challenge; mistaking goals for strategy, and bad strategic objectives (Loc. 735-740).

Admittedly, a college (save for-profits) is not a business. It is, however, a large complex organization or conglomerate of organizations – like a university system – that operates in a competitive environment. Leaders have to look at the internal operations, structures and processes of an organization, as well as at the external environment in which it functions. Obviously, a college must have a core mission, which identifies the students it serves and the relationship of the college to the larger world in which it operates. But choices must always be made. Teaching colleges have faculty members who do research, and research universities have a teaching faculty, but one type of institution is not likely to morph into the other. That involves choice.

Goals are crucial to success, but they are not a substitute for strategy, as Rumelt (2011) states. Small organizational units can have goals and can even have strategies, but the overarching organization should have a clear way to distinguish among competing priorities and make sense that the multiple goals do not conflict with each other. The more decentralized an organization, the more likely conflicts will happen because more organization units mean more places for managers to have to negotiate with each other and compete for the same pot of resources. This is a simple math point, not really an arguable philosophical proposition.

In lean times, as resources dwindle, the gentle frictions among competing goals become more pronounced. My group's goals and your group's goals may create structural and procedural tensions. In times of genuine budgetary crisis, these can be extremely pronounced. Good strategies have the potential to force a debate about the choices among goals and clarify an organization's

direction. Bad strategies can do the opposite, hence Rumelt's call to understand the differences between them.

I love a good screed as much as anyone. I think that Benjamin Ginsberg's book *The Fall of the Faculty* (2011) meets my standard. The gist of his argument is this: Colleges and universities are meant to be educational institutions first and foremost. The purpose of faculty governance is to ensure that those people most responsible for "delivering" learning are responsible and accountable for the decisions that involve the educational mission of the college. Regrettably, Ginsberg indicates, the loci of power and authority have shifted away from faculty and from the faculty governance process. Decision making about academic matters, which were traditionally the purview of the faculty, has moved to a larger and rapidly growing cadre of professional administrators who do not really come from the ranks of the traditional faculty, who plan administration as their career apart from teaching and research, and who have usually not spent enough time teaching (or have taught badly) so that they do not comprehend or consciously misrepresent the core values of the institutions within which they work. Ginsberg observes: "For many of these career managers, promoting teaching and research is less important than expanding their own administrative domains. Under their supervision, the means have become the end" (Loc. 69).

Administrators, especially at the most senior levels (presidents, provosts, vice presidents and deans) also need to place their "stamp" on the organizations they manage and lead. The most popular way to do this is to devise a new "strategy" or "strategic vision." Everyone who has ever worked in higher education in the last 20 years has seen at least one strategic plan, and often several. New administration, new plan – it's almost like clockwork. "The college president's first commandment seems to be, 'Thou shalt have no other plan before mine'" (Ginsberg, 2011, Loc. 756).

Ginsberg (2011) observes that plans serve three main purposes; New plans show who is in charge (Loc. 769); They are a form of co-optation of faculty and staff (Loc. 777); They serve as a substitute for action

(Loc. 789). Moreover, given the short time in office of many presidents and senior administrators before they are off to their next jobs at other colleges, much of their time at their current institutions can be spent planning (Loc. 788-76). Even when plans do get completed, Ginsberg notes that too many of them are surprisingly "cookie-cutter" in their style and content, in spite of all the months and person-hours invested in preparing them. He notes a couple of cases in which large parts of university plans were copied from other college's plans (Loc. 824).

Ginsberg does have some legitimate questions about whether strategic plans provide the sort of meaningful direction for academic excellence that leaders purport they do, or whether they are designed to employ more administrators or provide cover for existing ones to expand their power relative to the faculty who actually educate the students.

I happen to agree with Ginsberg on that point. On other points, I strongly disagree. In one area, I think he says things that are fundamentally misleading. For example, there is little doubt that the number of full-time administrators has risen both absolutely and relatively at most colleges. There is little doubt that the proportion of full-time faculty has declined relative to that of contingent faculty at many institutions; certainly the absolute number of contingent faculty has risen. Many employees at colleges duplicate services while gaps remain in what needs to be done (no matter what the task).

My biggest disagreement with Ginsberg is that he does not discriminate among "types" or categories of administrators – those who deal directly with students' learning and those who do not. All administrators are not created equal; some add value, while others do not (we all have met those in both camps over our careers). Some administrative positions are designed to plug holes in otherwise dysfunctional organizations, while others have responsibilities that are genuinely essential to serve new functions in 21st century universities. Given the often problematic preparation many students have when they arrive in college or transfer with from one college to another, many nonfaculty members who have distinguished

credentials – who often have held faculty lines and have teaching talent – are essential to help promote student success.

Insofar as students at any college or university deserve to leave with the best education we can provide, the debate about where best to place resources to meet our mission and fulfill our vision is the most important debate we have. As a mentor

Insofar as students at any college or university deserve to leave with the best education we can provide, the debate about where best to place resources to meet our mission and fulfill our vision is the most important debate we have.

at SUNY Empire State College, I am committed to finding the best way to get my mentees what they need. At times when the college was better funded, I am sure that was easier to make happen. In times like these, every dollar spent on an objective other than this is one less (or more than one less) dollar available to help my student to get a good education. In all honesty, I care less about whether that money is placed on a faculty line or on an administrative line, and more about whether that money goes to a person who directly serves a student to accomplish that essential goal as distinct from money for a person who moves paper or email, or conducts surveillance over others. I'd rather see a professional employee teach a student how better to write a paper than see one who never connects with students. This isn't saying that there aren't things to be done of value, but it is to say that scarcity forces choices to be made, and strategy should help us understand, make and implement those choices.

Ginsberg does not address one point that I think would make his argument, overall, much stronger; since he and I are both trained as political scientists, I am actually surprised he did not address this effectively. To my mind (and supported by legions of political scientists whose work I have encountered), there is a chronic tension in decision making between organized and centralized groups with small numbers of decision makers, and groups of decentralized groups with large numbers of decision makers. Decentralized groups can obstruct or slow things down, but they are not very effective when they try to direct. Centralized groups can make plans, take decisions and implement them much better. This is not a complex point, and one doesn't have to have read Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* (1971) to figure it out. Anyone who has opened the newspaper and read an article about the Cold War, Vietnam or the Obama administration's latest battle with Congress over the debt ceiling or health care can see that the White House is better positioned to develop a budget, propose a law, and implement a policy than is a legislative branch with two houses, 535 members and committees fighting over or sharing jurisdiction on the most pressing matters of the day.

If this is true about the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government, why should we expect more or less from a university administration in its dealings with "the faculty." Faculty committees can slow down processes; they can debate *ad nauseam* policies the administration want to implement; they can complain and resolve and petition forever – but they can rarely stop things from happening that they do not like. Once leaders of academic administration want to move in a direction, one should not be surprised that they usually get their way.

In some ways, this makes the matter of strategy even more important and the dangers of bad strategy even more troublesome. I suspect that some of the "bad strategy" we have all encountered in multiple corporations, governments and colleges is exacerbated because leaders decide to mollify the competing constituencies on issues they individually care about, rather than cutting to the core of the issues, diagnosing the problems and producing fluff-free language to implement solutions that might actually work.

In lean times, strategy is much more critical than in fat times. Bad strategies can do in any organization, but it will happen faster in lean times. There is no guarantee that a

good strategy will solve all the problems, but there is an absolute guarantee that a bad one can make things worse. In fat times, spending money on expanding administration that doesn't serve the mission is not so much an issue. In lean times, it draws away from the genuine needs of students. Whether we believe in planning or not, we should all remember, as mentors, that our students' needs should come before our administrators' wants.

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Remembering Moses Musoke

Colleagues from Empire State College

Our dear colleague, Moses Musoke, died on 01 July 2010. Moses, a highly respected and supremely kind mentor at the Hudson Valley Center in Business, Management and Economics for over 20 years, was born in Uganda where he did his B.A. in economics-history at Makerere University. Later, he earned an M.A. at SUNY Binghamton, an M.S. and Ph.D. in economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and an MBA at Rutgers. Many across the college miss Moses' wise counsel and deep care.

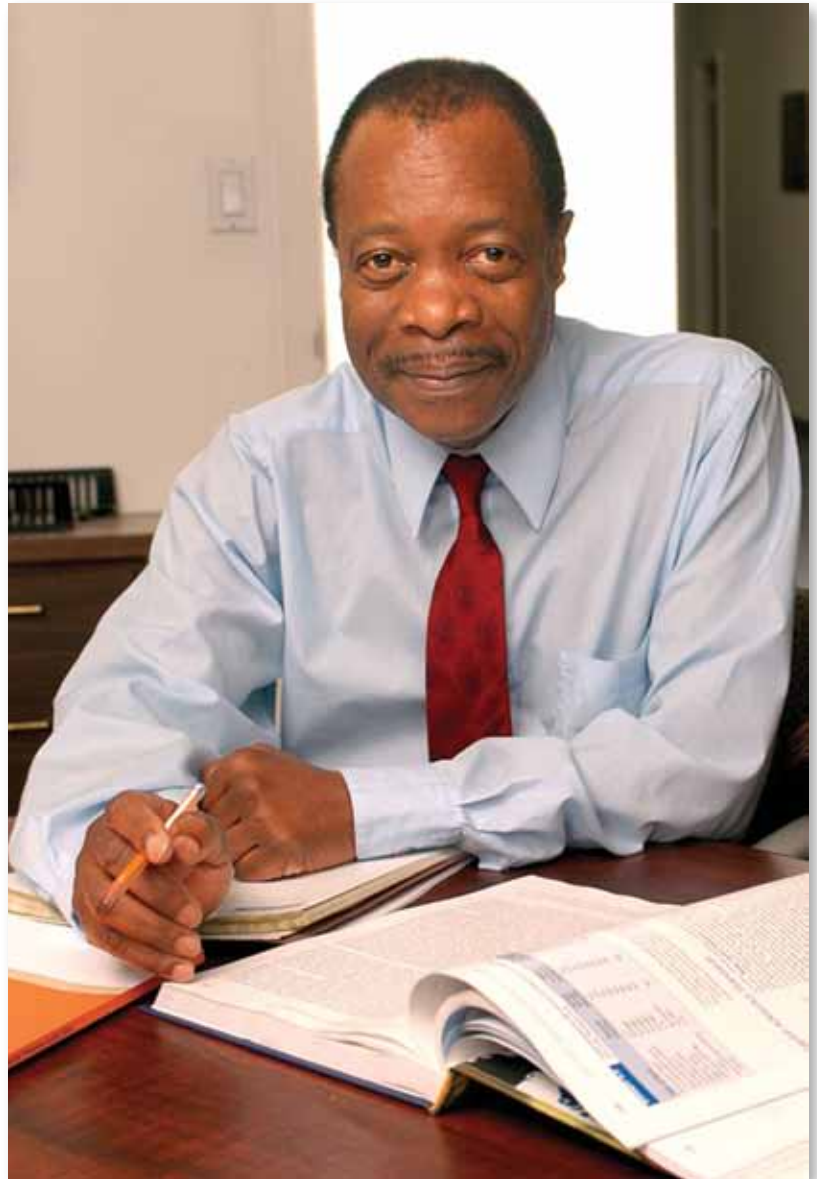
Kate Spector, School for Graduate Studies

Moses was on the search committee responsible for inviting me into Empire State College in the Hudson Valley Center at Hartsdale. After I was hired, I recalled the scenario of my interview, and with many of the staff and faculty, would chuckle over my recollection and other conversations as we sat around the Hartsdale lunch table (aka the HVC training/mentoring room because it is where we learned so much about the college, the center and each other, and where these rich exchanges hopefully still continue today!).

The story went like this:

During the interview, and after rounds of questions and pleasant exchanges between Dean Trullinger, Marie Tondreau, Joan Altman, Moses Musoke and me, Moses suddenly stood up. In his serious and melodic manner and shaking his head from side to side, he stated "If you're looking for an easy job, this is not the place for you! It is a busy place and you'll work hard! Now if you will excuse me, I have another meeting." He extended his hand for a departing handshake, and left quietly.

I was stunned and thought to myself: "What did I say that made this guy think I'm looking for an easy job?"



Moses Musoke

After I was hired, I asked Moses that question and he laughed and said, "I was telling you the truth, wasn't I?" Over the years we worked together, and, out of curiosity, I continued to ask Moses that question; his reply was always the same.

I have come to understand he wasn't responding to anything I had said, he was describing himself: A busy man, working long hours, with always another meeting to attend.

Rest in peace dear friend and esteemed colleague.

**Deborah A. Noble,
Metropolitan Center**

I will always remember Dr. Moses Musoke for making me feel so welcome at Empire State College when I first met him back in 2005. It was a pleasure to know and to engage in discussions with him. His presence is truly missed.

Leslie Ellis, Hudson Valley Center

Moses – along with Jay Gilbert, Terri Carter and I – occupied a group of offices off the beaten track at HVC for almost 20 years. Moses and I shared students and ideas. He would mentor the accounting and finance students, and I the management and policy students. We wrote the first set of BME rubrics with Joe Angiello. We talked governance with Marianne. All of us in Hartsdale ate lunch together. We debated politics, argued over degree programs, shared text books and discussed our families. He was my friend. After he passed, one of his students told me that he would work with her, no matter how late at night, to make sure she understood what she was studying. He would miss his dinner to help her and she was grateful. He was that kind of mentor, that kind of person and that kind of friend. This group of offices will never be the same.

Joan Altman, Hudson Valley Center

It's hard not to miss Moses. He was one of the kindest people I've ever known. I never heard him say a negative thing about anyone. He was kind to everyone, even strangers. I remember the time he stopped his car outside the Hudson Valley Center, to pick up papers strewn about Central Avenue that came from atop a car in front of him. A woman he did not know, who had no affiliation with Empire State College, left a stack of papers on top of her car and drove off. Moses stopped and got out of his car on a busy four-lane road, dodged traffic coming at him from both directions and gathered up all the papers. I remember him going through the papers, looking for a clue to track down the owner, finding her phone number and eventually returning the papers to her.

Moses was quite a remarkable man. His intelligence, wit and thoughtfulness earned him the respect of all. When he spoke, people listened. He was often the voice of reason at center meetings. He had a calm, reassuring way about him that made people feel safe. Moses was often the catalyst for lunch time conversation, both philosophical and practical. People sought out Moses for his camaraderie, advice and friendship. His presence is still felt at the Hudson Valley Center and he will always be missed by the people who knew and loved him.

**Wendy Chabon,
Hudson Valley Center**

It was a privilege for me to know and work with Moses at the Hudson Valley Center. His picture is up on my bulletin board, and I look at it and smile to remind me of the gentle, kind, compassionate and caring man he was. He is sorely missed.

Anna Bates, Hudson Valley Center

The thing I will remember most about Moses Musoke was his leadership during the two years he served as faculty chair of the Hudson Valley Center. Moses was a true colleague. He understood us, advocated for us, and most of all loved us. He had tremendous institutional savvy, and he loved our college. To have a person with those skills, and collaborative spirit, was a true blessing.

**Phillip Ortiz, Center for
Distance Learning**

Moses was a very important part of the college for me – he was more than a colleague, he was a mentor. Many times we sat in difficult meetings at senate or UUP and his way was always gentle and kind, but strong and firm. We would talk afterward, and he never failed to teach me something that helped me better understand the issues and make better decisions. I miss being able to ask him questions, but even more, I miss the way he would wait for a break in the meeting and pull me aside so that he could explain to me the aspects of the discussion that he felt that I needed to know. In a very real way, he was my mentor, and he very ably took me under his wing! I wish that I had had more time to learn from him.

Perhaps the thing I miss most about Moses is his presence – the smiles he generously shared, the light in his eyes, and even the tone of his voice and the pattern of his accent. By enlightening us about governance and UUP, or by the warmth he brought into a room, he created light in our lives.

**Marie Tondreau,
Hudson Valley Center**

Moses Musoke was a gentle and caring colleague, always concerned about the welfare of others. Soon after I became a full-time, tenure-track mentor, Moses suggested that I might replace him on the Affirmative Action Committee, and spent time explaining the value of such service to me. I was invited to serve after his recommendation, and was very grateful for that experience and the way he “mentored” me into it.

I remember one time he called me at home on the weekend – I was watching a golf tournament on TV and he joined me in discussing the action for a while, which was an unexpected pleasure – so that he could offer his advice (“as your colleague, professor”) on how I might improve my reappointment portfolio. I was touched by his generosity of spirit, taking the time to reach out and help someone else, after hours, motivated by nothing more than a desire to see someone else shine. I miss the distinctive sound of his voice. I miss the distinctive flavor of his presence. I miss Moses.

**Oto Jones, Center for
Distance Learning**

Please permit me to say a few words in memory of my dear friend, and well-respected colleague, Moses Musoke. Although I did not work with him at the same center, I considered him one of my close and trusted colleagues, in part because we were both members of the Diaspora. Having arrived at Empire State College at roughly the same time in mid 1980s, we both faced the challenges of learning the art of mentoring and advising. We also happened to belong to the same area of study, BME, and from the beginning, I observed the leading role that he played in its deliberations and in the group's

development. He never shied away from the challenge of volunteering for many ongoing and ad hoc committees, and with an easy going personality matched by an enviable level of honesty, he contributed to all the major activities of our group, be they for internal matters like the ongoing revisions of the AOS guidelines, or in preparation for the perennial Middle States reviews. He also was mindful of the needs of students and he volunteered on occasion to complete independent studies for students that I had referred to him.

He championed the idea of making the college more inclusive by helping to develop the first symposium on diversity in the 1990s and in creating that affinity group a few years later. He was very proud of his status as a naturalized U.S. citizen, but he also was determined to expose students to other cultures.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Moses might be in the establishment of the first Africa Residency at Hudson Valley Center. He led the drive of like-minded faculty to plan and execute the initial residency in 2010. Unfortunately, he never lived to plan or attend any future ones. However, we will always remember his determination to make the world, through education, a better and more informed place. I sorely miss my dear friend.

Miriam Tatzel, Hudson Valley Center

Moses was my friend. We were in different locations, but I got to hang out with him at meetings like the All College Conference. He was such good company and easy to talk to. We talked about the college, of course, and how we were faring. (Moses was politically astute and sometimes emailed HVC to gently chide us about one issue or another.) We talked about our homes. Moses was building his and had various frustrations, and I am forever renovating mine. In time, Ed and I went to visit him and his wife, Myrtle, to see this house I heard so much about. I was floored by the magnificence of it. Everything was the highest quality and so well thought out – the design, the materials, the decor. He was just finishing it when he died. He and I were the same age, and a

frequent topic of conversation had to do with retiring and our dreams for the future. I'm so sorry he didn't realize his plans.

In Nanuet, we were reminiscing about Moses, and what came to me was the memory of his presence – a beautiful man with a gentleness about him, always well dressed in an unassuming way, soft spoken with a charming accent. Good to be around. Missed.

Dick Butler, Genesee Valley Center

Moses and I came to Empire State College in 1985. Both of us were subsequently recognized for 25 years of service. Moses served as mentor in Hartsdale, while I served a variety of other centers. We became colleagues and friends primarily through our work in the BME area of study, and our joint work as officers in our faculty union, where Moses served as grievance officer. Over 30 others have written elsewhere, often movingly, about Moses' kindness and approachability. His intellectual capability is amply attested to through earning four academic degrees from three different universities. I especially valued Moses for his courage, evidenced in leaving Uganda to engage a new culture and life in the U.S. Moses and I shared not only ideas and work related to improving BME, our union, and Empire State College, but our hopes for our families, and concerns for the well being of colleagues and the college. Over the years, Moses became a valued colleague and friend, one whom I miss. Reflection on Moses' service as an Empire State College mentor, and on Moses' service as an influential companion – part of my own life's journey – helps clarify those values I cherish.

Bess Walker, Hudson Valley Center

Moses Musoke was a great mentor. Moses would always enter faculty meetings at Nanuet with a great big smile and a great big welcoming spirit. As I reflect back on Moses's days at Nanuet, N.Y., I think of Moses entering the doors at the unit with thanksgiving and much happiness. He would said, "Bess, how are you?"

and I would respond, "Moses, Moses, how are you? Hello Moses. ..."

I do miss him and will always cherish memories of him and his legacy. Moses left behind his wife, children, grandchildren, families, colleagues, friends and faculty at Empire State College.

He left his family with all of his love, and the college

his academic teaching, stories and academic journey

of working with students at Empire State College.

His work will never be untold at Empire State College.

Moses' legacy will always continue through the eyes of others.

I always looked up to him for encouragement. He would always ask me about my family and gave me great advice.

His advice on business and financial planning was the greatest. I will always cherish the words he said to me: "Bess you are the greatest of the greatest."

I will always remember Moses with great love and appreciation.

Joseph Angiello, School for Graduate Studies

In his first month at the college, Moses and I agreed to travel together to a college meeting. After waiting at a designated place for Moses to arrive, I was pretty sure that we on the search committee that had recommended his appointment had made a mistake, especially since Moses seemed unaware that he was two hours late. I grumbled, swearing to myself that I would have little to do with him. Had I kept that promise, I would have been the loser.

As it turned out, Moses served his students, his colleagues and the college steadfastly and honorably for 25 years and came to be respected for his intellect and his mentoring ways. But of greater importance are the enduring values that he embodied. Moses was a friend. He always seemed busy, perhaps, because he was disorganized but,

certainly, because he always made time for the people around him. He cared and he showed it. He showed it by listening carefully and by remembering. Anyone who was with Moses was the only person in his life at that moment. He showed it by not judging and personal concerns conveyed to him remained with him.

Moses had no illusions about his own good fortune and had great empathy for those who are less fortunate. He understood the ways in which hidden agendas misguide popular thinking and even the sciences in the economic and political subjugation of many by the few. And yet, he was positive and never lost hope that things could be better. That hope was reflected in the causes that he supported. It was reflected in the content of his teaching. It was reflected in his abiding view that people are capable of growing and, in turn, capable of changing the world. It was reflected in his kindness and his gentleness.

Perhaps, there is one more thing that needs to be said. Given the opportunity to wait again for Moses, for two hours or for however long it might take for him to arrive, I would.

The following eulogy was given by our colleague, Marianne Arieux, Hudson Valley Center, at a memorial honoring Moses on 12 July 2010.

Moments of Moses

Moses and I became colleagues just over a decade ago, a relationship that was to morph into a deep friendship with mutual love and support for each other in the past several years, for which I will always be grateful. Our connectedness was instigated in addition to believing in the unique kind of education possible at Empire State College, by similarities not readily apparent.

Firstly, we shared a love of Africa, particularly East Africa. Moses was from Uganda and I had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia, an experience that left an indelible mark on my life, my interests and my heart. Going to Africa as a young woman, I fell solidly in love with the country (East Africa and Ethiopia/Eritrea in particular), a love that is as unreasonable at

this time and age as it is strong. Moses loved Uganda. As a result, he and I shared the joys and concerns of news from East Africa; at times wringing our hands, at other times, at least for me, lost in yearning for the unique qualities of African life – where for example, the marking of time was and perhaps still is governed by human interaction rather than a ticking clock. On my daily way to the nursing school where I taught in Asmara, if I would meet someone I knew, it was imperative that I stop and ask about them, their family, etc. for a few minutes rather than show up exactly on time at the school or hospital. And this was true universally. Not one nurse ever complained when her replacement was late – it was an accepted practice and everyone knew it – a taken-for-granted ritual of politeness.

This is one of very many cultural practices that are embedded early into human lives as a consequence of repetition and precise behavioral instruction to the young that makes us who we are and changes how one perceives the world. While I only visited Uganda during my tour in the Peace Corps, I imagine these sorts of cultural distinctions that make indelible identity marks formed the young Moses and informed his adult life in spite of his incredible integration into American life. Something like that had to account for Moses' unique unflappability. It always seemed very African – whereas I would rail against and suggest he should respond to some personal injustice, he would recognize the injustice, but shrug it off his shoulders. This was an integral part of his being. It was because of our mutual love for a part of the world most people do not think about and his unflappability, that I could march into his office sometime last year concerned about some horrid injustice from Uganda that had made news that seemed so foreign to my understanding of the country. And he could come into my office another time to tell me about another yet unbroadcast famine in Ethiopia. It was this kind of camaraderie that we shared. Moses also was very generous and quite understated. When we planned the Africa Residency, which happened a month or so before he passed, it became clear that there were not enough rooms available for all of the presentations, so Moses insisted he share his time with my presentation.

Second and less well known is the fact that we were both the oldest of 11 children, although as I would often chide Moses, that was hardly a similar experience since he went to live with his grandmother who needed him in her widowhood at an early age, and I was left with a passel of squawking, squalling younger siblings. Moses left Uganda for the U.S. for educational purposes, and I left the U.S. for Africa, also for educational purposes.

And, of course, we shared a commitment as many do at our center to overturning social injustices through education; that somehow included staying late to see students. This was his service and it took untold time and sacrifice not only from him, but also from a family whom he loved above all. For Empire State College, even before the current transition, functioned like a not-for-profit organization – long hours with less than expected compensations. Moses and I were typically the last two mentors seeing students at night in the past few years. The work was never done, wearing down a sense of self efficacy. One night as we left around 9 p.m., Moses captured that experience with a pithy, spontaneous and hilarious remark (although something is lost in the retelling, I am afraid). As we walked out the back door, he stopped, shook his head and said, “The thing about this college is that it makes you feel bad about yourself.” I burst out laughing in complete synchrony about the impossibility of the work and the residual feeling of never being able to utter the sigh of work well done.

In the past few years, as Moses and I were the last mentors at Hartsdale versed in the original ways of educating at Empire State College at Hartsdale, we became closer. At differing times, we would comfort or strategize in response to the latest indignities and disregard for certain ideals. He somehow just became my buddy, a willing partner in the strum and angst that was this college for the past seven years. But Moses and I were different in our approaches. While I typically advocated action, Moses would amaze me by somehow letting this or that run off his shoulders in what I believe to be quintessentially Moses, or perhaps quintessentially African – a parsimony of

energy regarding fights not winnable, hence worth ignoring, although experiencing the pain nevertheless.

Moses loved his family, and cherished his students and friends. He was incredibly kind. I would watch him from my office several doors away, talking with students long into the evenings. When I would go in to ask a question, it was clear that the student and he were deeply engaged in talk about a degree plan or study or some problem. This always surprised me since Moses seemed such a contained person. He silently wrung his hands at students' handing in assignments late, and evaluated them anyway. He quietly chomped at the bit occasionally at mentors asking for a last minute BME PLA, yet never said "no."

As much as he was committed to his work, it was his family that was always primary. The last few parking lot moments

I recall with him capture both his intense concern for his children and the part of his nature that will always be remembered by me as delightfully enigmatic. In our last conversation walking into the college he voiced concern about his daughter, a performing artist, and how difficult it was to succeed in the arts, noticing how the many who do, do so through family legacies. I agreed, having read enough of those bios to notice the same. That was Moses: he would not know where the closest gas station was, but he grasped how and why systems worked for and against people.

Finally, later that week, I got into my car to leave for the day, and the light was still quite bright. As I pulled away from my parking spot, I noticed Moses' car parked, running without anyone in the driver's seat. I looked around, but he was nowhere to be found. Concerned, I pulled up next to it and got

out. My first thought was maybe his car is not shutting down and I need to tell him; but no, the keys were in the ignition. Then I began to panic – did he go deeply into the trunk to get something and get locked in? But all the car doors were locked, so I could not open the front door to get the trunk opened to check. I quickly decided that thought was just too crazy! Not knowing what to do, I turned to go back into the college to look for him just as he came out the door – not mugged, not in distress, but walking quickly toward his car. And I said "the car is running" and he said "I know." Then opening the passenger door to get in, he says something like, "Well I forgot a paper and had to go back." I still don't understand, but the moment will always be with me. Good bye my friend and thank you for all your kindness, your patience, your love, and your surprises. I will miss you terribly.

Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of SUNY Empire State College reflect the commitments of a dynamic, participatory and experimenting institution accessible and dedicated to the needs of a richly diverse adult student body. These values are woven into the decisions we make about what we choose to do, how we carry out our work in all parts of the institution, and how we judge the outcome of our individual and collective efforts. More than a claim about what we have already attained, the core values support our continuing inquiry about what learning means and how it occurs.

We value learning-mentoring goals that:

- respond to the academic, professional and personal needs of each student;
- identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills;
- sustain lifelong curiosity and critical inquiry;
- provide students with skills, insights and competencies that support successful college study.

We value learning-mentoring processes that:

- emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study;
- support critical exploration of knowledge and experience;
- provide opportunities for active, reflective and creative academic engagement.

We value learning-mentoring modes that:

- respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests and circumstances;
- foster self-direction, independence and reflective inquiry;
- provide opportunities for ongoing questioning and revising;
- reflect innovation and research.

We value a learning-mentoring community that:

- defines each member as a learner, encouraging and appreciating his/her distinctive contributions;

- recognizes that learning occurs in multiple communities, environments and relationships as well as in formal academic settings;
- attracts, respects and is enriched by a wide range of people, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

We value a learning-mentoring organization and culture that:

- invites collaboration in the multiple contexts of our work;
- fosters innovation and experimentation;
- develops structures and policies that encourage active participation of all constituents in decision-making processes;
- advocates for the interests of adult learners in a variety of academic and civic forums.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring*

If you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you have presented, *All About Mentoring* would welcome it. If you developed materials for your students that may be of good use to others, or have a comment on any part of this issue, or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please send them along.

If you have a short story, poem, drawings, or photographs, or have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, *All About Mentoring* would like to include them in an upcoming issue.

Send submissions to Alan Mandell (SUNY Empire State College, Metropolitan Center, 325 Hudson St., New York, NY 10013-1005) or via email at Alan.Mandell@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are no longer than 7,500 words.) It is easiest if materials are sent via email to Mandell as WORD attachments. In terms of references and style, *All About Mentoring* uses APA rules (please see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed. (Washington: APA, 2010) or http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM_APA_update_2010.pdf).

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