

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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“... [F]rom the position of an ethic of care, the learning environment and the teaching learning activities that students and teachers engage in encourage students to explore their own understandings and ignorance without fear. Educators working from this position want the best from their students. ... They are interested in getting to know students as individuals and respect the journey that they are embarked upon and not just the results that they may achieve. They would consider the curriculum to be more than just the syllabus but rather a dynamic and interactive process ... in which the student (and teacher) is transformed as a result.”

– Sharon P. Fraser
*Transformative Science Teaching
in Higher Education*
Journal of Transformative Education, 13(2),
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ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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EDITORIAL



*“Dear Mister Fantasy play us a tune
Something to make us all happy
Do anything take us out of this gloom
Sing a song, play guitar
Make it snappy”*

– Steve Winwood, Chris Wood and Jim Capaldi,
“Mr. Fantasy” (1967)

On a daily basis (could it be hour by hour?), particular words and phrases, whole lines, accusations, questions, little dialogues – they all buzz around in my head. I just can’t shut them off.

You’re a dinosaur, Mr. Mandell; it’s all in the past.

This one is huge, persistent. Could “mentoring” have had its day in the adult education, in the ESC, sun? Could it be that right now, in 2015, the language is just stale? OK, it’s not 65 million years ago, but might we be experiencing a particular andragogical extinction?

*The term is so overused, so watered down,
it’s lost all substance.*

I see it: Terms come and go; whole vocabularies are thinned out and then flip into something entirely different, and the process goes on. I get the point: It’s not something to mourn; it’s worse to claim that it’s still breathing when it’s really expired.

*This is a public college, my man, not a
theological seminary.*

Is it (really) all about mentoring?

I hate this one. It’s always hovering about because someone, somewhere, claims to know that for some of us, mentoring has become the foundation of religious belief, the focus of worship, an esoteric faith – a unique kind of pedagogical fundamentalism that’s got to go.

You’re telling me that one person, however committed, however adept, however email attentive they are at every hour of every day, can “mentor” 120 students? Give me a huge break!

OK, OK, I hear you. I know this is monstrous and, ultimately, an empty claim that makes the use of the term laughable. And I understand that those who use mentoring without accounting for, or even acknowledging, the stark, tough, triaging realities of real people in real jobs are either kidding themselves or, worse, trying to hide something big.

Haven’t you noticed that “mentoring” is everywhere? Every institution, every corporation, every school uses the term! Irony of ironies: You’re in your own little filter bubble, not seeing that care for the individual that you tout has become – come on, admit it – segmentation tactics, hierarchy-perpetuating, the glimmer of one-to-one marketing, a National Mentoring Month!

Don’t always stick it to me this way. I read about this stuff; I know what “dynamic content” means. It’s all so slippery. Mentoring. Differentiation. Individualization. Personalization. Words and words. Some new neo-liberal gibberish. I get the reverberations of these kinds of refrains: “Mentoring can become a mutually benefitting partnership!” “Choose from any of our personalization options to make your products mean even more!” Oy.

So you want Raymond Williams’ students to add yet another “keyword” to his original lexicon to give your campaign some heft? But what exactly would including “mentoring” in some imagined new edition of that volume accomplish except to mirror your tiny group’s “surpassing confidence” (as Williams would have it) in its value?

I’ve looked it up. I know “mentoring” did not make it into Williams’ *Keywords*. I get the politics of language. Our *From Teaching to Mentoring* didn’t catch hold; no significant audience. I feel the irony of a “keyword” taking off, going wild, the big embrace, and then slinking into ideology. A mantra about nothing.

**

The buzzings around mentoring continue, and, of course, there is more. I also would bet others hear and try to deal with their own particular murmurings, and carry on their own real and imagined conversations about the nature and quality of their mentoring work.

However unrelenting, I realize that it’s part of the deal, part of the texture of mentoring-life at our college. I feel the frustration of some; the suspiciousness and even cynicism of others and, at the same time (do you agree?), there’s some deep hope that’s always there.

And, I see around us an interesting mentoring inclusiveness, which, in our discussions at ESC right now, suggests that many different kinds of practices (one-on-one, face-to-face mentoring; mentoring at a distance; mentoring in groups; blending here and there) can all fall within the mentoring mold. In our own

emergent catholic spirit, we've become more welcoming, more diversified. We're imagining new mentoring ways, new possibilities.

But amidst all of the talk about mentoring (and advising and helping and supporting and caring – all of this), and particularly because the range of what we do as teachers at this school is now so great and the questions so persistent, I think we need a “fantasy,” perhaps not one that will “make us all happy,” but a vision that will provide us with some guidance, with an image of what could – of what *should* – be.

In a world of questions and deep worries about essentialisms and orthodoxies; in a world in which we are quick to point to the constructedness and thus the precariousness of it all, together, we need to hold onto something. Announcing a “mission” is one thing; agreeing upon and working within a set of “core values” is another. (The former is much more visible these days; the latter – take a look at the last page of each issue of *AAM* – has faded.) If it “really” is to be “all about mentoring” – I, for one, don't want to give up; I'll cope with the buzzing – we need

to be up to the task of trying to make sense of the term as we as a community understand it, scrutinizing the truly complex context in which it now exists, identifying structures that can support it, and, the most significant task at hand, letting it help us articulate a set of “evaluative criteria” around teaching and learning that we so desperately need. “Make it snappy.”

Ann. Will.

“Imagine occasionally keeping classrooms open for members of the public simply to drop in for individual classes taught on professional programs and contribute at any time (perhaps supported by new technologies); or imagine sporadically holding regular classes in public spaces such as museums, schools, parks, community halls, thereby inviting members of the public to spontaneously participate if they wish. It is the unplanned nature of the interactions that might ensue from such opportunities ... which allows for something new to be created.”

– Carolin Kreber

*Transforming Employment-Oriented Adult Education to Foster Arendtian Action:
Rebuilding Bridges Between Community and Vocational Education
Adult Education Quarterly, 65(2), May 2015, p. 112*

The Nuances of Belonging: Three Takes on a Collaboration

Yvonne C. Murphy, Central New York Region; Georgia A. Popoff, The Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writers Center; Michele Cooper, Central New York Region; Carlos Enrique García Rodríguez; Yoelvis Quintana Fernandez

Yvonne C. Murphy

Yvonne Murphy is the recipient of the 2013–2014 Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship, an annual award of release time and funding to support a community-based project proposed by a faculty member of the college. Here, Yvonne and two of her collaborators share reflections on their experiences in the final months leading up to the culmination of their project, a series of Creative Writing Empowerment Workshops at the Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writer's Center for workforce development and adult English language learners.

It was past late spring and turning into summer 2014 when we learned that it was foolish to try and hold our writing empowerment workshops in March. What were we thinking? Even buses shiver in the gray-bleak austerity of March in Syracuse. So, like everyone else, we held on, hunkered down and waited. Spring finally hit and our learners came, on foot and then bicycles. We gave them food and bus passes, which they saved up for especially rainy days with lightning or for when their bicycles got broken down or stolen. News outlets were buzzing with stories of children overcrowding the nation's borders, escaping Central and South America's abuses and cruelties, and a lot of people were mad. A lot of people were saying, "Send those children back!" I kept thinking about belonging, about ways we could be more welcoming to each other, about using creativity to confront our hopelessness, and about how our own vulnerabilities could become a bridge for connection instead of a closing off, a shutting down, a fencing in.

Flash forward to almost summer 2015, and I am listening to a Syrian girl on the radio, a teenager, talk about the way she was treated in a refugee camp in Europe after a treacherous

crossing of the Mediterranean for a better life: "They treated me like a dog," she said, "like I wasn't even human." Often I feel convinced we've lost track of our humanity but then I reconsider words, their ability to cut across deeds: like those of Missouri State Senator, Maria Chappelle-Nadal, used to comfort an inconsolable young woman during the unrest in Ferguson last summer, "... we are going to care about each other. We are going to take care of each other" (WS Blog, 2014, para. 18); or Martin Luther King Jr's claim that an "[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King, 1963, para. 4), like a worry stone I come back to again and again, needing and kneading into a worn smooth mantra. When I was a first-year college student, all incoming freshmen were required to take the same preceptorial study called On Being Human. I remember my entire classroom of 17- and 18-year-olds sitting stumped and dumbfounded at the impatient professor's open question about what truly separated humans from animals. Finally, after extended cajoling and huffy waiting, the professor admonished us: "humans have *compassion, empathy.*"

Originally, I crafted my Imperatore proposal in the summer of 2013 to give back to my community and align with my professional strengths: designing and implementing creative writing workshops. I also wanted to challenge my collaborative skills on an administrative level, so I was determined not to *teach* in these workshops, although I admit I often felt tugged to do so. This became especially tempting when we met our first group of learners comprised mainly of Cuban professionals leaving their identities, everything they knew and loved, behind to seek refuge in the U.S., in Syracuse – a scientist, a lawyer, a business woman, a veterinarian, a philosophy professor. My dusty abilities as a bilingual educator could not always be contained,



Yvonne C. Murphy at the Y in Syracuse.

as I would try to make myself leave the classroom after initial introductions. Inevitably, I ended up sharing grammar nuggets like some kind of teacherly old Statler and Waldorf throwing popcorn from the balcony in Spanish on my way out of the room. One of my favorites is parsing out the comedic differences between "bird, beard, bread and broad," words that can sound perplexingly similar to English language learners.

It's important to me to help make people feel comfortable, to feel at home, to feel appreciated to be who they are. With students, I like to share my mistakes. With this group, I started by telling them my own language mishaps, like the time I asked for *polvo* instead of *pavo* at a fancy dinner table, or the time I told a group of young men in a disco that I was hot, instead of telling them that I was feeling hot – a much bigger deal in Spanish and a rookie mistake. I also shared how when I was young and first learning, I kept my journals in Spanish so my family couldn't spy and learn my embarrassing teenage secrets;

and how once as a young adult, when I was in between homes and jobs in New York City, I kept a journal in Spanish and wrote whenever I got hungry and couldn't afford to eat, to keep my mind engaged, to create a place outside of my immediate pressures. How you can build an interior place, a world apart, when you write!

The YMCA's Downtown Writers Center (DWC), Central New York's only community center for the literary arts, serves a diverse range of self-identified fiction writers, poets, essayists and dramatists, but I wanted to introduce and nudge the possibilities for greater community-based outreach in their programming by proposing two free writing empowerment workshops for adult learners funded through the Imperatore project: one for recently arrived Americans, and the other for working adults and adults returning to the workforce to help foster economic development and mobility. I did my research and found out that only five of the nation's 200 largest cities have higher estimated poverty rates than Syracuse, and Syracuse has the highest rate of poverty for any northeastern U.S. city with a population above 100,000; in fact, it was reported that 34 percent of Syracuse city residents currently live below the poverty line (Riede, 2012). According to David C. Harvey, then president of the Syracuse-based ProLiteracy organization, "... an estimated 23 percent of Syracuse area residents [were] struggling with literacy ..." (Onondaga Community College, n.d., para. 3). These two facts gave me additional determination to work toward helping adult literacy education and writing empowerment to take root in Onondaga County as "low literate individuals are twice as likely to be out of work ..." (ProLiteracy, 2015, Economic Instability section, para. 1).

For this project, I knew I wanted to work closely with the DWC program coordinator, Georgia Popoff. Georgia is a tremendous community leader, one of the great unacknowledged "mayors" of Syracuse. One can't go anywhere in public with her and not attract a crowd of people who weren't somehow educated by her or touched by a performance or project or writing that she was somehow involved in bringing to life. Georgia and I both hold a deep commitment to sharing the transformative possibilities of

language with others. We worked together to create and provide training based on a flexible, learner-centered, process-based curriculum I made especially for this project. We hired a combination of SUNY Empire State College graduating and current students, retired school teachers and DWC staff to teach and provide extra individual support in the workshops. This was a radial form of synergy: We worked with learners and teachers from the community who might move on to take more workshops at the DWC and possibly studies or degrees at ESC. We helped DWC educators and ESC students/alumni gain more and varied teaching and learning experiences. We made community connections, shared and introduced potential resources for future projects either separately,

"I did my research and found out that only five of the nation's 200 largest cities have higher estimated poverty rates than Syracuse, and Syracuse has the highest rate of poverty for any northeastern U.S. city with a population above 100,000. ..."

together or with other partners. It is my hope that we built new forms of community by bringing different people together.

Our workshops met for one-and-a-half hours twice a week for eight weeks. Due to a number of factors, including a generous, unexpected Imperatore funding increase and our own careful budgeting, we were able to extend both workshops for an additional eight-week run. Our objectives were to develop and instruct with skills-enhanced pre-writing assignments, recitations, reviews, constant revisions, journaling, collaborations and discussions of evolving student literary projects, including: memoir, poetry, stories, letters, memos, occasional pieces, speeches, editorials, essays, etc. Students were empowered and encouraged

to write about subjects that were important and meaningful to them. Our goals were to facilitate ways that our adult learners could become more confident and at ease with their writing process and growing fluency, and to inspire them to continue working on and improving their literary and literacy skills. Giving sustained attention to learners' process, content and development of style over mechanics helps to better instill more self-regulated learning strategies. We also expected everyone's grammar, spelling, vocabulary acquisition/usage, organization, awareness of audience, and sentence structure to grow as they achieved greater experience, confidence and fluency, which it did. We measured this through formative assessment of their work, collections of their writing for the term, a final group anthology and reading of their work, and a regular set of self-assessments completed throughout the workshops – both verbal and written, formal and informal, designed for group and/or individual participation.

Established programs that utilize creative writing to teach and enhance literacy, and literacy fluency and skills, exist nationwide. The YMCA has supported several adult literacy creative writing workshop programs, including one in New Orleans staffed by advanced-level creative writing majors from Tulane University. There is already a large and growing body of literature discussing the merits of creative writing-based literacy workshops. Georgia Popoff (2010) is, herself, co-author of *Our Difficult Sunlight*, a knowledge-filled and practical book about process-based writing methodology and the transformational impact of creative writing workshops on literacy in urban communities. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (formerly the Office of Vocational and Adult Education) supports and emphasizes the growing importance of education in the American workforce and recently sponsored a two-year study culminating in a Teaching Excellence in Adult Learning (TEAL) handbook titled *Just Write! Guide* (U.S. DOE, 2012). This guide is an invaluable resource for anyone contemplating process and creative-driven approaches in literacy education. Interestingly, many of the core tenets of the TEAL philosophy concur with past Empire State College practices and widely accepted

adult learning theory, including learning strategy instruction, differentiated instruction, formative assessment and self-regulated learning. According to TEAL Center Fact Sheet #1: Research-Based Writing Instruction, part of the *Just Write! Guide*, "... poor in-school performance and high drop-out rates from high school lead to a situation in which adults are underprepared for postsecondary education or successful employment. The writing demands of most jobs – even at the entry level – are increasing and businesses may have to provide the remedial writing instruction that workers need" (U.S. DOE, 2012, p. 8). Again, these findings continue to underscore the dire need for and importance of transformative community-based adult literacy programs, as well as humane, process-oriented learning initiatives.

For a culminating event, Georgia and I did not want our workshop students and other project collaborators to have a purely somber public forum. Even though we made sure to create some time for recognition at the ESC Central New York offices with the typical anthology readings, speeches and acknowledgement of much hard work done well, we also (with the boundless help of Dean Nikki Shrimpton and her talented assistant, Tracy Zappola) hired a disc jockey, brought in a sumptuous Indian food buffet, and turned the balmy July evening into a sunlit celebration for all friends, old and new, to share dinner together, socialize, dance, connect and belong.

Georgia A. Popoff

Georgia Popoff is a community poet, and a program coordinator of The YMCA's Downtown Writers Center in Syracuse. She is the author of three published books of poetry, including her June 2015 volume, Psalter: The Agnostic's Book of Common Curiosities (New York: Tiger Bark Press).

In the early conversations with Dr. Yvonne Murphy planning our writing empowerment workshops, the possibilities of community service were foremost in our intention, which we also believed to be the overarching core of the Imperatore mission, as we understood it. To address and support, in some way, the ability for language to

move individuals into a more secure place of employment and in community was our hope, and I believe we were able to offer a tangible impact as participants took skills offered and put them to work.

The range of connection was remarkable for a small pilot program, in terms of both participants and instructors. Yvonne and I were able to connect with numerous literacy and refugee support programs throughout the city in our outreach, resulting in many referrals. We also learned a great deal about the many challenges a refugee faces in the first few months of residence in our community. A core group of regular attendees to both workshops were the ones who gained the most from the experience, which grew well beyond just studying writing and English together. There were life skills and elements of orientation to life in Central New York. There were families to meet and meals to share. There were political discussions; economics entered the conversation, as did employment opportunities; and how to best word an email among colleagues.

Our faculty and support volunteers were compassionate as well as highly skilled in their ability to teach with patience, encouragement and flexibility. Weekly, we met with participants going through taxing adjustments, and not just those who were new to the United States. Others were preparing to re-enter the workforce, improve skills for career advancement or create a life in recovery.

Some people came just once, perhaps twice. But those who committed to the program developed friendships as well as improved skills. They supported each other's growth and they shared in a safe space, an environment that led to the heartfelt writings that fill the pages of the anthology of work that they created.

We never intended to supplant the many agencies and programs doing critical work in Central New York. Instead, we hoped to accent the services available with something that would lead to long-term friendships, success in employment, creativity and personal reflection. I am confident that we met those goals, and dearly appreciate the opportunity to investigate another way to serve the region through Downtown Writers Center programming.

Michele Cooper

Michele Cooper is the 2013–2014 Workforce Writing Empowerment Mentor, a Central New York Region writing tutor, and won the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence in 2013. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Cultural Studies from Empire State College in 2012, and graduates with her Master of Arts in Liberal Studies in 2015. Her master's thesis is titled The Immigrant's Daughter: A Novel.

I had no idea what to expect when asked to teach a writing empowerment workshop focused on workplace writing at the Downtown Writers Center during the summer of 2014. I did know that the participants could attend free of charge, thanks to the generous Arthur Imperatore grant. I saw the enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism that emanated from the leaders of this effort, Yvonne Murphy and Georgia Popoff. I also knew I could teach these sessions, since I had conducted similar workshops during the course of my career as a writer and editor.

What I did not know was that the adults who stepped cautiously into the meeting room for that first session, and most of whom stayed to the very last, would be so interesting, thoughtful, receptive and eager to learn. Above all, I never imagined the diversity of the adults who came together each Wednesday night. One had had come to America a few years ago from China. He spoke four languages and needed to improve his writing skills because he was trying to develop a sales opportunity. Another was a freelance writer for *CNY Latino*, a local weekly paper, who wanted to improve his writing skills. Another, who lived at the YMCA, always contributed the most amazing insights to our conversations. One

"... we hoped to accent the services available with something that would lead to long-term friendships, success in employment, creativity and personal reflection."

woman was recovering from illness; she loved to write creatively, poems mostly. Two women professionals attended; one worked in human resources at a university, the other in finance at a hospital. Two young adults, a brother and sister from Vietnam, barely spoke English – she patiently translated everything I said for her brother. I encouraged them to switch to the English Language Learners workshop held on a separate night. I hope they did that.

Each week, we gathered to discuss how to construct business letters and emails, resolve sticky grammar issues such as subject/verb agreement, pronouns, sentence styles, gendered pronouns, etc. These are topics most people would consider not very exciting. Yet, we made it exciting. Students shared what they knew, applied what they learned, filled in the practice worksheets I had created. They asked many questions and discussed solutions as a group. They were, for the most part, a quiet, reserved group of individuals, but intensely interested in what we discussed each week. They shared what they wrote. The group adopted a personal dimension, too. We laughed, we listened and we empathized as some shared their personal stories of struggles or triumphs. Some produced incredible pieces of prose to be included in the capstone for this workshop, a bound publication of works by adults from all of the workshops.

In the end, I was the one who learned the most. This diverse group of people brought me outside of my comfort zone, made me think and made me care about what I was teaching. There was a reason why they came to the class; they had a need they wanted to fill. No one told them they had to be there. They wanted to be there – not just for the free pretzels and snacks, or the complimentary paperback dictionary and thesaurus. Rather, they came to learn. They had reasons for learning. The party a week after the workshop ended was the icing on the cake, complete with refreshments, a DJ, disco lights and dancing, readings by students, hugs, smiles and just togetherness – a beautiful way to share what we had all experienced and learned. These diverse, amazing, committed and unbelievably nice people sneak into my thoughts often. Each time, I wish them all happiness and success, and hope in some small way, what they learned about writing will serve them well in whatever paths they pursue.

Yvonne C. Murphy

And so, with an unrepayable debt to poet Lucille Clifton and her poem “homage to my hips,” we offer these works from our student anthology, “Today Is The Best Day,” as further but partial illustration of their journeys. These words are strong words. These words have traveled great distances to speak to you. These words are *free* words, they need *space to move around in* – they make waves: hush and lull, laugh, storm and retreat, sometimes into themselves. These words *don't fit into petty places*, they are bold. They jump and soar, catapult across borders, listening, threatened, befriended, humbled. These words lift and glide, they are *mighty words*, grace notes and gravitas. *Estas palabras son fuertes, amiables, importantes –y, a veces, desagradables*. These words could be yours.

Carlos Enrique García Rodríguez

Habana-Syracuse . . .

*Un viaje que no acaba,
un corazón que no se detiene
terminan sonriéndose .*

*A veces los espacios nos conforman,
a veces nos destruyen,
pero casi nunca nos damos cuenta.*

*Un golpe de sol habanero,
un copo de nieve de Syracuse
me saben igual.*

Será que sigo en casa?

*Un palabra ,
una lenguaje ,
no hace la diferencia.*

*Personas vienen,
personas van.*

*A veces creo entender todo
pero solo quiero caminar.*

Havana-Syracuse . . .

A trip that never ends,
a heart that does not stop,
they end up smiling.

Sometimes the spaces shape us,
sometimes they destroy us,
but we seldom know about that.

A gust of habanero sun,
a snowflake of Syracuse,
they taste the same to me.
Could it be that I am still at home?

A word,
one language,
it doesn't make a difference.

People come,
people go.

Sometimes I try to understand everything
but I just want to walk.

Yoelvis Quintana Fernandez

Ciudad amiga

*Syracuse, ciudad de sal, ciudad pequeña de
inviernos fríos y esperados veranos.*

*Ciudad de manos inmensas que alcanzan abrazar
al mundo.*

*Muchas personas de todas partes, importados todos,
como el propio nombre de esta ciudad.*

*Muchos idiomas y un solo lugar, el mapamundi
está en sus calles, ropa, comida, fe.*

*Gente diversa. Distintos todos, pero siempre con
algo en común.*

*Su idioma es universal, no necesita palabras, se
aprende rápido y sin esfuerzo, no cuesta nada y
todos lo hablan. Afortunados somos, de terneros
todos, esta amistad y a Syracuse.*

City friend

Syracuse, city of salt, small city with cold
winters and longed-for summers.

City of immense hands, reaching to embrace
the world.

Many people from everywhere, all imported, as
the name of this city.

Many languages and one place, the world map
is in its streets, clothes, food, faith.

Different people. All different, but always with
something in common.

Its language is universal, does not need words,
you learn quick and effortlessly, it costs
nothing and we all speak. Lucky us, to have us
all, this friendship and Syracuse.

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“A Better World Through Kindness to Animals”: A Sabbatical Love Story

Barbara Kantz, Long Island Region



Barbara Kantz

“When people can no longer say ‘it’s only a dog,’ that is social change.”

– Cyrus Mejia, artist and founder of Best Friends Animal Society

Parents enthusiastically await their baby’s first word – hopefully “mama” or “dada.” My first word? “Dog.” So began my early connection to animals. I grew up in Towson, Maryland, a slowly suburbanizing post-World War II suburb of Baltimore. Next door lived my Uncle Phil and his golden palomino horse. A field bordered our properties; down the end of the street was a stream where Dad and I caught frogs and waded in cool and clear water. My dad was a kind of Lutheran-Buddhist-Pantheist. After each Sunday church service, we would go for a walk or a picnic. We never killed anything. Each spider, fly and ant was carefully placed outside on a bush – a practice I still follow. Rabbits, parakeets, turtles and Spunky, our

three-legged dog (one limb amputated after an unsuccessful car chase) were my playmates.

This personal info serves as a segue to introduce my recent sabbatical, which examined the bonds that people have with animals. Most of what we know and think about animals is changing, which makes for an exciting and transitional time in the emerging interdisciplinary field of study called human-animal studies (HAS).

One of the most surprising and pleasing aspects of my sabbatical study came from reading serious science for the first time. I better understand scientists, their inquiring minds, and the various experiments designed to understand animal behavior and cognition. Scientists like Irene Pepperberg in her work with Alex the parrot, and John Pilley in his work with Chaser the dog, have demonstrated what most pet owners already know: animals have cognition, language, can solve problems, have an ethical/moral code and they care for others.

Acknowledging these realities has had a dramatic effect on human behavior. The legal status and legal relationships between humans and animals are reflected in orders of protection that now include animals, and child welfare laws that consider animal abuse a form of emotional child abuse. Animals can have lawyers, can be buried with their humans and can be named in wills. In several urban settings, pet owners are now defined as “guardians,” a term that requires a more comprehensive code of care. Internationally, Argentina is the first nation to champion the rights of orangutans, while the papacy is discussing whether animals go to heaven. Despite these apparent positive victories for animals and their human champions, many animal issues remain deeply disturbing. Taking on the big agro-cultures of meat and poultry production, animal abuse itself, and the 88

percent correlation between animal abuse and child abuse, remain serious challenges in American culture.

Since I mentor in the Community and Human Services area of study, my exploration extended to the myriad ways animals help people – not by providing food, but through labor, assistance and love. In recent years, service animals and animal assisted therapies have become prominent treatment modalities for those affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, prisoners, soldiers and people with disabilities. Animals and their handlers travel to nursing homes and hospitals where they provide an emotional lift. In our county of Suffolk, on Long Island, the district attorney recently hired a service dog to comfort stressed clients in the office setting. Animals are involved in solving crimes, not only as sniffing detectives, but as DNA carriers who leave clues for human detectives. Watch for *CSI: Canine/Feline* on the horizon!

The field of social work is expanding in the direction of focusing on animals and their caregivers. A new branch of social work practice is called veterinary social work.





The Parrot Pavilion.



Caring for a blind horse.



Angel's Rest Cemetery.

The goal of these studies is to examine and mitigate the connections between human and animal violence; deal with grief and loss; and reduce compassion fatigue in animal workers, scientists and veterinarians.

In the midst of this intriguing inquiry came the highlight of my sabbatical study: a site visit to Best Friends Animal Society in Kanab, Utah, whose vision is “A better world through kindness to animals” (visit <http://bestfriends.org> for more information). Best Friends is the largest animal rescue site and sanctuary in the country, perhaps best known for rehoming the Michael Vick pit bulls called “Victory Dogs” and made popular via a National Geographic TV show called *DogTown*. The sanctuary site is 3,700 acres in a canyon at the foot of Zion National Park – the property alone is breathtaking – and houses 1,700 animals at any given moment. A large modern veterinary clinic centers the property, which is divided into housing and care sections by animal group. Best Friends makes a lifetime commitment to each animal it takes in, though its goal is to rehome every animal through an extensive process of assessment, socialization and adoption. Each animal has an individualized rehabilitation plan that is charted daily. An intercontinental string of airline pilots and truck drivers voluntarily deliver adoptees to their new homes.

Best Friends also advocates for no-kill shelters, an ongoing advocacy project that has been successful in a few states so far. An amazing animal cemetery resembling a Zen garden, replete with wind chimes, takes up several acres where the animals once cared for are now buried. A group of animals who died during Hurricane Katrina are buried there. Katrina was a turning point for rescue organizations like the Red Cross and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), who found that people chose death rather than leave their animals behind. These agencies now provide shelters for animals that are rescued during disasters.

The students in my study group, Humans and Animals in Human Services, have responded positively to this lively topic and have developed personal advocacy plans including meatless Mondays, animal adoption and a healthy respect for ants! One student developed a food blog that shares recipes for meatless meals. As we enter the probable Anthropocene – the emerging and highly touted new phase of geologic history whereby humans can actually alter both the biological and geological processes of the planet – now, more than ever, we need to understand and rely on our interconnectedness as living creatures. Through my sabbatical study, I have become a more attentive, humane educator and a better planetary citizen by studying nonhuman animals and our relationship to them.

Turning “Other” Into “Another”: Valuing Diverse Knowledge Through the Standpoint Theory

Layla Abdullah-Poulos, Long Island Region

The unique and dynamic educational process at SUNY Empire State College makes effective, culturally-relevant interaction a crucial part of exchanges between faculty and students. In order for this to occur, exploration of experiential knowledge, and its influences on both instructor and pupil, is vital. ESC mentors Jeffrey Lambe, Alan Mandell and Elana Michelson have contributed significantly in this area. Their books and articles demonstrate the important relationship between experiential knowledge and faculty developing an appreciation for the diverse learning of the college's students. The endeavors of these ESC colleagues reflect the continual undertakings that promote an encouraging collegiate atmosphere. I will explore the historically Eurocentric underpinnings that dominate academic culture, the challenges they present to students of varied cultural perspectives, and demonstrate how Standpoint theory can potentially induce a shift from the current hegemonic system and provide educator and student a heterogeneous structure to value a myriad of knowledge archetypes.

“O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another” (Quran 49:13).

The above verse from the Quran eloquently describes the significance of sociocultural diversity and relevancy to the human experience. Throughout history, human beings created a variety of cultural paradigms indispensable to each of their societies. These paradigms serve as connections within the society and demonstrate what a social group may produce. Ideally, the rest of the world appreciates these contributions; however, human beings consistently demonstrate an inclination to be dismissive of anything outside of their cultural realm. This also is true regarding gender bias toward women, which

allows the dismissal of feminine knowledge and perspective. However, as the above verse indicates, there is value that the diversities of gender, race and sociocultural situation provide to an individual's conceptualization of knowledge. The Standpoint theoretical approach, asserted by feminist theorists, challenges the prevailing hierarchical educational paradigm that attributes superiority and infallibility to the white male European perspective and encourages the utilization of experiential knowledge by marginal groups as a valid platform for the articulation of diverse kinds of knowledge and perspectives.

Historically, members of groups outside the dominant Eurocentric secularized culture experienced alienation from the attainment of knowledge considered “credible” and had their own knowledgebase relegated to a diminished status. Elizabeth Minnich (1990) explained that there are “hierarchical classification systems” (p. 28) developed in the present education system that maintain dominance by “rewarding intellectuals, artists and ‘opinion leaders’ who conform while discrediting and isolating others” (p. 31). This hierarchy, through which knowledge is categorized, is founded upon Eurocentrism, which provides a disproportionate amount of attention to European and Western social and cultural accomplishments (i.e., the arts, politics, science, etc.) while downplaying atrocities perpetrated by their societies, as well as the achievements of non-European cultures (Mazrui as cited in Kanth, 2009, p. xi). Here in the United States, the Eurocentrism evolved into American Exceptionalism, which involves merging the idealization of white European societies with notions that this country is a unique exemplar of the Western world. Both Eurocentrism and American Exceptionalism influence academic narratives and pedagogy, as well as the types of knowledge/intelligence valued by society and its educational systems.



Layla Abdullah-Poulos

The Eurocentric secularized culture that dominates Western higher education is a product of the historical sociocultural colonization of societies and nations by middle class Western Europeans. During the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, a transition from an “old world” to a “new world” order among Western Europeans emerged and was disseminated to the rest of civilization, where it was strictly enforced. The objective was to purge society of the old and sacred and usher in a utopian society of harmony (Noble, 2002, p. xxxix). In other words, any cultural construct that was not in accordance with the prevailing Western European secular construct became delegitimized and allocated to a “mythical other” space, void of substantiality. This process coincided with the physical subjugation of societies via Western European colonization.

As European countries overpowered peoples across the globe, they also stripped them of the cultural constructs from which they generated their thought and perspectives. Consequently, knowledge structures of subjugated groups became discredited when juxtaposed against the culturally-specific knowledge paradigm created by their colonizers. This also includes the knowledgebase of women, who regularly find the knowledge they acquire in society's “private” sphere devalued. Thus, the learning of subjugated groups and women of both

the marginalized and dominant cultures are persistently challenged to demonstrate not only their ability to learn, but the value of the specific knowledge produced from their experiences. However, theories in feminist epistemology challenge the status quo and advance a construct that affords individual development of a unique “standpoint” that includes integration of once excluded socio-culturally situated experiential knowledge.

A common assumption is that the current educational structure breeds an atmosphere that welcomes diverse perspectives, but this is not the case. Academia maintains a duality in that it is ideally the bastion of new and liberating thought, but at the same time, the protocols of a given discipline can present a stagnant force to anyone who dares to think beyond its boundaries. This becomes immediately apparent to students navigating cultural intersections like gender, race and religion when they enter higher education. Unfortunately, those belonging to culturally subjugated groups often experience the active silencing of their perspectives. Patricia Hill Collins (2009) posited that, “elite white men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interest pervades the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship” (p. 269). That is, in order for members of a subjugated group to gain credibility, it is necessary for them to suppress any part of their knowledge, standpoint, learning ability or method of expression considered unacceptable because it is outside the specific parameters set by the white male-dominated “educational” paradigm. A major keystone of this paradigm is the idea of the “universal knower” generated during the Enlightenment.

The notion of a “universal knower” immune from the effects of social positioning and life experience is a tool used to ensure that the perspective of white males maintains supremacy in the Western epistemological structure. Elana Michelson (1996) explained that the Enlightenment model of knowledge idealizes a knower who is, “interchangeable with all others; able to rise above the human contingencies of emotion, historicity, and social position” (p. 187). According to Michelson, the glorification of the Western Enlightenment’s “universal knower” acquires knowledge

through reason and concurrently disparages emotional, sensory and manual labor knowledge acquisition processes typically associated with those occupying the social “other” categories such as women and non-Europeans. Thus, knowledge developed by women via these conduits is subdued by the dominant “universal knower” model and is consistently underestimated.

For example, there is a course offered at Empire State College called The Science of Cooking. The course utilizes common cooking activities such as kneading bread

“Academia maintains a duality in that it is ideally the bastion of new and liberating thought, but at the same time, the protocols of a given discipline can present a stagnant force to anyone who dares to think beyond its boundaries.”

and browning meat to explore biological, chemical and physical science concepts. In my experience, science faculty consistently scoff at the course as not being “college-level” science. The transitioning from the laboratory to the kitchen to engage in scientific experimentation demonstrates that such knowledge processes are not exclusive to the lab coat scientist created by the Enlightenment, and moves undervalued knowledge traditionally acquired by women to an equal level of credibility. Similarly, there is an opportunity to reorganize the prevailing knowledge hierarchy and move to an egalitarian model that recognizes the value of socio-cultural experience and the unique standpoints created by it.

Social position directly affects what one learns experientially. This produces a variety of socio-cultural intersections between gender, race and economic status, which are all points for potential educational suppression. The

challenging of the dominant Enlightenment universal knower model by feminist and anti-racism theorists creates a restructured model where “[k]nowledge is local, interested, relational. . . socially and historically situated, that is, always embedded within the matrix of social relationships and social activity” (Michelson, 1996, p. 192). This provides the once demoted knower a platform, equalized to the once dominant platform of the Western European white male, for the articulation of the experiential knowledge acquired from various cultural intersections, and is at the crux of Standpoint theory.

Standpoint theory recognizes that the knower maintains social and cultural connections that directly affect the way one acquires and conceptualizes knowledge. This creates a partial but socially-relevant kind of knowledge, wherewith the knower can express his or her standpoint. Additionally, each “knowledge” set is considered important and recognized. Tanenisi (1999) explained that every marginal group’s standpoint is partial with a “distinct angle of vision” that may “furnish less distorted understandings of the world of human concern” (p. 152). The same can be applied to that of the standpoint of the dominant group. The European white male perspective consists of the same experiential kind of knowledge resulting from their socio-cultural positioning. Because there are identifiable limitations on notions of a “rational consciousness constructing knowledge in detached and splendid isolation” (Michelson, 1996, p. 191), the white European male perspective is just as partial as the perspective belonging to marginal groups. As a result, knowers occupy a space horizontal to other knowers in a way that does not grant superiority or “completeness” to one. Consequently, the European white male perspective takes a similar place as “another” standpoint, instead of procuring the role of signifier juxtaposed over all “other” standpoints. In this construct, the European white male perspective loses its façade of superiority and infallibility, and it is placed appropriately with the kinds of knowledge acquired by women and non-Europeans. This is an important transition because it provides a point of opposition where subjugated groups can resist against the perceived ideologies that

Secular European white masculine standpoint is superior in order to become credible and creditable knowers.

The idea of a non-European non-white knower, who expresses his or her conceptualized knowledge from a legitimate standpoint, serves as a socio-cultural equalizer and demolishes the hierarchal academic discourse dominated by white European secular masculinity. The application of Standpoint theory repositions the relational spaces occupied by the dominant and marginal in a way that affords all authority to contribute their values and perspectives in a coalescence of knowledge.

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The Black Male Initiative (BMI): Focusing on Retention of African-American Male Students Through to Completion of a College Degree

David A. Fullard, Metropolitan Region

The Situation

Low college retention and graduation rates have become a crisis among black male students, as noted by Shaun R. Harper (2012), director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education: “Black men’s dismal college enrollments, disengagement and underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education” (p. 1). In response to this situation, a number of schools have developed programs to encourage retention and graduation of black men, including the Black Male Initiative (BMI), founded in 2009 at SUNY Empire State College’s Metropolitan Center in New York City to focus on the retention of black male students through to completion of a college degree.

What is the actual nature of the situation that has given rise to the need for development of these programs? Despite an increase in enrollment for students of color in recent years, the complex issue of student retention, especially for black men, remains a serious problem. “[T]he nationwide college graduation rate for black students stands at an appallingly low rate of 42 percent. This figure is 20 percentage points below the 62 percent rate for white students” (JBHE, 2006, para. 3). For black men, the situation is even grimmer, with a graduation rate of just 35 percent.

Viewing these figures from a slightly more positive perspective, from 1990 to 2005 the nationwide black male graduation rate did improve to reach that level, increasing from 28 to 35 percent, while black women’s college completion rate rose from 34 to 46 percent (para. 4). However, the overall graduation rates for black men are still dismal. Even at



Photo Credit: Xavier Hamilton

From left to right, Lawrence (Larry) Johnson, president of BMI; Albert Cotto '14, currently in the M.S.W. program at Hunter College; Craig Pride '15; David Boyd, M.A., BMI secretary/historian; Jay Marshall '06, '08, BMI founding member and peer coach; Dexter Mead '12, BMI founding member and peer coach; Jeffrey Tucker '10, '88, BMI founding member and president emeritus; Rodney Hill; Anthony (Tony) W. Haywood '13, David A. Fullard Scholarship recipient, at a BMI event.

historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), “[y]oung black men are not attending, or graduating from, college at the same rate as black women ... [they] are scarce at colleges everywhere. ... This education gap virtually ensures that men of color... will continue to have less earning power than their white counterparts and be underrepresented across a broad spectrum of high-paying professions” (Valbrun, n.d., paras. 2, 5).

Many causes have been identified as the reasons for this low graduation rate and the notable graduation rate gap between black males and other groups: a chilly racial climate on campus, dealing with stereotypes and/or prejudice; a low level of black enrollment or community; a sense of alienation, or a lack

of belonging/engagement at the institution; inferior K-12 preparation; absence of a family college tradition; financial pressures/money problems, including lack of access to or awareness of loans, grants, scholarships and other financial aid, or the need to work and support the family, as well as being “predisposed to avoid seeking help” – or simply being unaware that such help is available (Redden, 2011, para. 4).

Harper’s (2012) groundbreaking report, “Black Male Student Success in Higher Education,” examined the reasons why black males succeed in college and stay through to graduation, as opposed to other studies, which tend to look for the reasons why they fail or drop out early:

[We] have much to learn from Black men who have actually been successful. ... those who somehow manage to navigate their way to and through higher education, despite all that is stacked against them – low teacher expectations, insufficient academic preparation for college-level work, racist and culturally unresponsive college environments, and the debilitating consequences of severe underrepresentation, to name a few. (p. 1)

Harper's report noted several features shared by the achievers: strong family support and high expectations, with low-income and low-education parents accessing free or low-cost educational resources for their children and insisting on college planning; positive school experiences, good connections with influential teachers and leadership positions in school clubs and activities; attending college-readiness programs and selecting colleges that were a good match (more often suggested by relatives and teachers than guidance counselors); being able to pay tuition and other educational expenses, and/or being aware of and applying for as many scholarships, fellowships, and paid internships and student leadership positions as possible; and participating in bridge programs often led by black male student leaders on campus.

Beyond Equal Access

The study of student retention dates back to the 1970s, with much of the initial work done by Vincent Tinto. The focus on African-American student retention (and the development of programs to address the situation) has just started gaining traction in the past 10 years or so. Early studies looked at other demographic groups, including women; Christine L. Persico (2006), former dean of the college's Metropolitan Center, in an All College Conference presentation, examined "variables associated with completion" and "barriers and facilitators to their learning." At SUNY's first conference focused on retaining students of color, Persico reported on a presentation I had given with then mentor Shawna Bú Shell at an earlier Metropolitan Center meeting that, in part, addressed Muwakkil's (2005) view of the startling absence of black men in higher education, noting that there is more to creating a level

playing field than simply testing everyone with the same instruments and offering equal access and equal opportunity.

Persico (2006) employed Bensimon's (2005) concepts on diversity, concluding that to achieve real results, schools must move from a diversity cognitive frame to an equity cognitive frame. While the former seeks to "... attract more students of color; increase students' understanding of cultural, racial and ethnic differences; promote cross-racial relationships; [and] promote intercultural understanding," the latter seeks to "improve" and "be more accountable for the outcomes of historically underrepresented students; [and to] take equity into account when making decisions about the centrality of programs, the allocations of resources, the hiring of new faculty and staff, and the criteria to participate in selective programs, etc." (Persico, 2006, p. 2).

Black Male Initiatives Around the Country

Many schools have attempted to come up with programs to address the issue of retention of black male students through to completion. A wide variety of issues are addressed in these programs, which seem to have been developed independently at each institution. One example is the Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Program at the Institute for Urban Education (n.d.) at the University of Missouri, Kansas City that seeks: to support and retain students of color, achieving an 85 percent retention rate by following a cohort model, building community, communicating early and often, holding midterm meetings, providing increased clinical opportunities, a summer college immersion program – and high expectations for program participants. These programs have different areas of focus, depending on their location, community, enrollment, curriculum and other issues. However, all of them address education, retention and graduation of black males in particular, although most programs offer the support to all students regardless of race or gender if they are willing to take advantage of them, to forestall any issues of exclusion of other groups.

As the BMI program titles suggest, to achieve the main goal of improving the enrollment/retention/graduation rates for black males, groups may focus on leadership

and engagement in college and civic groups, academic skills (tutoring, writing center, STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] support, college survival skills, study groups, peer coaching), "intrusive mentoring," academic advising/course selection, counseling (improving self-concept, addressing specific issues), decision-making, career planning/professional development, life skills, health and wellness, drug abuse prevention, reducing recidivism, providing social events, cultural enrichment and speaker series, rap sessions, opportunities for service learning and community service projects, access to and information about financial aid resources including scholarships and funds to assist students.

A number of the programs describe how they have evolved from their earliest forms, changed names and often broadened the groups that they serve, while always remaining focused on improving the retention and graduation rates, and reducing the graduation gap.

For instance, the Black and Hispanic Male Initiative Program at Westchester Community College in Valhalla, New York, noted that "The program started life as [a] Black Males Initiative program in 2003 but in the fall of 2011 a decision was made to include Hispanics and all males of color" (AACC, 2013, Program Initiated section, para. 1). Other similar developments and changes have occurred at many of the programs based on population, some on funding sources, some on general involvement of the university.

BMI at ESC

The Black Male Initiative (BMI) was founded at the Empire State College (ESC) Metropolitan Center in 2009, to focus on the retention of black male students. The program was originally titled the African-American Male Initiative, but this was changed to this Black Male Initiative (BMI) since many of the students were from the Caribbean or other countries outside of the U.S. and therefore did not identify as African-American (Henahan, 2011).

A committee led by the Metropolitan Center's former associate dean, Anne Lopes, created the BMI to address the large gap between graduation rates of black males and other groups at ESC. Lopes wanted to address the

data which showed that “black men at the college did not persist like other groups” by tapping the “strength of the college’s alumni and expertise in mentoring to better connect black male students with student services, faculty, and instructors, and, most importantly, with each other” (Henahan, 2011, p. 11). Initially, the program called for two alumni to serve as peer coaches, outreach calls, one-to-one meeting with students, and biweekly support groups. When student enrollment was lower than needed to make the program viable, college staff reviewed lists of students who attended orientation to identify black males, and peer coaches used “cold calls, email blasts, posters and fliers” to make contact with students (p. 12).

The program has evolved from a mentoring program into an energetic student and alumni group providing peer coaching, panel discussions, career counseling, support groups, technical assistance, networking events, admissions outreach, fellowship and social responsibility initiatives. In early 2013, the leaders of the BMI went one step further to create a BMI Scholarship, contributing personally and fundraising actively to meet this objective. This scholarship is now available to black male undergraduate students actively participating in the BMI at the Metropolitan Center, especially those who demonstrate a commitment to improving their communities. All of BMI’s programs are focused on retention, which is the No. 1 mission.

The Situation at ESC

With a college graduation rate of 36 percent, it is clear that black male students struggle to complete their education. As noted earlier, the reasons for this low rate are numerous: poor educational preparation, lack of financial resources and, for many who are first generation college students, lack of family or community support. At Empire State College, the challenges are even greater, as students try to navigate a complex college academic system, engage in an educational program that requires considerable self-discipline, and seek an education at a time when they are dealing with adult responsibilities such as jobs and family.

From the start, we wanted to address these challenges. At its founding, the primary aim of BMI was to increase graduation and

retention rates among black male students at the college’s New York City location. Alumni, faculty and more academically seasoned ESC student-mentors – all black men – provide a variety of supports for new students and for those who are struggling. These supports include mentoring, at-risk outreach, counseling and networking. Several dimensions introduced in my presentation with Bú Shell, mentioned earlier, were later developed into the current BMI program. These included: (1) developing a working relationship with the student; (2) keeping in touch on a regular basis; (3) unconditional positive regard and an accurate empathic understanding of the student; (4) motivation by my example, or “what my education did for me”; (5) motivation by my students who graduated, or “what education did for them”; (6) nuts and bolts exploration of what the student wants to do with an ESC degree (focus: employment); (7) nuts and bolts exploration of what may happen without a degree (focus: underemployment and social pathology); (8) vestige of slavery and racism; (9) ideas for further thought, including networking events to reduce isolation, counseling to help with personal problems, coordinating with outside programs for support, training for multicultural mentoring relationships and adding black male faces to advertisements for the colleges.

To provide some kind of context: The Metropolitan Center, located in New York City, is the largest of the college’s centers with more than 2,100 students enrolled, 200 of whom are black men. Currently, BMI serves an annual total of 75 students. It continues to grow.

Common characteristics of the black men who enroll with Empire State College include:

- first generation college students
- bad educational experiences in college and/or high school
- former involvement with the criminal justice system, many with substance abuse issues who are now serving as substance abuse advisors
- currently in work situations where a college degree is essential for further advancement.

The Program

At the core of the BMI is mentoring from black male alumni who have succeeded in obtaining their degree. These mentors understand the college and how to negotiate its support structures, and perform aggressive outreach (“intrusive mentoring”) to assist students in remaining motivated to complete their educational goals. Each of the two alumni peer counselors sees an average of 15 students per week. The program also creates support materials, sponsors regular events such as panel discussions, and continues to create other facets, such as the scholarship program and all of the counseling work mentioned above.

BMI outreach begins as soon as a black man has expressed an interest in attending Empire State College and is available throughout a student’s career with the college. Guidance is provided through the admissions and financial process, with peer mentoring used to address any academic issues prior to a crisis point or during a crisis, and networking to provide career counseling. BMI also seeks to offer or make connections with opportunities for counseling on personal and/or family issues that may affect a student’s education. One of the BMI peer coaches commented that the outreach component “... sends the message – we care – we notice – we want something for you that you want as well.” Another noted the results of this approach: “Participants will be less inclined to drop out if someone is there willing to empathize and support them” (Henahan, 2011, p. 13).

Specific events are developed to address the needs and interests of Metropolitan Center’s population as described earlier (e.g., first generation college students, bad previous education experience, prior involvement with the justice system, recovering substance abusers, working while going to school). Some examples include a community forum on the need for higher education for successful re-entry post-prison; a panel discussion on today’s black men and the business of prisons; a meet-and-greet focusing on the importance of being prepared for the world with a college degree; and a seminar exploring the link between education and employment.

Brochure and Website

The BMI has an aggressive outreach program, where alumni peer coaches reach out to black male students directly and invite them to join the program, attend events, ask if they have any issues that BMI could help to resolve, and offer to connect them to other departments and services to ensure they stay on track to complete their degree. These peer coaches lead support group sessions on topics of interest, arrange networking events and schedule forums open to all. Students also may learn about BMI through the program's website, found on the Empire State College website under the Metropolitan Center (SUNY ESC, 2015a). Information about the program provided on the website is virtually identical to what is in the program's printed brochure, available in a number of offices locations.

The emphasis in this first-contact material is to welcome and invite the black male student to connect with the peer coaches and attend a BMI event. The brochure and website clearly state "What We Are" as "... a safe space for black male students where they can freely discuss their problems and issues in an open, familiar and understanding environment without reproach or fear of embarrassment" (SUNY ESC, 2015b, para. 1). Contact information is provided in the form of an email and an office address, and descriptions of various programs designed to support black men persist to complete their college degrees are detailed as well: at-risk outreach, peer and faculty advisor coaching, support group meetings, career counseling, student and alumni networking, and panel discussions on topics of interest to the group (SUNY ESC, 2015c).

The reason for the personal outreach and strong follow-up is to overcome any reticence among black males to seek out or accept support from outside sources. Historically, black men have been taught to keep their problems to themselves and not attract attention, since that has often resulted in very negative consequences. Sometimes black men fear being judged harshly or negatively if they say they need help, so they simply keep their issues to themselves out of safety. Michael Cuyjet, associate professor at the University of Louisville and editor of *African American*

Men in College, noted that "Generally speaking ... a large number of African American men are socialized to not ask for help" (as cited in Valbrun, n.d.). As one of the BMI peer coaches put it, "[M]en, especially black men, are taught to keep their feelings close and not to talk about frustrations and challenges" (Henahan, 2011, p. 13). This also is why, from my point of view, there should be an emphasis in training mentors to interact with students utilizing methods from client-centered Rogerian therapy, such as unconditional positive regard and accurate empathic understanding.

Furthermore, students also feel safer interacting with counselors/coaches/mentors from their own group, so it is important to have black male faculty, staff and graduate students to act in this role. In a report for Indiana State, Childs (2011) cited Columbus State University's Darrel Holloman, who found that in their freshman seminar retention program, "African American males felt more relaxed attending counseling sessions with an African American male counselor" (p. 11). A BMI peer counselor at ESC noted that "at first participants were a bit reluctant to talk about what was on their minds," but once they realized they were in a safe space and not being judged, "... you could see the change in body language and watch as they dropped their guards" (Henahan, 2011, p. 12-13).

Outcomes

According to statistics retrieved from ESC's Center for Planning and Institutional Effectiveness Retention Data Mart as of November 25, 2013, the BMI has had a positive impact on the retention and graduation rates of black males at Metropolitan Center. Prior to 2009, these retention and graduation rates were approximately 2 to 5

percent lower than those of the college's six other major centers. Beginning with the 2009 entering cohort, the retention rate to the second year jumped up by 14.25 percent from the previous year, to a retention rate of 71.15 percent. While the retention rate has leveled off, it still remain on average 5 percent higher than pre-BMI, and remain 5-10 percent higher than the other centers.

While this data is preliminary, the graduation rate also shows an uptick. Prior to 2009, compared to the rate of the college's other centers, Metropolitan Center black males graduated at a consistently lower rate. Beginning with the 2009 cohort, the graduation rate increased over previous years on an average of 3.59 percent over two years vs. other centers. (It should be noted that, since the majority of the college's students enroll part time, most cohorts require more than four years to graduate; hence, many in the post-2009 cohorts are still enrolled.)

Since the BMI program started, enrollment of new black male students at the Metropolitan Center also has increased, on average by 10-20 students per year over the pre-BMI years. This reflects efforts to encourage students at the time they express interest in the college, and the assistance provided to process admissions and financial aid applications.

Recognition

Based on the positive results of the BMI program at Empire State College's Metropolitan Center, SUNY plans to replicate the program to black men enrolled in the other major cities it serves, such as Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany.

The BMI program has been written about in a number of articles published for the Empire State College community. In addition to Henahan's (2011) *Connections* piece, several stories have been posted on the college's *Exchange* online newsletter:

- Importance of being prepared for the world with a college degree was theme of Black Male Initiative meet-and-greet (Dec. 3, 2013)
- Student-run Black Male Initiative holds panel on today's black men and the

"Sometimes black men fear being judged harshly or negatively if they say they need help, so they simply keep their issues to themselves out of safety."

business of prisons at Metro Center (Dec. 11, 2012)

- Black Male Initiative encourages youth to pursue their dreams; seminar explores education and jobs link (May 6, 2013)
- Students, faculty and alumni create Black Male Initiative scholarship to promote degree completion for black men (Oct. 17, 2013)
- Black Male Initiative co-sponsored community forum on need for higher ed for successful re-entry post-prison (Nov. 4, 2013).

Further Work

The BMI at ESC will continue to grow and serve the community, and hopefully SUNY will follow through on plans to expand it to other campuses with black male populations throughout the state. Increasing the number of black males who persevere through their studies to complete their degrees, and reducing the graduation gap between black males and other groups are important goals.

Chicago State University's (n.d.) AAMRC (African American Male Resource Center) noted that "If the United States wants to keep up in the global economic race, it will have to pay systematic attention to graduating minorities, not just enrolling them" and that "with effort and money, the graduation gap can be closed," citing a recent success when Washington and Lee College "graduated the same proportion of minorities as it did whites" (para. 10). The school noted aggressive mentoring programs, partnering with parents at a pre-enrollment session and providing special cultural events as contributing to the change. Virginia Commonwealth University also closed the graduation gap for African-American students, raising the graduation rate from 34.5 percent to 49.8 percent, "... approximately the same rate as their white peers." They credit a cohort-based core curricular experience with limited course options and small class sizes, a centralized support system including professional academic advising with extensive tracking, tutoring, orientation and more. The vice provost for instruction and student success echoed the above sentiment, stating "In order to be competitive worldwide, we had to concentrate

on making students more successful, rather than just screening [them]" (Nguyen, Bibi, & Engle, 2012, p. 6).

The creation, implementation and development of dozens of programs over the past 10 years aimed at both enrolling and retaining minorities in general, and black males in particular, have resulted in significant improvements. As noted by the Huffington Post (2013), "Between 2004 and 2010, about half of the public and private schools named in the report [Advancing to Completion] either improved their graduation rates or closed the attainment gaps for black students by an average of 8 percentage points" (para. 14). Lorenzo L. Esters, project director of Minority Males in Stem Initiative, and vice president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities summed it up thusly: "A great deal of work remains to be done at all levels of the educational pipeline, however, the opportunities for improving outcomes are limitless" (as cited in Tyler, Sterling, & Grays, 2013, para. 13).

At Empire State College, we have much more work that we can and should do.

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It's Just a Job: Stanley Fish's *Versions of Academic Freedom*

Eric L. Ball, Center for Distance Learning

Why mentor? Why would an institution want to continue requiring mentoring when there are other ways to *deliver* education more *efficiently* and simultaneously demonstrate with a lot less fuss its *accountability* to the powers that be?

Many of us have heard time and time again big arguments (sometimes emanating from my own big mouth) about how mentoring is a necessary public service that few in the academy ever get around to performing, that it's crucial for a healthy democracy, or that it's the only or best way for us to help disenfranchised learners. But Stanley Fish makes a good point (which I will paraphrase as follows): Save the world on your own time; when you are in your academic role, please just do your *academic* work.



Photo Credit: University of Chicago Press

Having read his columns on academic freedom in *The New York Times* over the years, I was excited to read his new book, *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution* (Fish, 2014). It is, as he wrote, “a thesis book” (ix), advocating for one particular concept of academic freedom (his, of course – the “professional/it’s just a job” concept). He does so by discussing not only his concept

but also four other competing schools of thought on the subject, which he describes as: the common good school, the academic exceptionalism school, the critique school, and the revolution school. The comparisons and contrasts shed further light on his own preferred concept, and allow him to explain the ways that the other four versions fail, in his view, to hold up.

Much like Fish, I think the academy is nothing if not a comingling of practices wherein “knowledge is advanced, where the truth about matters physical, conceptual, and social is sought” (p. 132), a matter of “seek[ing] truth in the company of inquiring students” (p. 44), of “turn[ing] the lens of disinterested inquiry on the objects of its attention” (p. 126), of “go[ing] down intellectual paths wherever they lead, to challenge received wisdom, to confer analytical skills, to build systems of analysis, to formulate and test hypotheses” (p. 48). I agree that “higher education is a service that offers knowledge and skills to students who wish to receive them. Those who work in higher education are trained to impart that knowledge, demonstrate those skills and engage in research that adds to the body of what is known” (p. 10). Such an academy need not justify its existence in terms of “any theory of truth” (p. 126), nor in instrumentalist terms such as job creation, maintaining democracy or molding citizens; it is its own end. And, insofar as the effects of this work tend to be (coincidentally, contingently) valued by others for reasons as varied as economic development, so-called innate human curiosity, the fostering of national consciousness, self-actualization, character development, or the development of the next new technology – such an academy also, lucky for us, gets funded.

I agree (doubtlessly inspired by reading Fish’s columns) that many ideas about academic freedom circulating in the American academy

are too troubling. Academic freedom should not mean that academics are simply above the law, as it were. It should not mean that academics are the public-appointed guardians of all that is true, beautiful and just and, therefore, that we can do anything we see fit provided it is aimed at supporting the “public good” or “justice for the people” or “saving the planet.” Academic freedom should mean, quite simply, “the latitude [that] must be allowed professors if they are to be capable of delivering [the good of disinterested inquiry]” (p. 20). Academic freedom denotes “the conditions we require to do [our academic job] properly” (p. 49). And, “[t]o the extent that students have a right of academic freedom, it is the right to be introduced to ideas and projects that have earned the academy’s seal of approval” (p. 73). It should mean that the advancement of knowledge goes wherever it happens to go, not where it is *told* to go by those who aren’t participants in the process of doing the advancing. It should mean that we referee scholarly works in terms of their academic merit (merit that only peer academics can be assumed with any confidence to recognize) and not on the extent to which they happen to espouse our own partisan politics. It should mean that facilitating inquiry among students into controversial issues is not a synonym for trying to indoctrinate them into a particular political position on those issues. Issues can be examined. A partisan political position can be assumed hypothetically in order to consider its potential implications in light of other arguments or evidence. A partisan political position might seem to be almost an almost logical corollary of whatever else is being analyzed (e.g., after a careful examination of the history of women in Western Civilization, a student might eagerly conclude that advocating for fairer treatment

of women is a political priority, but this is probably not a conclusion that should be *taught*).

Note that Fish is well aware that *all* academic work is inescapably political. He wrote, for example, that “the unavoidability of the political in a general sense does not authorize the importation into one context of practice a form of politics that is legitimate, even de rigueur, in some other context of practice” (p. 30). The insistence is against *foregrounding* of politics in a way that aims at partisan indoctrination, not in favor of espousing some kind of impossible political “neutrality” (p. 34) or “balance” (p. 35) in the classroom. *Disinterested* inquiry is the goal, even though just what disinterestedness means or entails can never be settled in advance. Academics do not head over to the philosophy department and ask for a definition of “disinterested,” settle the matter once and for all, and then go about their work accordingly. What disinterestedness means and entails is something that academics “know” (and can modify over time) through practice, when engaging in disciplinary work like teaching or scholarship.

All good so far, but now I must part company with Fish: He explicitly acknowledged that academic freedom, on purely professional grounds, means that “it is up to [academics] to monitor the conditions that ensure the health of their practice” (p. 126). But his definition of the academic profession implicitly suggests that this monitoring – this legitimate exercise of academic freedom – must *never* entail a *politics of academic freedom* conducted by academics in their roles as academics, at least not if such a politics is a partisan politics.

What happens when the question of academic freedom *itself* is inescapably intertwined with an issue of partisan politics? (Fish seems to avoid this question, which makes for a neat and clean exposition, but ultimately doesn’t help get us far enough into the complexities of the subject at hand. Worse, it creates the illusion that things can be made this neat and clean.) Addressing this question hinges, at least in part, on how one defines what the academic job *is*. For Fish, it is clear: the job is teaching and research in your discipline – period. His job description implicitly excludes, once and for all, participating in the politics of academic freedom. Even if it is inappropriate

for academics on the job to do politics *for the sake of* democracy, religion, imperialism, human rights, the well-being of animals or a stronger economy – one does politics for the sake of such things in one’s role as *citizen*, not in one’s role as academic – the same ought *not* to be said, I aver, for doing politics in the name of academic freedom. Why not? Because the question of what academic freedom *presupposes* – what “learning” or “inquiry” mean or what “disinterestedness” entails – is at once an academic question (and properly treated as such in disciplinary work) *and* (at least potentially) a partisan political issue. According to Fish’s job description for academics, if academics conclude (via academic analysis) that the structures of their university, the laws of their nation-state, or the conventions of their field preclude or unnecessarily compromise *in advance* their ability to practice “disinterestedness” or hinder the ability for inquiry to go wherever the inquiry “itself” indicates it should go – all they can do is, *as citizens off-the-job*, engage in politics that will hopefully, eventually trickle back down into the institution that employs them. But the academy itself can offer no guarantee that such a citizen-path even exists (or if it exists in theory, that it “works” in practice). If there ever happened to be an historical context wherein citizens – or at least citizens who are employed as academics – didn’t have the means to make such a difference as citizens, too bad! In this case, what must happen, by Fish’s logic, is that academics must continue to do their job *without* (in their view) requisite academic freedom and without being allowed to advocate for it politically while on the job, which means that, at the very least, they can’t even assert in the open (to students, to colleagues, etc. – to do so would be to do partisan politics on the job) that they are being required to do academic work that they are pretty sure, *for academic reasons*, is not disinterested (or not disinterested enough). And one need not wait for such an unfavorable social context to arise (wherein academics as citizens have no way to effect political changes needed for academic freedom – itself an academic question!) – just the fact that it *could* happen is enough to reveal the shortcoming of Fish’s concept of academic freedom.

Academic freedom needs to be defined in a way that “works” (to allow for the advancement of knowledge) whether the socio-historical context of said academy – in terms of citizens’ potential effectiveness in politics – is benign, dysfunctional or downright corrupt. Fish’s narrow description of the academic job ends up undermining what might otherwise prove a useful way of thinking about academic freedom.

“Academic freedom needs to be defined in a way that ‘works’ ... whether the socio-historical context of said academy – in terms of citizens’ potential effectiveness in politics – is benign, dysfunctional or downright corrupt.”

The problem might be easily solved, however, at the cost of making things a lot messier in their implications: The job description of the academic just needs to be opened up ever so slightly: teaching, research and service that are not only “in the discipline” but also allow for reflection, analysis, and, yes, even doing politics related to the *preconditions* for that disciplinary work *as* academically free – i.e., *as* unfettered disinterested inquiry aimed at the advancement of knowledge.

Of course, someone familiar with the sociology or anthropology of knowledge, say, the philosophy of science, educational theory or the sociology of scientific knowledge, might realize immediately that this “limited” definition of politics *potentially* opens up a floodgate of partisan political issues that can be seriously and responsibly related to assumptions about “learning,” “inquiry” or “disinterestedness.” Consequently, many of the politics that are touted by academics as protected by academic freedom that Fish wants to exclude *might* come flowing right back in again – protected by academic freedom after all, but *not* in the name of academic

exceptionalism or in the name of democracy or “free speech,” but simply *in the name of striving to achieve or to ensure academic freedom as a professional need in the first place*. The politics Fish wants to keep out might come back (in different clothing) as *part* of the academic job, not as something separate for “citizens.”

Thus, I cannot agree with Fish that the “right” distinction is that which separates the academic hat from the citizen hat – from doing the academic job from doing partisan politics. He wrote:

There is, I must acknowledge, no reason in nature for the category of academic work not to include the direct taking up of charged political questions with a view to pronouncing on them and thus prompting students to action. (p. 125)

What the ‘It’s just a job’ school says is that the academic work/politics distinction is built into the specification of what the task is; it doesn’t have to be added on or sought in philosophy. (To be sure, the academic work/politics distinction is itself a formulation politically inflected; but, according to my argument, it is the “right” – that is, task-appropriate – politics.) If you know (in your disciplinary bones) that what you’re supposed to be doing is putting theses, including your own, to the test of rigorous documentation and techniques of falsification, you also and already know that you’re not supposed to allow your efforts to be guided or influenced by your partisan ideological desires. Granted, the sequestering of your professional labors from your more general commitments and affiliations can never be total – no matter how hard you try, your personal history will have an effect on the way you conceive of the job – but that doesn’t mean that trying is of no effect. There is all the difference in the world between approaching a class or a research project with the intention of aiding your party and approaching the same class or project with the intention of getting it right, where “getting it right” means coming up with an account or a description or an analysis that does not depend on or derive from any nonacademic allegiances you may happen to have. The results of the

two approaches will be different and the difference will be the difference between behaving as an academic and behaving as something else. (pp. 30–31)

I would aver that the “right” task-appropriate politics (still aligned with the spirit of an “it’s just a job” approach) is the distinction between academic work/politics-that-is-not-the-politics-of-academic-freedom. If, for example, you become convinced that your disciplinary bones are not as disinterested as they should be because your discipline’s practices are already politically inflected in ways that compromise or undermine disinterestedness; if you have reasons to believe that the prevailing wisdom about rigor in your field is *already* a matter of partisan ideological desires that you disagree with – it isn’t clear that you can or should *always* try to suppress your own partisan ideological desires on the job.

Thus, the politics of academic freedom themselves need to be allowed back in, and, since what is fair game for the politics of academic freedom is itself an academic question, it must remain open. At the practical level, then, it means that the question of if or where to do academic freedom politics while “on the job” needs to remain a matter of professional academic judgment of (mostly but not entirely individual) academics. My sense is that, on the whole, individual practitioners of a discipline (even a discipline like “generalist mentor”), in reviews, do a pretty good job of acculturating or gatekeeping other individuals who might be exercising such judgments unseriously or irresponsibly. At least this is our mechanism as academics for doing so without compromising academic freedom (in theory anyway – the fact remains that the final decisions are not always made by the academics). If this means that there is still the occasional total outlier (either because the outlier’s judgment has seriously lost its way or because it is way out ahead of everyone else’s), so be it. It is a reasonable price to pay in order to ensure that we academics are allowed to walk the tightrope that distinguishes between “doing politics” and “doing academics,” but doesn’t turn it into a hard dichotomy. It is a reasonable price to pay to ensure that academics don’t risk losing the necessary latitude for exercising their best professional

judgment about what they should do in their academic capacities (e.g., teaching, mentoring, speaking, writing, governance).

To summarize:

Academic freedom is the latitude that is granted to faculty (and to some extent students) because it is necessary for the *academic* work to proceed. However, this latitude cannot a priori exclude “doing politics,” insofar as doing politics may, depending on the context and the analyses that academics themselves come up with about the context, be a *precondition* for academic freedom. Doing politics in a “limited” fashion (when deemed as necessary for better achieving disinterestedness) must be allowed. Once it is allowed, it might not ever come up, or it might come up in a big way (we cannot preclude saving the world, as it were, as a precondition for disinterestedness in one or more academic disciplines). Nevertheless, no a priori judgment can be made about how expansive the politics of academic freedom can legitimately become. It is a professional judgment made by practitioners of the academic profession themselves – if it is not protected as such – not granted within the latitude of academic freedom – then “academic freedom” has for all intents and purposes come to an end before it even begins, because there is no way to know with absolute certainty at any given moment if the “citizen route” is truly open, available, and functional. The “politics of academic freedom” – however great or small – cannot be excluded from even Fish’s minimalist “it’s just a job” view of academic freedom.

In closing, I would like to suggest that my reading of Fish points to at least two lines of inquiry related to mentoring that have perhaps remained unexplored until now.

The first line of inquiry would go something like this: OK, so mentoring might “coincidentally” be good for democracy or useful to economic development or a good thing for the ocean, but if we treat it as “just a job” – a particular kind of *academic* job that is not unrelated to, but nevertheless distinct from, the job of “math professor” or “literary theorist” – what professional latitude do *mentors* (hired and reviewed by a “discipline” that is generalist – cutting across all areas of studies – to the extreme) require in order to participate in

the disinterested advancement of knowledge, following it wherever it goes? What does academic freedom look like for mentors? How does it shape up compared with academic freedom for departmental faculty?

The second line of inquiry would go something like this: The very idea of “disinterestedness” needs revisiting. Positivism or methodological individualism might suggest that “disinterestedness” is something like a “state of mind” of the academic doing disciplinary work in the way she or he has been disciplined to do so (to avoid “bias”). But many other schools of thought (social theory, philosophy of science, anthropology/sociology of scientific knowledge, ethnography, ethnomethodology, multiculturalism, etc.) would almost certainly complicate our understanding of what disinterestedness means or where it lies or how it is best sought after.

For example, consider the insights proffered by some fields that all social interaction (including all educational interaction) is inescapably political and that all “facts” are, in certain respects, always value-laden. What if trying to achieve disinterestedness in the process of advancing knowledge requires not merely trying to keep one’s own interests in the background, but actively seeking dialogue that aims to listen to and care about (without necessarily sympathizing with) the interests of one’s interlocutors in inquiry? What if educational dialogue is inescapably “heteragogical” (Ball & Lai, 2005)? Could it be that the emphasis on dialogue with individual students that seeks to understand something about the contexts of their lives, on listening and responding to their learning purposes and learning goals, on trying hard to fit our academic structures to each of them instead

of just more conveniently trying to squeeze them into our disciplinary structures, might contribute to a level of “disinterestedness” of inquiry that conventional setups for teaching and learning find difficult to practice? Is there any reason to believe that mentoring is not just an “alternative” approach to delivering education, but a preferred way to conduct *disinterested* inquiry in the company of students? If so, then maybe mentoring isn’t just a job, but also a job worth doing.

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“As adult educators, we frequently have the opportunity to engage the formerly incarcerated in our classrooms. By recognizing these students often have unique needs by virtue of their prior prison experiences, we can seek to engage them in ways that potentially transform their past trauma and promote agency. Collaborative inquiry ... is one vehicle which potentially provides the emotional support, intense academic rigor, structure, and opportunity for action within mentoring relationships seemingly effective for these students. Non-traditional models of classroom learning and learner-centered teaching have long been the hallmark of adult education – collaborative inquiry is both non-traditional and learner-centered, providing opportunity for reciprocal engagement for all adult learners – student and teacher – within the inquiry process.”

– Joni Schwartz

*After Incarceration and Adult Learning:
A Collaborative Inquiry and Writing Project
Adult Learning, 26(2), May 2015, p. 57*

My Fulbright Semester in Hungary

Karen Garner, Northeast Region

Karen Garner, associate professor in Historical Studies, was awarded a Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program grant for the fall 2014 term to lecture at the University of Pannonia in Veszprém, Hungary. Her project title was “Collaborating with Gender Studies Scholars in Hungary.”

Over a year and a half into the planning of, applying to and anticipating our cohort’s Fulbright semester abroad, we stepped off the plane in Budapest and soon realized we weren’t in New York anymore. As those who have visited Hungary’s capital city on the Danube know, it’s a beautiful, modern and cosmopolitan city, but it retains pockets of other historical eras and cultural worlds that don’t exist in the USA – except maybe in the movies!

Our first foray out of the hotel and into the streets took us in search of the apartment of American ex-pats, former Fulbrighters who ended up staying on to make their home in Budapest and who invited the September 2014 cohort of grantees to a “Welcome to Hungary” party. As we rang the bell of a narrow doorway and were buzzed into a dimly lit entryway that opened up onto a central atrium ringed by apartments, the voice on the intercom directed us to the elevator cage and told us to ride up to the 4th floor. In the small 3 by 3 foot space, as we closed the cage doors and pushed the brass button and started our slow ascent, we felt like we had stepped into a Wes Anderson set for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.

For the next several days, orienting with our fellow Fulbrighters and their families, we learned the names of the cities where we would each be sent to teach and study: Debrecen, Eger, Szeged, Veszprém and Budapest. My husband and I were bound for Veszprém, a small city of 25,000 people that was home to the regional University of Pannonia, where I would teach two courses in the English and American Studies Institute (or “EASI,” as the acronym was shared with us – un-ironically). Although we had mined the Internet for

information on the city and found a lively YouTube video with clips of Veszprém folks dancing through the winding streets of the picturesque city to a soundtrack of Pharrell Williams’ song “Happy,” we weren’t expecting the warm welcome we received from the director of EASI, Dr. Szilard Szentgyörgy. (In its English form, Szilard’s name translates into Constantine St. George, which we told him was the perfect name for an international *bon vivant*.) He is, in fact, a very accomplished linguist and an alumnus of the Fulbright program himself, who studied in the U.S. when he was completing his doctorate in the 1990s.

We settled into our new home quickly, as classes began two days after I arrived. I was asked to teach courses on U.S. Foreign Relations and American Women Writers, filling in for two of the subject area studies that students who are enrolled in the EASI undergraduate degree program are required to take. I had been in touch with Szilard before our travels and had brought teaching materials with me, and many full-text short stories that I assigned for the writing course were available through Internet sources. Also, the



Karen Garner presents a picture of SUNY Empire State College, 2 Union Avenue to English and American Studies Institute (EASI) Director Szilard Szentgyörgy.

University of Pannonia utilizes the Moodle course platform, so course preparations were pretty seamless for me as I translated pages into English with the school’s software. The students also were fairly fluent in English, even



Garner’s host institution, the University of Pannonia, is located in the city of Veszprém, just north of Lake Balaton.



Photo Credit: Karen Garner and Chuck Vosgianian

The iconic Hungarian Parliament building in Pest, as viewed across the Danube from Buda.

if they were very shy about speaking in class. I hope my students learned something new about the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy, and about a few American women writers and race, class and gender issues at different moments in the American past that we explored through their literary works. At the very least, I think they learned some new vocabulary, and everyone expressed appreciation for our help with their “Americanized” pronunciation of the English language.

As for me, I learned a great deal about Hungarian culture and history, and what it was like to live in a country in the former Cold War era Soviet bloc, behind the “Iron Curtain,” as Winston Churchill termed it. The Fulbright program provides a tremendous opportunity to live and work in another country. In the spring of 2003, I had received my first Fulbright grant to teach in Lithuania. There, I taught for a term at the University of Vilnius Gender Studies Centre. That was such a great experience because it took me out of my American comfort zone and inspired new directions in my research, writing and teaching interests that have since focused on gender and international relations. Living among people whose histories and global perspectives are different from your own expands your imagination, and deepens your understanding about the diversity of the human experience as well as your respect and empathy for others. Once I had that experience, I was hooked, and I looked for another opportunity to join the Fulbright program again.

the U.S. State Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and online at www.cies.org) allowed me to search out schools that were looking for specialists in my primary field of American history where I could teach in English. Through the Fulbright Scholar Web portal, you can search for awards by region, by discipline and designate whether you want to conduct research or teach. Most teaching awards allow you to teach in English while many research awards require some language skills in the country of your project focus. Fulbright program officers in Washington D.C. are identified for each award, along with their contact information, and I would recommend that interested colleagues talk to one of these officers when you narrow down a target country, region or award you want to apply for as they will give you advice and direct you to additional contacts at your prospective host school. I made contact with a scholar at the University of Debrecen who wrote a letter of invitation for me, and although I was assigned to another school in Hungary, I was invited to speak at the Hungarian Society for

My formal studies in graduate school had focused on the United States, Western Europe and East Asia, and because I had studied the Cold War era extensively, I wanted to go to an Eastern European or Central European country. My research into the variety of awards offered by the Fulbright Scholar Program (through

the Study of English (HUSSE) Conference at the University of Debrecen because I had made the initial contact.

The five months that we spent in Hungary allowed us to get to know my faculty colleagues at the University of Pannonia, a number of Hungarian students, as well as a lively group of students from the People’s Republic of China who also came to study English, etc., at the University of Pannonia during the fall 2014 term, and a great group of local people who came to Veszprém’s “American Corner,” that also was sponsored by the U.S. State Department and was a meeting point for students, business people or anyone who wanted to improve their English conversation skills. Everyone we met shared personal stories about their own lives, hopes and dreams, and, in turn, they asked us many questions about the United States – about politics, religion, money, family values – nothing was off limits. In conversations with my students and with the Hungarians we met through the Fulbright program, we talked about Hungary’s roles in World Wars I and II, including an alliance with Nazi Germany; about the Cold War in the geopolitical East and Hungary’s experience of “liberation” and “oppression” under the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence; about the forced labor camps and suppression of the 1956 uprising against Soviet communist rule; and about the current conservative government led by Viktor Orbán and his overtures to Russian leader Vladimir Putin. In conversations with Chinese students, we talked about China’s current leadership, higher education system, substantial economic



Photo Credit: Karen Garner and Chuck Vosgianian

View of the Veszprém Castle Hill (Várhegy), one of seven hills that mark the territory of the city that was founded in the 9th century.

investments in Eastern and Central Europe, Chinese versus Western pop music, karaoke and much more. As it happened, China's leader Xi Jinping was the focus of international media attention in the fall as he hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting and articulated the "Chinese dream" to "realize the great renewal of the Chinese nation." November 2014 also marked the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a significant anniversary for the world but particularly for Eastern bloc countries such as Hungary. All the lessons I learned will be incorporated into the courses I teach at SUNY Empire State College on Modern China, and on Global Governance and Gender and War.

In addition to our long talks on history and current international relations with all our new friends in Veszprém, we also met with our fellow Fulbright grantees in different cities once a month, and toured castles, churches and cultural sites. Together we shared our "American" impressions of some paprika-laden Hungarian foods, retro burgers (which were all bun and very little burger), potent pálinka (similar to grain alcohol, but fruit flavored!) and Hungarian-isms, such as greeting a friend with "See ya" (actually spelled *szia*) and parting from them with a cheery "Hello."

I recommend the Fulbright program for all academics and especially at this moment in our "globalized" world. Although we talked about differences among countries on a government-to-government level, we experienced the best kind of human warmth and generosity of spirit on a personal level every day that we were in Hungary. The Fulbright Scholar awards applications are due by August 1 each year, to be considered for a placement abroad in the following academic year. Please contact me (or Alan Mandell, Fulbright campus representative) if you have any questions about the application process.

Teaching for Employability Skills: A Competency-Based Approach to Educational Planning

John M. Beckem II, Suzanne Benno and Valeri Chukhlomin, Center for Distance Learning



John M. Beckem II



Suzanne Benno



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Introduction

According to Bridgstock (2009), “Recent shifts in education and labour (*sic*) market policy have resulted in universities being placed under increasing pressure to produce employable graduates” (p. 1). Policymakers are concerned with the student loan debt levels of graduating seniors and their inability to find employment after graduation. Unemployment and underemployment have increased default rates of student loans for nonpayment. “At an organisational (*sic*) level, employers have been, for some time, proclaiming the need for highly educated and skilled people if their businesses are to be successful in a rapidly evolving, global economy” (Department of Trade and Industry/ Council for Industry and Higher Education; Brown & Lauder as cited in Harvey, 2000, p. 5). “Governments (particularly of the U.K., Australia and Canada) have made public funding for universities partially contingent upon demonstrable graduate outcomes, with

an emphasis on the production of ‘work ready’ graduates who are competent within their disciplinary fields and possess the abilities necessary to negotiate a world of work that is in constant flux” (Barrie; Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell, & Watts as cited in Bridgstock, 2009, p. 31).

The relationship between academia and employment is not without controversy. Some within the academic ranks believe that it is anti-intellectual to suggest that higher education should be concerned with graduates’ employability rather than improving their minds. However, why must graduates’ employability and intellectualism be opposed to one another? If our desire is to develop graduates into autonomous thinkers, shouldn’t employability be subsumed as a subset within that goal? In an effort to be responsive to the needs of students, the desires of employers, and the pressures of government, higher education is presented with an opportunity to transform students by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously

equipping them with employable competencies that empower them as lifelong critical, reflective learners.

We believe that our online competency-based course, Self-Management and Self-Marketing, not only captures this opportunity, but also provides a framework for others to follow by teaching students how to use contemporary learning theories and fundamental management and marketing concepts to guide their self- and career development through a series of learning activities aimed at developing, documenting, evaluating, peer-reviewing, presenting and improving their practical self-management and self-marketing competencies and skills.

Business Undergraduates and Industry

According to the 2012 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, 87.9 percent of college freshmen cited getting a better job as a vital reason for pursuing a college degree,

approximately 20 points higher than for the same survey question at its “low of 67.8 percent in 1976” (Pryor et al., 2012, p. 4). As indicated by the 2012 CIRP survey, students recognize the importance of learning and working. Even with a degree in hand, many new graduates feel inadequate and unprepared to enter into the workforce. Graduates may be sufficiently equipped with technical know-how; however there is broad agreement among employers that they lack certain employability skills (Shury, Winterbotham, Davies, & Oldfield, 2010). There also is a disparity between college graduates and the availability of employment after graduation. Increasingly, students upon graduation return home to live with their parents only to face unemployment and the inability to repay their student loans. Graduates are beginning to question the return on their higher education investment, and understandably so. Despite these trends and growing concerns of graduates, few institutions of higher education are addressing the situation or changing their learning model. Only 11 percent of business leaders “strongly agree” that students have the requisite skills to meet their business’ needs (Sidhu & Calderon, 2013), whereas 96 percent of chief academic officers believe that their institutions are “very effective” (56 percent) or “somewhat effective” (40 percent) at preparing students for the work world (Jaschik, 2014). Career-oriented students are seeking direct pathways to employability that are streamlined and cost effective. How long will institutions of higher education be able to charge upwards of \$50,000 for a four-year degree without addressing the skill sets and competencies needed for employment?

According to Pool and Sewell (2007), one critical aspect of any graduate employability model is the development of skills. Generic employability skills such as communication skills; information management; ethical and social responsibility; analytical and problem-solving skills; understanding people in an organizational context; understanding organizations within broader contexts; personal, interpersonal skills and attitudes, and a good work ethic; and self-directed and active learning skills, also variously referred to as nontechnical, professional, key, core or generic skills, are considered vital in enabling graduates

to apply disciplinary knowledge effectively in the workplace (Archer & Davison, 2008; NACE, 2014; CBI, 2015).

In a survey of information technology employers, the Boston Area Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC, 2007) group found that employers placed more emphasis on employability skills than technical ones: “Technical skills are important, but without employability skills, technical skills are merely commodities. Employability skills turn intellectual commodities into intellectual capital” (p. 34). McKinsey & Company analysts estimate that the number of skill sets needed in the workforce has increased from 178 in September 2009 to 924 in June 2012 (Mourshed, Farrell, & Barton, 2012). With the exception of medicine and engineering, subject-specific knowledge is not the primary determinant of suitability for employment in most graduate recruitment. “Employers and their representatives consistently say that, to succeed at work, [graduates] must develop a range of personal and intellectual attributes beyond those traditionally made explicit in programmes of study in higher education institutions” (Harvey, 2000, pp. 7-8).

Online Learning Environment

“Online learning – for students and for teachers – is one of the fastest growing trends in educational uses of technology” (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010, p. xi). The executive overview of Ambient Insight’s report, “Academic Content Digitization Efforts and Reduced Budgets for Classroom Training Driving Adoption of Self-Paced eLearning,” stated that “[b]y the end of 2013, there were over 20 million higher education students in the U.S. taking one or more classes. ...” and by 2018, “over 4 million students will be taking all of their classes online (Adkins, 2014, p. 7). Online learning environments provide students opportunities to demonstrate scholarship that was once only possible in a brick-and-mortar, face-to-face setting. Today, many online programs focus on subject discipline that is theory-based. At the same time, development of quality competency-based courses that teach college students applicable employability skills, and attempt to predict and plan for skills gaps is virtually nonexistent, but offers

many possibilities. As Weise (2014) stated that, “Online competency-based education marks the critical convergence of multiple vectors: the right learning model, the right technologies, the right customers, and the right business model. It fuses mastery-based learning with modularization, leading to pathways that are more agile and more adaptable to the changing labor market” (The Innovation Most Likely to Disrupt section, para. 3).

Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education seeks to evaluate a student’s understanding of a topic through demonstrated mastery of the specific skills or learning outcomes related to the topic (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Students within a competency-based learning environment are given an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of a subject through the execution of project-based learning activities that test their understanding of the subject at advanced levels. The integration of appropriate technologies enhances the ability of online competency-based education to provide students with a platform that supports multiple learning tools and assessment opportunities.

Educational Planning, Self-Management and Self-Marketing

In the spirit of its mission, the Empire State College requires all undergraduate students to take 4-8 credits of educational planning studies. Those typically include skill-building courses and also studies helping students design individualized degree programs. A new educational planning study opportunity, Self-Management and Self-Marketing, is an online competency-based course offered by the Center for Distance Learning aimed at teaching students how to use contemporary learning theories and fundamental management and marketing concepts to guide their self- and career development by identifying their essential skills’ achievements and gaps. Students then continue to develop learning activities that emphasize their strong points while building a stronger competency base.

We need to consider the new paradigm of work: anytime, anywhere, in real space or in cyberspace. This represents a dramatic change in how we work, and it presents

new challenges for students. It is probable that organizations will employ multiple technologies and students will benefit by being able to demonstrate their abilities to effectively function in these new environments. Self-Management and Self-Marketing involves the application of key functions of business into managing oneself, and addresses these functions both individually and collectively. These functions, as they relate to both education and the workplace, are: goal setting; achieving consensus; planning; cooperating; compromising; accepting responsibility; being assertive; making proposals; documenting; and influencing decisions. This knowledge benefits both students who individually design their programs, as well as those who may opt for future registered programs. No matter what a student's degree structure, self-management and self-marketing skills can be improved, thus leading to higher levels of performance both academically and professionally.

The Course, (BME-214524)

The learning objectives and structure of the course are as follows.

In this course, students will:

- learn how to approach and conduct self-analysis, self-assessment, self-marketing and self-development in a business context
- implement strategic approach and use proven business strategy techniques for their professional development
- identify professional and generic competencies and skills that are most valuable for their chosen field; collect evidence of their actual performance, measure it against benchmarks, and learn how to monitor progress
- use self-management tools, such as self-assessment instruments, dashboards, e-portfolios
- integrate self-management and self-marketing techniques
- develop/deepen active learning, metacognitive and self-regulatory skills
- get familiar with and learn how to use underpinning learning theories, such as self-regulated learning and transformative

learning, to guide their professional development and personal growth.

The course is useful for senior undergraduate and graduate students specializing in any area of business, management and economics, as it will help them better understand processes of self- and professional development and master necessary skills, such as gathering evidence, conducting self-assessment, making sense of its findings, and developing strategies for self-improvement and self-marketing. The course can be beneficial for managers and policymakers, as it is research-based and can provide insights into recent trends in workforce development in a global context.

“No matter what a student’s degree structure, self-management and self-marketing skills can be improved, thus leading to higher levels of performance both academically and professionally.”

The 15-week course is divided into six modules:

- Module 1 introduces and examines self-management in the context of employability skills (two weeks)
- Module 2 deals with strategic self-analysis (three weeks)
- Module 3 examines approaches to self-assessment (three weeks)
- Module 4 helps to make sense of self-assessment to inform and guide self-management (three weeks)
- Module 5 examines approaches to self-marketing (three weeks)
- Module 6 closes the loop with self-reflection and planning for improvement (two weeks).

We believe that Self-Management and Self-Marketing help students think creatively and innovatively. Each individual's ideas combined with the creative ideas from other students will help a student renew him/herself as necessary to be competitive in the 21st century. The ability to successfully complete this online course can be leveraged to the workplace to demonstrate that one has the independence and knowledge to function in today's changing economy. It is important for students to show employers how they fit into their operations. Successful completion of this course is empowering, as it demonstrates one's concern for personal and professional growth and demonstrates self-confidence and willingness to take responsibility. By a student taking responsibility for his or her learning, the student also is learning to accept individual responsibility and accountability, thus linking the goals of employability with intellectual growth.

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Remaking the University: A Conversation With James W. Hall, Part II

Ed Warzala, School for Graduate Studies



James W. Hall

All About Mentoring #46 included the first part of an interview with James W. Hall, founding president of SUNY Empire State College. He served in that position for almost three decades, after which he became chancellor of Antioch University. Jim Hall has written and spoken extensively on adult education. His abiding commitment to the adult learner has been acknowledged through honorary degrees from Granite State College: University System of New Hampshire, DePaul University (Chicago), Thomas Edison State College and SUNY Empire State College. This second conversation took place in Jim Hall's study in Saratoga Springs, New York, on 10 September 2013. Thanks to Jim Hall and Ed Warzala for offering us this conversation and for their important help in creating this version of the text.

Ed Warzala: So in the mid-1990s, you did serve as both Empire State College president and as vice chancellor of the SUNY system?

James Hall: That's right, I was vice chancellor for educational technology, which did not imply that I knew very much about technology,

but rather that I was really interested in having the university explore the uses of technology to enhance the academic program.

E.W.: And who appointed you to that?

J.H.: Chancellor D. Bruce Johnstone.

E.W.: And how did you function in both of those roles? I mean, physically, did you spend time on both the campus at Empire State College and at the system?

J.H.: Physically, it was a bit of a challenge. My proximity to SUNY System Administration made it more feasible than might be the case for most other presidents. I commuted to Albany typically two days a week. But there were many days when I would have to be in Albany and Saratoga Springs because of the way people's schedules worked. Frequently I was elsewhere in the state, as well. So it's hard to put a number on it, but I had an Albany office and a staff. There was an IT staff at System. They worked with me, and I also involved Paul Shiffman and Carol Twigg from Empire State. Of course my Saratoga office staff, especially Susan Bayer, had to carry a certain amount of the work, as I was functioning irrespective of my physical location. In many ways though, I viewed my responsibilities in Albany as consistent with advancing the value and leadership of ESC to the SUNY system.

Keep in mind that I originally came from the SUNY administration with a strong sense of mission as to how Empire State College itself might be a transformative force for the university as a whole. So I felt that the bilateral commitment was not really in conflict in any way and certainly, in terms of budgets and reputation, I think it was useful at that time. In the end, I felt that we made less progress than I had hoped. I chaired a SUNY task force on part-time adult learning in 1976, well before this period of online distance learning. This was an early attempt to

highlight the emerging issues SUNY was facing. I believe that it helped to give traction to Empire State College.

E.W.: What specifically was your charge by the chancellor, in this role?

J.H.: Our understanding was that I was to help the SUNY campuses focus on using technology as an educational tool, rather than only for handling records, or, at best, wheeling a film projector into a classroom. The focus was to actually begin to use technology more fully to improve access to learning resources for students. One of the areas where we had some success was in the area of getting the libraries online. The libraries were ahead of everyone else in using technology to help students get access to much wider ranges of texts, research papers and information than was typically possible at the traditional bookshelf libraries.

E.W.: Probably, they were concerned about the drain on their resources by Empire State College students. It continues to amaze me how weak any sense of SUNY as a system is on the individual campuses. There is a kind of "prisoner's dilemma" operative among the campuses that limits sharing of resources and even ideas.

J.H.: But one of the policies that we initiated during my earlier full-time role in System Administration was to ask the trustees to endorse a policy that declared all state university libraries open to all SUNY students and the public, wherever they might be.

E.W.: So you said that your role at SUNY may have been beneficial to a degree to ESC. Did you ever feel any conflict of interests between the two roles? I mean, you might have benefited your own college?

J.H.: That was an important part in my thinking, but it also was part of that original mission of the campus: not only to serve students, but to see and test new modes of learning for students. And we certainly did

that and shared as much as we could. I would say that during that period, I had a lot of prominent audiences. I was asked to speak frequently at state and national meetings. I made one major presentation to the SUNY board of trustees to explain what we were doing, asking them to endorse the directions of that new office. The assignment was always viewed as something temporary to address a specific goal, and I think it was useful. It put Empire visibly on the front edge of new developments and, not incidentally, ESC was doing very well at the time. But the budget continued to include a negative mission adjustment!

E.W.: So did that appointment directly bring online learning to ESC? Was it that appointment or was it a matter of timing and of the emergence of inexpensive microcomputers? Was it coincidental? Was it a direct trail from your vice chancellorship and from your presidency at ESC to the college becoming one of the prominent online providers in the SUNY system?

J.H.: Well, it's certainly true that [what was originally known as] the SUNY Learning Network was driven largely by Empire State. ... However, I would like to put this in a longer term context. During the formative period for Empire State College, beginning in the summer of '71, I requested that the academic vice president prepare reference catalogs for instructional resources by academic area. The idea was to create a resource bank, a reference source that would include all of the different areas of study, showing both students and faculty mentors where they might find the resources to study a particular topic. I wanted it to be student-centered, but I felt it would be unworkable unless you had an easy and accessible way that a mentor and a student could have access to resources. The library issue was certainly front-and-center at that time. My request was strongly resisted by the academic staff as just the wrong way to go. I was never able to get it off the ground. Later, I tried to accomplish something similar by appointing a provost for learning resources (Loren Baritz). Later he became provost of the college.

What followed were a number of experiments designed to increase our academic resource base for students and mentors. We redesigned some existing Open University courses,

considering them to be the best available technology-pertinent self-study courses at the time. These were essentially very sophisticated continuing education courses. ESC's Office for Learning Resources also created a whole series of materials upon which studies could be flexibly based. They decided to call them "whatchamacallits." They were modular in form, and some 100 or so were written by visiting scholars. As an academic, you'll appreciate that they were quite inventive and different from anything that was going on in a classroom. They were designed to facilitate independent learning, putting in front of the student a wide range of ideas and choices that I thought would enrich individualized learning.

The question for us was: How do you get the resources necessary to sustain a high quality program for a student, not predetermined, but where the student and a mentor could work together to build a degree program? What do you put in it that's solid, strong and real? Obviously there are other ways to do it, but some approaches are very time-consuming and costly. I was looking for ways to make life easier for mentors, with the student taking a lot of responsibility.

E.W.: Why is it academically sound for the learner and the mentor to collaborate and to decide on what will be learned, and how it will be learned?

J.H.: Well it's not academically rare to do that. There's a long history of independent studies at some fine institutions, but, except at the doctoral level, it has been the exception rather than the rule. ESC turned that traditional equation upside down, putting the student in the middle. To make this possible, I truly believed that you needed to have a stable of resources upon which both student and faculty could draw. I also was concerned as to how ESC's faculty mentors would maintain currency in their fields. We approached that in a variety of different ways. The resource package, I thought, was fundamental for that.

Over time, we recognized that there were futurists talking about what computers might eventually be able to provide. Early on, you didn't know whether to believe that or not. But with the capabilities we have now, with all of these search engines on individual computers, it's a natural. No single mentor could provide

all of this, unless she was a renaissance woman, and there are such people at Empire State, but it's tough. And over time, it's even tougher. Most of the faculty at Empire State, with all the training and experience they have, learn how to advise and navigate many subjects, helping to find the right approach and material for a particular student. The mentor helps the student to define it, and then tries to help link them with appropriate resources. The outside specialist tutor was an important resource, too, and was absolutely critical as the student moved to more highly specialized studies. No single mentor could cover the gamut. I

"The question for us was: How do you get the resources necessary to sustain a high quality program for a student, not predetermined, but where the student and a mentor could work together to build a degree program? What do you put in it that's solid, strong and real?"

don't know how the tutor function is working these days. We never had funds to really pay tutors as I think they should be paid, but a great number of people were willing to do it. The anecdotal evidence we heard about the experience and pleasure of dealing with our motivated students was always gratifying.

E.W.: Now it's 2013, and in the last couple of years, there's been a huge explosion of alternative higher education models – public and private – including the University of Phoenix, with almost as many students as the entire State University of New York. You have Harvard and MIT's edX initiative. The two colleges have committed \$30 million each to create this capacity of online delivery. You also have Coursera, the Stanford University spinoff that SUNY has reached an agreement with. What are your thoughts about these

developments in higher education and in alternative higher education? What might this mean for Empire State College?

J.H.: Well, I do follow it because I'm very interested in it. But I could not today write a monograph about it because I'm not informed in enough detail, nor have I personally experienced using these approaches. So from 30,000 feet, I think it's superb. In many ways it's a validation of much that Empire State tried to do and is doing. But even at the time Empire was founded, there was a considerable number of new colleges or divisions of more traditional colleges established with alternative approaches. Most of those established in the early '70s are not around today. Some of them focused on competency learning; some of them focused on degree by examination. Some did PLA; others were aggregators of credit. But what was uniquely different about Empire State College was the mentor, and related faculty who perform similar functions in somewhat different ways. Unlike many of the institutions serving adult students, ESC's approaches are a relatively costly way to go. But cost has a direct connection to quality and quality control. And quality assurance is a big struggle for many of these new online institutions.

Empire remains a unique institution in the way it's structured, with the mentors, with the online learning possibilities for all students, and the individualized programs that some students want. Some may prefer to have more group studies than they currently have access to. But at ESC, the idea was to try to adjust to the individual student rather than batch process groups. And although this approach is relatively costly, it is less costly than at a traditional residential campus. Student surveys, year after year, show a very powerful student response to Empire State. But today, increasing competition is an important issue. Many students select programs and don't always know those programs' relative strengths or advantages. They may not have the option of Empire State. Can Empire State continue to compete effectively? It is a question I cannot answer definitively, but I think ESC has a lot going for it. After all, it doesn't need to have 50,000 students. It doesn't need to be a University of Phoenix-sized institution, but neither should it be small and precious.

Moreover, I have to assume that students beyond the political boundaries of New York are increasingly seeking Empire's services.

The way Empire has defined it, the mentor also has its specialist requirements, for example, requiring a terminal degree. In theory, mentors are supplemented by specialist tutors (such as in assessment of prior learning and specialized studies), so that the student can receive a very professional evaluation. Frankly, I don't know whether any other colleges do it this way. Two faculty to one student, found in the Oxonian tradition, has a long and hallowed history. So does classroom teaching. But mentoring a student is more complex, and more student-centered than these.

To me, that is where the mentor's role really is unique. That skill can be applied to any field if the mentor is wise enough and has time enough to engage the other appropriate resources. To me, that is, cumulatively, the key ingredient driving the learning process in a superb institution. I'm being a little dogmatic about it, but so be it.

E.W.: Can mentoring, as you described it, be done online to the same degree that it can be done face-to-face, which is where Empire's mentoring model began? Can it have the same quality?

J.H.: I can't answer that question because I have no factual data on it. But I do hear anecdotal comments and speeches that say that they have been trying to measure this kind of thing, and that they're finding very positive results. I know that on some of my visits to the University of Maryland University College, which is heavily online and at a distance, I learned that they have measured positive results. Probably President [Merodie] Hancock will have a lot of experience and knowledge about that. But it would be an interesting panel discussion sometime to weigh in on that very point: it's critical.

But I think all this brings me back to the concept of the whole. Any single learning mode taken in isolation may not be adequate and certainly would not be adequate to all students. I love the hybrid model. I think it is critical over time to have one or several persons who are primarily responsible to that student for making sure they make progress – a professional who assures that the student

is getting the proper resources and guidance. Should they be well-skilled counselors as opposed to academics? In 1971, I thought not. I still hold to that point. I didn't think that traditional counseling would achieve it, and I do think that's another difference between Empire and many alternative institutions that were started at the same time. Some thought that you just needed to counsel the student and take their personal interests into account. That was indeed somewhat student-centered, but it had little substance. You can't separate substance from process; the two are equally important. The mentor makes that happen, but the mentor doesn't need to do it all. And some do, and then they growl that it's too much work. You've got to have multiple accessible resources. The students should not have to rely wholly on coming to see the mentor. Some students, of course, can do well doing just that, but for others, it is inefficient and not effective.

Mentoring is not an add-on, in my view. It should be central. But keep in mind that there are a variety of nuances in what mentoring actually is, depending on what program and which student one is working with. But all should have some aspects of mentoring.

E.W.: Do you think that finding ways to articulate the mentoring model in a digital and electronic form is the way for Empire State College to move forward and prosper?

J.H.: It's worth exploring. I really see no difference in the circumstances. Consistent human interaction is ESC's great and singular strength. But Empire is a public institution. One cannot escape the issue of cost to the student and cost to SUNY. And 20 students, if that's the number a faculty mentor serves, is a level that a very wealthy, small private college probably could do, but only a very few of them actually do it. But Empire can't do it and thrive. It's a conundrum we live with.

E.W.: Do you think that online learning in general and, more particularly, the Center for Distance Learning, ought to be employed in the service of preserving the face-to-face model? Should revenue earned in the online program support and preserve that one-on-one model?

J.H.: You know and I know that we could spend our entire time with one student, and have a great time doing it, particularly with

an exceptional student. Moreover, student connectedness cannot assume that every student will succeed. And also, coming back to the question of whether all of these learning strategies need to be employed in everything that the student does: I don't think so. Again it's a cumulative process. I don't know why such a divisive issue exists about which approach is better. The fact is, they kind of work together, for a lot of reasons. The student needs that range of possibility and the student needs lots of resources, and the costs have to be kept in balance and managed.

E.W.: That brings me to the Alan Davis administration and our Open SUNY proposal. The proposal was submitted to a new chancellor who was looking for bold ideas, what she calls "BHAGs: Big Hairy Audacious Goals." I believe that Davis saw Open SUNY as a way to secure and preserve the prosperity of the college, especially given the context of having experienced three consecutive budget cuts of 10 percent annually in his first three years with the college. What are your thoughts about Open SUNY and what it could mean for Empire State College?

J.H.: Two points: The first is that the idea did really emerge fully from Empire State College and President Davis. I think he did a very thorough job of pulling it together in a comprehensive way ... I had an opportunity to look at it and make any suggestions, and my suggestion was, "This looks very good; put it forward." ... The ideas ... are fully based conceptually on the kinds of things I was trying to promote in that period when I went to System Administration and was in the double role. That's point one. Point two is you can't be the chancellor of a system as large and complex as the State University of New York without having a universitywide, socially-broad approach. SUNY can't deny the opportunity to participate to any campus that wants to participate. You can control resources perhaps, but even then, there's a limited ability to fine tune funding. So my guess is that Chancellor Zimpher has championed the concept, hired a consultant, and consultants do what consultants do. They're not going to single out one institution for a universitywide initiative. They want the plan to appeal to as broad a campus audience as possible. So you can see the dynamics that are at work there.

Who will participate and how delivery will actually happen is another question. I can't begin to speculate on that, but I would hope that Empire could play a very key role. I did write the last chapter in *The Promise Continues* (1996: Donning), Richard Bonnabeau's 25-year history. It was obviously limited by the intervening 20 years, but I was trying to suggest a way forward. ...

E.W.: That chapter is remarkable; it's not very far off.

J.H.: There are a few notions that don't seem unreasonable today.

E.W.: Considering when that was written, I think you were actually pretty prophetic and insightful. Do you, could you identify the opportunities and threats facing Empire State College.

J.H.: Well, that would take a daylong workshop to tease those out. And both opportunities and threats can sometimes sneak up unpredictably.

E.W.: What are *you* worried about?

J.H.: First, you have to have enough money to function and there are lots of ways not to have enough money. When you come right down to it, the state, which technically owns the college, is a relatively minor player in providing enough. Our economy affects the number of applicants and enrollees at any given time. Enrollment directly affects revenue. The state both sets the public tuition level through the political process, and re-appropriates that revenue to be spent. And SUNY has the authority to shift those funds around the system under varying formulas. Without these intermediaries, Empire State could likely function reasonably well on its own earned revenue. The big question is ultimately whether the tuition collected is able to support the ESC educational model. That is an annual challenge that amounts to an ongoing threat. That threat can be limited by conservative management of expenditures, establishing reserve funds in good times, and budgeting contingencies to maintain some flexibility in tough years. During the earliest years of the college, we faced very restrained budgets yearly and seldom had available funds for investment

in developing programs. Fortunately, the college today has more ongoing resources than at any prior time.

A second, more subtle, long-term threat is the ability to attract and sustain highly qualified professionals through a career. They are essential to delivering a quality academic program for students. That has always been a challenge. From the outset, we insisted that this college, unlike the adult and continuing education practices elsewhere, required full-time, well-trained professionals. Many of ESC's potential competitors have few or no full-time faculty or staff, especially with normative expectations and rights. Moreover, our faculty is expected to have a mix of special abilities beyond that as a disciplinary specialist. Can that be sustained? What kind of people are the graduate schools turning out these days? Is there a continuing interest in working in this kind of teaching/learning mode? In the early '70s, Empire was able to attract such multi-faceted professionals. Based on my limited contacts, I sense that ESC continues to attract and support many extraordinarily talented people through a career. I have no reason to think that will not continue, but attention always needs to be kept on this issue. I assume that compensation has generally moved with all of SUNY?

E.W.: Pretty close, though, of course, we have a 12-month faculty contract and other campuses do not, but all in all, I think it's pretty fair.

J.H.: We insisted early on that ESC should have a 12-month contract in order to function continuously without a fixed semester calendar. Moreover, ESC has been able to manage the schedule to include a month for vacation and month to encourage a period of more intensive research and study. Moreover, the flexibility of being somewhat able to make one's own schedule is a benefit. And I realize there are limits to that because of the work that needs to get done. In the other colleges, many faculty still jump at the chance to teach in the summer session, even while being paid relatively little for it. In any case, one needs to be fairly compensated and there's always a threat there, and the field itself just can't attract qualified individuals without competitive compensation. In many highly specialized fields, like symphonic performers, salaries are under stress.

E.W.: How much pride do you take in what you accomplished at Empire State College? Do you put it in some kind of historical perspective? What is the sort of personal feeling that you have about creating this institution?

J.H.: I was a teacher before I was an administrator. My first teaching position was in music. It's only when I began my doctoral studies that I moved into cultural history. But my musical experience turned out to be important. If you think about music, you work with one student at a time. You start where the students are and try to help them develop and mature. You identify the repertoire (resources) most suited to their abilities and progression. You try to give them the confidence that they can do it. I am proud that so many students have found these approaches to work. That sounds trite, but it's true; I do feel that. I think that many, maybe all of the faculty at Empire have that same experience in relating to their students. And it's pleasing to generate an institution where those principles constitute the ethos. I do think of ESC as a kind of family. People do know each other; they help each other; they celebrate one another; and they share in a sense of accomplishment. This was an important quality Art Chickering [founding vice president of academic affairs] and I talked about for a really long time. We wanted to incentivize a shared sense of responsibility to one another in an organization that had small, team-oriented groups. I think that was a very wise notion. I wasn't responsible for all that, but I did help it to happen. I hope it's still there.

E.W.: Yes, I think that ethos is stronger in Empire State College than at other colleges I've spent considerable time in. It's quite remarkable. And why is that? Is it because the college is different?

J.H.: It's the people. Following self-selection, there is an acculturation process. Not everybody succeeds. I think most people who make the choice to actually accept an appointment here probably have a strong interest in it. How could you not feel tremendous responsibility to make the whole thing work for colleagues and for the students that they're working with?

E.W.: Few people ever have a chance to leave a lasting legacy by leading the formation of an institution like ESC. That's quite a monumental accomplishment!

J.H.: What a great opportunity it was. Part of the president's job, in a sense, is to be a cheerleader. We need to remind people that what they're doing is important, and that they are making a major contribution individually. I used to say to many, "You're heroes." The way people joined us – willing to give up careers elsewhere and come together to do this with tremendous dedication. There were some good arguments and battles, and so on; but none of them were vicious. People were basically so respectful of one another that they worked through their issues. I always started with the assumption that most battles occurred because people cared. ...

E.W.: But you know, there are some nasty things that take place on some campuses when budgets are really stressed and things can get ugly. ... But I haven't seen that, or heard much about it at this college. Maybe it has to do with the particular people and acculturation process.

J.H.: That is a big part of it. You think people don't even know what the president does, other than the few obvious things. It's an irony that you have very little opportunity to do good. You're most visible when you have to do something that's not very nice. That almost invariably comes from external sources where you are considered to be the commanding officer. But you are not the commanding officer most of the time, because all you have is the power of persuasion, and even that is limited. Particularly in the public system – but it is true elsewhere to a somewhat different degree – there are certain decisions that only you can and must make when budgets are weak; that's not the best part of the job.

"How could you not feel tremendous responsibility to make the whole thing work for colleagues and for the students that they're working with?"

E.W.: The Metro case [when the college, in 1982, in the face of a significant budget crisis, chose to eliminate faculty positions at the Metropolitan Center's main office in Manhattan, a decision that was later rescinded] was probably one that must have been very difficult and painful.

J.H.: And totally unnecessary; it was such a foolish political charade. I wasn't cynical about it, but I was deeply involved in the Metro Center, and I had many professional friends there, and some very personal friends. When the governor ordered us to send letters to named employees as of the very next morning, the considerations I had to weigh were "Do you single out one focused location, or do you take out all the newest hired, or do you take out a scattering all around the state?" As budgets squeezed, we already had reduced personnel, as vacancies occurred anyway. So my decision was to make a statement, and I would say to some extent it was strategic. I had no idea what the outcome would be. But of course, as soon as the names were out, the legislature responded exactly the way the governor probably figured they would. But the human cost was very damaging.

E.W.: Was it strategic in that Metro was more able to fend for itself politically, more so perhaps than another center might have been?

J.H.: Well, I can't honestly say that I factored that in. I do think that is true, but I was not thinking about that at the time. Rather, because the City University held primacy in New York City and could prospectively meet the need for adult students there, and the remainder of ESC was located outside the city, I wanted a plan that would be workable in the event that it went through. If we had to cut out something, that seemed the least irrational choice to make in a thoroughly irrational situation.

E.W.: Can we go back to the question of opportunities and threats?

J.H.: I started out by talking about the issue of funding, and I talked about maintaining the quality of staff. You have to consider a third issue: enrollment. There were many in System Administration and the campuses who thought that Empire State would serve a temporary need, and I confess that I did not know what the answer to that claim would be.

We projected growth up to a size of about 20,000. That is the number found in the original Prospectus. We planned 20 centers each serving about 1,000 students. This was based on an examination of the major urban areas with outreach to the surrounding territory. Obviously, given the tight budgets, we never opened that number of centers, but today, the number of students is somewhat beyond the predicted number, with an assist by online learning.

The challenge for the institution is not size. I think Empire can always be of a decent size; there will be demand. The programs need to keep up with that, and to a considerable extent they have. ESC now provides some more specialized programs; programs that I never thought would be approved by SUNY or the [Board of] Regents. I tried the education track once but we were slammed by the other state education schools. But it is impressive that President Joe Moore managed to get that approved. One success: I was able to get the master's authorization, which I was sure would be beaten down, but we got it!

Now ESC has a nursing program. I would not have believed that ESC could gain authorization to offer nursing, of all things. So yes, changes and new programs need to evolve. It may be necessary to redefine the areas of study, but they were arbitrary in a way. Though they made sense at the time, perhaps they need to be updated for the present generation of students.

So this is both a threat and an opportunity: Can ESC gain external support to authorize the college to do new things, and can the college identify the funds necessary to develop them? New York is probably the most complex state in the nation to gain authorization for new programs.

E.W.: I was actually thinking about some retraining opportunities that might help workers displaced by the shifting global economy – education that might supply focused skillsets that are needed to help them re-enter the emerging workforce.

J.H.: I don't disagree with that at all. The difficulty is that so many of the specific areas are highly technical, and require a specialized faculty to teach them. Community colleges and many for-profits are very focused on

these areas. On the other hand, the emergence of online self-directed courses that provide most of the special knowledge may suggest new opportunities, calling not for a specialist, but a mentor to manage the student, provide essential interaction and evaluate.

The final threat that's always lurking and that I'm very sensitive to is the issue of credibility. And unfortunately, credibility is not necessarily the reality of what is, but the perception of what is ... I've talked to you about some perceptions that we had at System Administration, where staff often chatted informally about this campus or that campus, in a most critical and unattractive way. It may be difficult to accept that a great many staff, including leadership, simply did not understand Empire State College. They could not envision how quality and rigor might occur outside a classroom. Those misunderstandings existed at the State Education Department, as well, and needed much thoughtful negotiation. Today, I believe that the rapid spread of many of the educational strategies pioneered by ESC makes this threat significantly lower than some years ago. Even so, you already see the backlash among many university faculty, especially if they perceive a potential threat themselves. If there is some negative impact on enrollments and employment, higher education's mainstream will not go quietly, nor do they need to go! What is occurring mostly is the rapid expansion of the entire pool of students seeking a degree. High quality, traditional colleges are unlikely to suffer.

Nonetheless, the appearance of a threat could trigger a critical attack on the credibility and viability of alternative institutions. The accreditors on whom we depend for recognition and the state regulators who charter and authorize, could be pressured to modify their oversight responsibilities in ways that could be unfavorable to ESC's program as it exists. And given possible employment issues, political intervention is not beyond possibility. That might require rethinking some of our approaches.

E.W.: We've exhausted our time, Dr. Hall. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your generosity in granting this interview. These conversations will inform the historical record for generations to come. Those who know you will be anxious to see what you think of the

current state of affairs. Those who don't know you will better understand how this marvelous institution came to be what it is. Thank you.

Language Matters

Rebecca Bonanno, Center for Distance Learning



Rebecca Bonanno

In 2014, Rebecca Bonanno published a chapter, “Court-Ordered Treatment Programs: An Evaluation of Batterers Anonymous” in an edited book by Lee. E. Ross titled Continuing the War Against Domestic Violence (CRC Press). Her chapter examines the history, current state and future directions of programs for domestic abusers.

In the following essay, Bonanno discusses a controversial issue in the field of domestic violence intervention.

Academics know that language matters. The words we choose and how we string them together communicate not just ideas but also beliefs, emotions and biases. When communicating about sensitive or controversial topics, as I often do as a social worker, I find myself weighing the benefits of simplicity and directness against more measured and nuanced language that is less likely to offend or be misconstrued. Social scientists are notorious for our use of jargon that sounds technical and weighty but may only obfuscate meaning. My husband, a longtime journalist, shakes his head when I use

terms like “human subjects.” “Why can’t you just say ‘people’?” he wonders.

Social change advocates would likely agree. Strong, clear language gets attention and makes an impact and, much like advertisers, advocates must make their points quickly and directly. But what happens when strong language paints too broad a stroke, minimizing important subtleties?

In my research with perpetrators of domestic violence, I have found that the word *batterer* is one such loaded term. The typical dictionary definition of “batter[er]” is one who “strike[s] repeatedly with hard blows; pound[s] heavily and insistently” (Batter, 2004, p. 46). According to the *Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence*, “[b]atterers are people who inflict violent physical abuse upon a child, spouse, or other person ...” (Renzetti & Edleson, 2008, p. 63). Celebrated boxer Floyd Mayweather, a man with a long history of misogynistic violence, comes to mind. He has demonstrated a pattern of physically abusing and terrorizing multiple women over many years and has shown no indication of remorse. This type of batterer is difficult to defend (though some sports commentators have tried).

However, perpetrators of domestic violence are guilty of a range of abusive and controlling behaviors that may or may not be physically aggressive. An abuser might control a partner’s finances or attempt to disrupt relationships with friends and family, leaving the victim feeling powerless and isolated. Demeaning and hurtful language can be abusive, as can emotional manipulation. Do these acts qualify as battery? Thanks to increased awareness of abuse and stronger legal protections for victims, anyone who feels threatened or intimidated by a partner can obtain an order of protection, which legally commands the partner to refrain from threatening acts and/or keep his or her distance from the victim. If the partner breaks the order of protection, he or she can be arrested and charged with a domestic violence crime. Many individuals

arrested for these types of violations are referred to quasi-therapeutic programs for treatment and rehabilitation, called Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP). Therefore, even those who commit non-physically violent acts of abuse or intimidation fall into the category of batterers.

In 2007, I conducted an ethnographic study of an all-male BIP run by a county department of probation. I sat in on group sessions over the course of a year, observing the counselors and participants as they engaged in the intervention, and I conducted extensive interviews with many of the participants about their experiences in the program. For all of the participants, attendance at this group was a part of their court-ordered probation sentence. Throughout my research, I met many men who were shocked to find themselves categorized as batterers. Without question and often by their own admission, these men had committed crimes – they had harassed, threatened, and sometimes hit or slapped their partners. But almost every person I observed and interviewed in my study rejected the label of “batterer,” at least initially.

Most BIPs aim to hold abusers accountable for their actions; some explicitly seek to change their behavior, thereby increasing victim safety. To achieve these aims, the BIP counselors do their best to educate men about the many forms of abuse, the ways in which men try to dominate women using physical and emotional intimidation, and the effects that these actions have on victims. Abusers commonly respond by minimizing their behavior or its consequences, flipping the blame onto their partners or completely denying wrongdoing. The counselor’s job is to take a hard and often confrontational stance against these denials and excuses. Some BIP participants eventually come to understand and acknowledge themselves as batterers; others continue to resist the label.

After getting to know these men – some with long histories as abusers, some who had committed one violent offense, and some whose behavior, though threatening and illegal, had never risen to the level of physical aggression – I can understand why they would question the category of batterer. In one BIP group, I observed perpetrators and counselors discussing this point: “How am I a batterer when I’ve never raised a hand to anyone?” one man asked. The counselor responded that battering can be verbal, it can be emotional. In this group, battering was a broad, and vague, term with a meaning different from the standard definition of the word (repeatedly striking with blows).

To group together those who abuse with words and intimidation and those who abuse with physical violence is to take a stand against all types of abusive behavior. It draws a line in the sand as to what type of behavior is unacceptable in a relationship. The downside to this use of language, however, is that it may alienate and demotivate the perpetrators of abuse to change their behavior. Individuals who seek to control and intimidate their partners are not likely to appreciate being backed into a semantic corner with the label of batterer; in effect, the label may lead them to reject the BIP approach at the outset. How does that increase safety for victims of abuse?

One particular BIP in Massachusetts called “Emerge” specifically resists using the word batterer because the negative context associated with it “doesn’t speak to the services we provide,” including work with verbal, emotional and other types of non-physical abuse (Emerge, 2015, para 3). Some researchers and practitioners in the field are encouraging the use of motivational, instead of confrontational, strategies in BIPs. This means trying to engage the abuser as a partner in treatment and helping him or her to realize the benefits of change from an individual perspective, rather than creating an adversarial relationship.

Perhaps the word batterer, so powerful during the 1970s and ’80s when public awareness of domestic violence was sparse, has outlived its usefulness. As an educator, I feel it is important to use language that is meaningful and authentic. And as a social worker, I would like to encourage fellow professionals – advocates, researchers and practitioners – to do the same.

I believe that the simple word “abuser” better captures the range of problematic behaviors that victims face and may be an easier pill for perpetrators to swallow, as we seek to engage them in treatment.

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Faculty Competencies in Information and Communications Technologies: Toward a New Approach for Independent Studies at SUNY Empire State College

Luis Camacho, Metropolitan Region



Luis Camacho

Introduction

Independent studies are one of the most essential components within SUNY Empire State College's educational model. This educational form is not only important as an additional teaching and learning tool, but it also exemplifies the institutional commitment to offer a high quality education that is both flexible and fulfilling to the needs of our students at all levels. In fact, when referring to the independent study "option," Hall and Bonnabeau (1993) stated that "for the first time, on a statewide basis, off-campus students were offered a wide range of education options to individually tailor their academic studies" (p. 55).

Although independent studies have been critical to the success of a significant group of students throughout ESC's history, it is equally true that they have been challenged because the college does not have a model that guarantees the quality of learning and knowledge transfer between the mentor and the student. We are vulnerable to

such challenges because we are lacking an assessment methodology that allows us to measure "quasi-similar" results from one study to another. Therefore – and this is an issue we have actively taken up in formal and informal discussions with our colleagues – it is necessary to establish a structured model that ensures student engagement, and, at the same time, creates a process to ensure quality teaching of independent studies.

After completing the dissertation for my doctorate in education with a concentration in instructional technology and distance education, and based on my research, I understand that the key to developing independent studies without losing the essence of flexible, independent and natural mentoring activities is creating a "structured – independent study" based on ICT: information and communications technology. This new approach to independent studies would not pose any problems to the "status quo" because: a) the ESC Moodle platform works efficiently, and b) the individual management of these studies does not create any interference with the Center for Distance Learning.

Although the proposition offered here could be one possible solution to the problem of quality and of assessment, we would have to face some inconveniences. Based on my doctoral research, I have concluded that one of the major obstacles to initiating a renovation process of our independent studies is the mentors themselves. We do not want to change what has become our "traditional" teaching model; we are resistant to integrating ICT tools into our courses.

This paper will present various theories on the development of ICT teaching skills applied to teaching models. Understanding

the importance of independent studies in our institution's history and educational model, the purpose here is to create a discussion space in order to understand this reality, and improve the quality of our educational offerings and our work with our students.

Higher Education Within the Context of ICT

Adoption and implementation of information and communications technologies have had a significant impact on higher education. One such impact is evident in the expansion of skills and know-how. Nontraditional and distance education have been revolutionized by the spillover effect generated, especially on pedagogy.

A broadening of knowledge about information and communications technologies has had a positive, reinforcing effect on the new education paradigm. Moreover, it has contributed to institutional, economic, access and pedagogic changes at the university level. Late-generation communications technologies have turned the bricks-and-mortar classroom into a virtual, computer-based learning juncture. A changing, innovating world requires changing, innovating professionals. Technology (requires upper-level instructors to stay on top of those changes in order to deliver a high-quality learning experience (Camacho, 2014).

Today, instructors must be ready to deliver a communications-based and technology-based learning experience to their students. Similarly, gaining such skills must be part of students' core curricula and routine study activities. No professor, no mentor, worth his or her salt should stand in front of a class or engage with a student via other modes without a proper set

of technical and communication skills. Only by mastering such skills can a professor be a real pedagogue: to empower with ICT-based advantages; to actually teach by integrating concepts and know-how relevant to education today (UNESCO, 2008).

New Teaching Competencies in Higher Education

The new century is full of changes and challenges, framed by a quick, competitive pace of life, suffused with vast volumes of data. Successful integration requires citizens capable of decodifying, processing and turning such information into applied knowledge.

ICT-based higher education represents the best system that can be used to address these challenges and changes. Moreover, transforming information into knowledge requires guaranteed access and critical use (Larraz, Sánchez, Casalprim, & Saz, 2013).

When presenting their own study on digital competencies, Imbernón, Silva and Guzmán (2011) turned to the following description:

... 'digital competence' ... involves 'the confident and critical use of information society technologies ... underpinned by basic skills in ICT and the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.' (Comisión de las Comunidades Europeas as cited in Imbernón et al., 2011, p. 108)

And their own ICT expectations follow:

Recent studies stress that university teachers must have a command of IT [information technology] skills and know how to develop them, in order to foster independent, meaningful learning processes. Therefore, lecturers should also know, understand, select, use, assess, perfect, recreate or create teaching strategies that are effective in a context that is defined by ICT against the backdrop of ECTS [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System]. (Imbernón et al., 2011, pp. 108-109)

Tello (2003) defined computer competencies as the: "set of skills acquired through information technology which enable the individual to relate to the computer in such a way as to be able to identify its components, achieve personal, academic and/or professional goals through task-specific software, in order to get information, communicate and solve problems" (p. 38).

And in yet another effort to describe such skills, the Mixed Commission CRUE-TIC y REBIUN (2009) defined computer competency as: "the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors which instruct individuals in the operation of ICT, their purpose and how to use them to achieve specific goals" (p. 6). Moreover, the commission differentiated between computer competency and information competencies: "Information competencies are a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors which enable individuals to become aware of their need for information, where to find it, its relevance and how to apply it to the task at hand" (p. 6).

New Roles for Instructors of Higher Education: Toward a Proposed New Profile and Competencies Model Integrating ICT

Higher education needs professional training programs that prepare instructors to integrate ICT tools into their studies and courses. There are, accordingly, many models that have been implemented, with differing applications and elements, mainly technology, pedagogy and contents. In spite of the awareness and recognition that instructors must be equipped with adequate tools and experience, most step into the virtual classroom or to studies relying on various technologies for the first time without proper training, thus having a negative impact on both instructors and students (Abel, 2005).

Reigeluth (2012) presented a summary of the roles stemming from the new instruction paradigm. For him, teachers' new roles include: "designer of student work"; "facilitator of the learning process"; and "caring mentor." Students' new roles include: "worker"; "self-directed and self-motivated learner"; and "teacher" (p. 11). The author goes on to say: "While much instructional theory has been

generated to guide the design of the new paradigm of instruction, much remains to be learned. We need to learn how to better address the strong emotional basis of learning, foster emotional and social development, and promote the development of positive attitudes, values, morals, and ethics, among other things" (p. 15).

Higher education institutions are compelled to endeavor in overcoming this situation. Faculty clearly feel dissatisfied with the current level of support provided by their home institutions, regarding virtual education. Among the explanations for this situation is a negative perception of online instruction held especially by non-virtual instructors, as they feel a lack of professional development hinders creating and implementing online programs. Similarly, a higher level of academic involvement in online programs (vis-à-vis making improvements or expansions) places additional burdens on the faculty, paradoxically due to inadequate or nonexistent basic ICT elements at those institutions, thus creating further barriers (Heather, 2012).

Integration and use of information and communication technologies in education have created opportunities for students: they may now be fully trained in those areas. Faculty play a major role in this process, as they not only orient and supervise, but also design learning tools and the right learning environment, and facilitate the use of ICT. This means, rightly, that all of us must be, in some way, proactively involved in a professional development program involving ICT in order to strengthen their own skills and help their students, thus enhancing the student learning experience. Higher education institutions, virtual or otherwise, must develop and support an information-and-communication-proficient faculty, resulting in better teaching and integration of acquired knowledge and skills (UNESCO, 2008).

On the other hand, integrating ICT into the various education programs calls for new pedagogies and new approaches to teaching and learning. Such programs will strongly rely on the ability to structure learning environments in nontraditional forms. Similarly, ICT must be paired with new pedagogies. Finally, ICT must foster socially-dynamic learning opportunities, stimulating

cooperative interaction, collaborative learning and group work. Instructors must acquire such competencies as needed, in order to effectively teach their students (UNESCO, 2008).

Information and communications technologies are, no doubt, the road map to achieve high quality nontraditional education. They contain the supporting tools and methods necessary to set up effective curricula, thus significantly aiding students in achieving their learning goals (Cabero & Aguaded as cited in Imbernón et al., 2011). Similarly, Zamora (2002) pointed out that developing IT competencies among instructors, as part of their own formative curricula, is not just relevant, but essential. Without doubt, the teaching-learning evaluation process would greatly benefit from this optimizing process,

especially when integrating resources such as WebQuest, a didactic activity based on constructivist elements of learning (Adell, 2004).

Integrating the Internet into an individual's everyday activities transcends the mere ongoing quest for information. Its real importance lies in it turning into a technological tool, ideally suited to furthering the learning of an individual on any level. Furthermore, pairing the Internet with education results in multiple applications, thus facilitating the transfer of knowledge, for example: e-learning, online education, part-time courses, virtual education, blended learning and mobile-units education – each fostering the study of ICT and its potential applications in the education process.

This new reality compels all faculty to ponder their roles and competencies, as well as their workloads, teaching schedules and “presence” (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009; Parsad & Lewis, 2008; Vaughan, 2007). This new perspective in understanding instructors' roles and their competencies has encouraged an integral transformation characterized by new education approaches that were neither understood nor taken on in years past. Today, meeting higher-level education demands has meant readjusting curricula, integrating technology into the teaching-learning process, going increasingly online and adapting and adjusting to those described as nontraditional students (McShane, 2004).

UNESCO (2008) developed ICT competency standards for instructors. Their goal is to improve across-the-board instructor performance through combining ICT competencies with innovations in pedagogy, study plans (curricula) and school organization. UNESCO's project aims to improve instructors' general competency levels, as well as the education system, furthering social and economic development. These competencies are outlined in the table below:

| Politics and vision | Basic notions of ICT | Deepening knowledge | Generation of knowledge |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Study plans and evaluation | Basic knowledge | Application of knowledge | 21st century competencies |
| Pedagogy | Integrate ICT | Solving complex problems | Self-regulation |
| ICT | Basic tools | Complex tools | Widespread technology |
| Organization and management | Standard classroom | Collaborative groups | Learning organizations |
| Training of professional instructors | Learning ICT ABCs | Management and guidance | Achieving the model instructor |

Source: UNESCO, 2008, p. 9

Conclusion: Structure Independent Studies Based on ICT: The Way to Assure Our Institutional Commitment With Our Student Population, With High Quality and Flexibility

First of all, we need to define “structured independent studies” as flexible study options (including both individualized and more generic guided independent studies),

supported by a learning contract and a weekly assignments calendar, with intensive technological usage. In order to accomplish those purposes, the faculty member should create a virtual environment through Moodle integrating synchronous activities (using Blackboard Collaborate, social media tools such as Facebook and WhatsApp messaging, among others), and asynchronous activities

(using academic forums, videocasts, podcasts, blogs, wikis, and specialized links to upload reading assignments and any other activity).

Exhibiting different ICT tools and systems that claim to improve educational quality will not assure their implementation in the educational process, nor their effective use. The key to taking advantage of how those tools are

used is the faculty; therefore, all faculty must have (or gain) the competence and the right attitude toward technology (Kadel, 2005).

ICT is a permanent fixture of higher education: it is here to stay. In the near future, pressure to adopt ICT, not only in distance learning but in both traditional and nontraditional learning, will only increase. Institutions need to adopt a continuous professional development routine, so as to effectively integrate technology into the education process. They, moreover, must be ready to make the best of ICT, especially when focusing on different learning contexts such as: student interaction routines and independent learning, and goals such as adapting to student interests, promoting cooperation on assorted tasks, and helping students to develop autonomy both at work and at school (Toro & Joshi, 2012).

Notwithstanding the financial backing needed or given to support and acquire educational technologies, to date, the results are generally disappointing (Selwyn, 2007). Even those faculty willing to adopt technology often lack the technical know-how, skills and necessary experience (Buczynski & Mall, 2010). In my opinion, this is the great wall we need to confront in order to improve our independent studies at Empire State College.

Academia is highly conservative. But today, higher education institutions not actively engaged in integrating technology into their

“Academia is highly conservative. But today, higher education institutions not actively engaged in integrating technology into their practices may risk losing students.”

practices may risk losing students. In spite of consensus between technology suppliers and higher education decision-makers, rough spots remain. Schneckenberg (2009) has argued,

for example, that workshop results prove that faculty show weaknesses on effectively using ICT.

Technology, however, is itself in a permanent state of flux, of non-permanence. Successful and sustainable technology integration into teaching and learning requires probing and changing long-established beliefs and practices, as well as encouraging institutional thinking out of the box (Bates, 2000; Cook-Sather, 2001).

Effective technology-based education, however, requires the integration of faculty and these new tools. Where faculty were once purveyors of knowledge, they are now knowledge facilitators. Today’s society expects (indeed, demands) new education paradigms: an open, flexible, high-quality education for a new world. Instructors’ inadequate ICT teaching competencies stem as much from their reluctance to change as they do to higher education institutions’ administrators’ lack of planning and willpower.

Finally, we must protect one of the most important and fabulous differentiator components in our college: our independent studies. Obviously, we are committed to improving them. In doing so, we need to take two fundamental elements into consideration: 1) stimulation of faculty to change their attitudes toward ICT; and 2) enforcing the concept of structured independent study, aided by new uses of ICT as a way to respond our students’ learning needs, and to the realities of higher education today.

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“University policy-makers, managers and teachers need to apply ‘joined-up thinking’ to technology use. This involves identifying and specifying the aims and purposes of using technology to support teaching and learning, bearing in mind that terms such as these are open to a variety of interpretations by those involved. Further, changes in one organizational area are likely to have consequences in a number of others. Consequently, achieving innovation with technology has implications for many aspects of institutional culture. ...”

– Adrian Kirkwood

*Teaching and Learning with Technology in Higher Education:
Blended and Distance Education Needs
‘Joined-Up Thinking’ Rather than Technological Determinism
Open Learning, 29(3), 2014, p. 21*

In Response to Kim Hewitt's "From the Wilds of Sabbatical: A Reflection on Transformation"

Anastasia L. Pratt and Elaine Handley, Northeast Region; Steve Lewis, Hudson Valley Region; Deborah J. Smith, Frank Vander Valk and Kim Hewitt, Center for Distance Learning; Robert Carey, Metropolitan Region

We were very pleased to include Kim Hewitt's essay, "From the Wilds of Sabbatical: A Reflection on Transformation" in All About Mentoring #46 (winter 2015, p. 45-48). We thought that the ideas, the criticisms – the overall spirit – of Kim's essay might provoke further valuable conversation about the nature and quality of our mentoring work at SUNY Empire State College. It was in this context that we invited a number of colleagues to respond. Thanks to them for their willingness to participate and for their thoughtful commentaries; and, of course, thanks to Kim for her original piece and for her response, which also is included here.

Anastasia L. Pratt, Northeast Region

Kim Hewitt's description of the mentoring life and its demands rings very true. Heaven knows that I often find myself wondering how I can find the time to do one more thing, to meet with one more student or to participate on one more committee. Yet, one of Kim's ideas stands out for me. She writes, "If you care about something, you are engaged with your heart, your body, your whole being. If it touches you, it has the power to transform you" (p. 46).

That idea describes the role that mentoring has in my life.

Whenever I feel the need to recharge, whenever I feel the need to rest or to step away from the daily grind, I reflect on my students. I think about the mentees who, after graduation, call or write to express their thanks and to tell me about the great new job they have or the amazing graduate school in which they have enrolled. I think about the students who are still struggling through their programs, grateful for the chance to be part of this educational venture. I even think about the most challenging of students, the people who require the most time and attention. Then I remember

how much I have learned from each of them. They have touched my life and have helped to shape me as an educator and as a person.

How fortunate I am that my work allows me to engage regularly in that kind of transformation.

Steve Lewis, Hudson Valley Region

More than two years into a "sabbatical without walls" (i.e., retirement), I am still reflecting back on my long and evolving relationship with SUNY Empire State College – and thus was fascinated by Kim Hewitt's narrative about transformation during her recent sabbatical. Let me amend that: fascinated *and* disheartened. Fascinated because I loved being a part of the college community through the 1980s and 1990s for its core values, its marvelously unwieldy practice and the remarkable transformations – professional and personal – I experienced during those years. Disheartened because it is so clear that Hewitt has never had the magical experience I knew as an overworked mentor in what was then a living, breathing, messy, transcendent expression of alternative one-on-one education.

For me, this unfortunate institutional transformation began sometime after the visionary, James Hall, left the college. Due to what, in retrospect, appears to be a regrettable confluence of cultural, political and economic factors, the audacious educational experiment that was the "SUNY College Without Walls" was slowly walled in by the crippling structures of traditional higher education.

Administrative goals were set in place that would inexorably undermine the college's hallmark appeal for nontraditional students and a faculty committed to the unique mentoring relationship. Soon enough, the elegant *suis generis* learning contract was under attack, as was the time-consuming though

endlessly inspiring face-to-face educational planning session and the artful process of life experience evaluation. In their place were grades, rubrics, prescribed curricula, standardized courses and an institution-wide lack of respect for experiential learning.

The result? In 2015, good mentors like Kim Hewitt have been robbed of knowing the myriad satisfactions of personal and professional transformation *while mentoring*, not only during sabbatical.

Deborah J. Smith, Center for Distance Learning

I have always believed everything you learn transforms you. Even coal-mining.

The negative, the positive, the centered, the unbalanced, the whole lot, is a route to transformation for the individual. In encountering life, whether through formal education, one's own exploration, a sabbatical journey, an interaction with another or engagement in daily life, you learn more about yourself and more about the world. In so doing, you are not the person you were at the start.

Unlike many, I feel no real need to engineer transformation. Simply by its nature, all learning is transformative. This, however, does not preclude an obligation to teach well, understand the subject or establish rapport with one's students or mentees. But it does say to me that one learns, and one is transformed.

Robert Carey, Metropolitan Region

Kim Hewitt's piece, "From the Wilds of Sabbatical: A Reflection on Transformation" takes us through her views on the pressures, joys, horrors and chronic pains associated with being a mentor and organizing one's life based

on a 12-month contract. As she moves into a sabbatical year and the weights of teaching duties, college service and the like fall away from her shoulders, she rediscovers reading, she gets reacquainted with the challenges and delight of drilling into a research topic; she can list in hilarious detail what any faculty member at Empire State College will certainly recognize as the realities of their everyday life. She is out from under and enjoys the spot that sabbaticals create: to look back over what one has been doing and assess the cost and remaining possibilities.

Which brings the reader of this reflective recounting to ponder the possibilities of the “transformation” term that looms large in her thinking about her work, as something more worthy and central to our work – something that we should want for ourselves and our students.

Reading that made all my theological alert lights start to blink red; it is a huge term, that is, I gather “au courant” in ed. speak circles. I am not certain what it intends: it assumes that something is busted that needs fixing and so far as I can see, never actually closes with what mastery involves. It is one of those “good” things that we should want for our students: “The process of transformation, for students and faculty, requires the time and space to digest what nurtures us” (p. 48).

Fair enough (though “nurture” is another of those doughy terms), but if we are, as educators, to look at learning in developmental terms, then we are talking about mastery, about a kind of literacy that allows a student to see things in more detail than they did before they started. We are talking about helping students chart a course away from the pieties and clichés, bromides and old saws they learned at the kitchen table and that pass for knowing what is going on. Teaching and learning is – like learning to run – a function of measurable performance: better is better than merely good, best is something to aspire to and work for. This is deeply purposive development; it has its costs, but it is a gateway moment; we can design for it. I think if we let go of the big balloon terms and look at what is central to our work, we can actually chart how to make those moments of awareness and mastery occur. We also will be left with an interesting question:

How does our being researchers really prepare us for the day in and day out work of saying: Not bad, let’s try that again?

Elaine Handley, Northeast Region

Kim’s article moved me; I have had the same realizations a few times over the 23 years I have worked at ESC, when I have been able to have a little distance from my work, get some rest and have time to reflect. I remember that one thing that drew me to an academic life was my belief that it would offer me time to reflect, something I make room for in educational planning for my busy adult students, urging them to take time to think about what they want from their degree beyond the credential. But in fact, my own reflection seems rare, often done in the middle of insomniac nights or during brief, intense encounters occasionally with a colleague.

And transformational learning? Yes, I believe in it, I hunger for it, I try to create the opportunity for students to experience it. And sometimes they do and that is an absolute high. It’s an affirmation for the academic life. And sometimes they give up before they can experience it and it is hard not to feel like I have failed them, that in the face of so many personal struggles and even suffering, maybe academia is an ivory tower.

And the truth is sometimes I dedicate so much time and energy to my students and academic work that I fail others in my life – and myself. The ability to find balance eludes me. The need to be grounded and present in my life, for my students, my family and friends, my creative and scholarly work is my daily goal and struggle. Yes, maybe it is part of the human condition to try to find the balance we seek, but I am made sad by all the opportunities that have passed me by, both within ESC and beyond it, because I was just too busy or too exhausted to be grounded and present. The truth is, I have come to believe, if I do my job to the best of my ability at the college the way the job is currently configured, there is little left over for anything else in my life.

Frank Vander Valk, Center for Distance Learning

In the same issue of *All About Mentoring* in which Kim Hewitt’s sabbatical report appears, one also can find an interview with Dr. James Hall, the first president of Empire State College. In the course of the wide-ranging interview, conducted by our colleague Ed Warzala, Hall describes the role of the Empire State College mentor. Hall is clear that the ESC faculty role “is not a counseling job.” He continues: “I want to underscore that ... I always thought of the role as that of an intellectual coach” (p. 76). This is an intriguing description of mentoring. Qua faculty mentors, there are limits to our roles at ESC, of course. A line is drawn between mentoring and other sorts of supports for students. First and foremost we are charged with the continuing intellectual development of our students, and mentoring (i.e., helping our students identify and succeed in appropriate learning opportunities) provides a model for supporting this development.

But, what does it mean to be an “intellectual coach,” especially in light of the institutional challenges that Hewitt has outlined and the extra-institutional pressures that weigh upon the “higher education sector”? At the very least, it suggests that the core function of faculty mentors is an intellectual one. Registrarial, clerical, administrative and counseling functions (however one might construe those various activities) need to exist, of course, but the intellectual center must hold. Further, such a claim suggests that the intellectual work of students and faculty ought to take place in a cultural and cognitive space – Hewitt describes it as “a space of rapport with students” – that is created and perpetually re-created by the college (p. 47). Rather than the factory imagery that may capture the current educational ethos, perhaps a more appropriate analogy for this space, at least in its ideal form, is a gymnasium. With the proper coaching and supports, the benefits of work performed at a gymnasium redound to the athlete/student. Often, the more difficult the exercises, the greater the long-term benefit. And, as personal trainers and physical therapists around the world can attest, to get optimal results one needs to have a strong (in this case, intellectual) core.

However, this approach to intellectual labor is at odds with the factory mentality that seeks to make learning overly efficient, predictable, reportable and ... easy. There is something hollow and dishonest about asking mentors and students to hammer away at widgets all day and then praise widget-making as great exercise, as though the factory were really just a more convenient and technically advanced version of the gymnasium. Widget-making can be a worthwhile endeavor that is undertaken by interesting and flourishing people, but we ought not mistake it for the type of activity one finds between student and intellectual coach. Hewitt's piece speaks to the costs of making this mistake.

All of this is merely to say that a college should make the continuing existence of vibrant, robust and creative learning environments the highest priority. The mentoring relationship can help to keep open such a space, especially if mentoring hews closely to Hall's description of intellectual coaching and mental exercise. (It is an open question whether a purely instrumentalist, neo-Skinnerian approach to education can sustain such a space, but that is an issue for another time.)

But the mentor-as-coach-not-counselor idea goes further than simply recognizing the obvious fact that teaching and learning are intellectual activities. A coach strives to bring out the best in her players. To do this, a coach challenges. A coach exercises her judgment (gained through experience) with regard to the lesson that a particular moment demands. And, a coach who expects any measure of success from her students or athletes will understand that such success demands both hard, challenging work and a space in which to perform this work. In the context of a college, it demands *intellectual* work and this is true whether the particular subject matter is nursing or medical sociology. Hewitt alerts us to a real and persistent problem for the future of any college: It is difficult to retain that which we hope to retain – students, academic quality, a culture of truly creative intellectual life or a distinctive pedagogical approach – if we aren't clear on the differences between core intellectual tasks and the kinds of supporting structures that are required.

As anybody with a sports background knows – if I may push the coaching analogy a little further – substantial preparation goes into the job behind the scenes. Game tapes are viewed, scouting reports digested, coaching clinics attended (or put on), players are recruited, meetings of the coaching staff are convened, supporting cast members (e.g., trainers, therapists) are consulted and their expertise incorporated into the big picture, playbooks must be devised, talent-utilization plans must be drawn up, general managers are consulted regarding acquisitions and trades. All of this preparation takes place prior to, and in support of, more visible coaching, either in a practice or a game. A successful team owner and/or management team will ask, “Are we providing the coaching staff with the resources, especially time and space, that they require?” We might ask the same question at Empire State College with regard to academic mentors, “Are we providing the intellectual coaching staff with the time, space and other resources that they require?”

Gaining clarity about the difference between intellectual labor and other forms of work performed by college staff does not privilege particular intellectual *content*. It does not suggest that one or another “family” of disciplines best captures the “essence” of education. It does not discount the employment or career goals of so many students or the absolute necessity of wide-ranging support services. Neither should such clarity-seeking be read as a naïve, ivory-tower idealization of the educational realities of these complicated times. The challenges associated with keeping intact a space for intellectual work and coaching are legion. But meeting a challenge first requires that the challenge be identified. Hewitt has performed a valuable service by articulating some important concerns.

Kim Hewitt responds:

I am so pleased that my essay resonated with so many colleagues here at the college. I hope it will provoke more discussion, but more importantly, I hope it can provoke change. Clearly, something is amiss when so many mentors feel so depleted by the duties of a role that can be joyful and “magical.” Is the origin of that burden the institutional move toward more traditional structures? I am not

so sure. It seems to me to be more a product of “doing more with less,” no matter how our institutional policies about degrees or prior learning assessment change. Others may feel differently, but I don't see the shift toward more traditional structures as the root of the problem.

ESC is a dynamic institution. I've been here 10 years and it has been in a constant state of flux – a steady flow of questions and possible changes in identity, and few answers. The responses to my piece raise important questions about mentoring. How closely can we maintain focus on the intellectual core of mentoring? What exactly is “transformation” and what kind of transformation are we seeking in ourselves and in our students? Do we have a right, or a responsibility, to value certain kinds of transformation over others? If we do, do we have a responsibility to work toward those transformations? I am always deeply impressed by the dedication to students that ESC faculty and staff exhibit. So many of us feel lucky to be part of a nontraditional college and lucky to be able to work with students in a way that can deeply engage important questions about the purpose of higher education.

I hope the conversation continues, but I also hope the endless discussion in which academics sometimes embroil themselves won't distract us from questions we need to answer: What kind of institution do we want to be and what kind of educational experience do we want to create? How will we support faculty and staff in providing that experience to students, especially if we value mentoring? How do we prevent burnout among our faculty and staff?

The issues I raise are not new. About five years ago, the college established a Blue Ribbon Panel to recommend changes to address the workload problems that had been identified again and again at ESC. After many meetings and many hours, the panel made its recommendations. I have not seen a single one of the Blue Ribbon recommendations implemented. What actions will we take to ensure that we work in an institution that maintains a stance of integrity toward its students, faculty and staff? I very much want to see the conversation continue, but endless discussion without action is meaningless.

Back to Nature: Tree Series



"Untitled #1" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"



"Untitled #2" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"

Marta Jaremko
Northeast New York Region

Marta Jaremko is an adjunct instructor with SUNY Empire State College, teaching oil, acrylic and watercolor painting studies at the Latham location. Born in Wroclaw, Poland, today she lives and works in Delmar, New York. She has an M.F.A. in studio art from the University at Albany and a B.A. in English literature from the University of Illinois. Some of her more recent group exhibitions include work shown at the Prince Street Gallery in New York City, and a regional exhibition in Woodstock, New York.

For many years, Jaremko's work has been representational and figurative, attempting to weave personal narrative into a larger historical context. Her paintings often deal with the immigrant experience and the roles that power, gender and culture play in contemporary society. (For a glimpse at some of this work, see <https://vimeo.com/101818345>.)

While working at her paintings with culturally weighty themes, Jaremko sometimes takes a break from that subject matter in order to make paintings without social significance or point of view. Those works are often based on observation and are mainly concerned with pushing paint around a composition until it feels right, and until all the formal qualities of a painting come together in a nontraditional context.



"Untitled #4" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"



"Untitled #5" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"



"Untitled #6" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"

That is the case with "Tree Series." They were done when Jaremko finished a narrative body of work where figures were predominant. Looking at the wooded grove in her backyard, she painted a number of different images based on the complex tangle of trees, branches, bushes and vines. The complexity of nature required drastic simplifications, and in some cases the suburban setting as she depicts it became less manicured and more wild than reality. The works are nontraditional compositions in the way they mostly frame the upper views of flora. Nevertheless, they convey the idea of trees growing in a landscape.

Jaremko also teaches painting and drawing in her studio in Delmar (The Artist Studio; see <http://www.theartiststudioindelmar.com>). She offers SUNY Empire students the opportunity to study in a working artist environment through her Art Studio Experience course. In summers, she offers a *plein air* study, Painting Outdoors, which meets on the banks of the Mohawk River.



"House in Clearing" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"



"House in Woods" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"



"House in Village,"
2011, Oil on canvas,
8" x 10"



"Woods" (tree series), 2013, Oil on panel, 9 1/2" x 8"

“The Struggle to be Critically Conscious”: Two Mentors in Conversation

Frances A. Boyce, Long Island Region; Shantih E. Clemans, Metropolitan Region

This article is the result of a conversation we had about our perspectives and experiences on race, racism, privilege and identity in the practice of our mentoring and teaching at SUNY Empire State College. This project also is about collaboration and the power of dialogue.

Deciding to Talk

Shantih Clemans: Frances and I had gotten to know each other a little bit over the last year and connected around talking about the complicated subjects of race and racism, particularly how race as a construct comes up in our teaching and at the college. I had recently read the book *Breaking Bread*, by bell hooks and Cornel West (1991). It is a conversation where a black man and a black woman talk about what it means to be a black intellectual. hooks and West don't necessarily agree in this book; that is the point of it. I liked the conversation format and wanted to do something similar with Frances. I was really interested in talking openly and honestly about a silent subject: race. I wanted to talk to Frances, a woman of color. I am a white woman and I thought Frances and I could learn from each other. I also wanted to expand the discussion to include other aspects of identity. For example, I am a lesbian and Frances is heterosexual. I wondered how we experience these two identities in our teaching and mentoring.

At the same time, I was teaching a study group, Cultural Competency in Human Services. Week after week, I was struck by the complexity of my role in this class – a white woman mentor – nearly all of the students in this group, and almost all of my students at the Brooklyn Unit, are women of color, mostly from the Caribbean. I wanted to talk about the dynamic I strongly felt of being the “white person in power” in a room of women of color who do not necessarily experience power in

their everyday lives. I also wanted to talk to Frances about her experiences teaching what I thought were mostly white students. I wanted to know what it was like for her.

Frances Boyce: The reason I wanted to start this project stems from Shantih's project on mentoring in groups last year. This was a reassignment through the Center for Mentoring and Learning where Shantih interviewed mentors about teaching and mentoring practices, struggles and challenges. [Shantih's report can be found at http://cml.esc.edu/programs/CML_reassignments_2013_2014.] As she interviewed me, this unusual intersection of our teaching became clear. We are in different areas of study but teach a similar topic: in Business, Management and Economics (BME), it is the Diversity Management study, and in Community and Human Services (CHS), it is Cultural Competency. One important addition to this context is that we both teach the topic to students who are primarily different colors from us. I was eager to have this conversation because discussions on race and how to teach topics of diversity can be uncomfortable. I felt that both Shantih and I could sit with any discomfort and have a deep conversation. In many ways, racial issues can imply judgment; to step back from that takes practice, commitment and a sense of security in the conversation. In my opinion, to move toward a world with less bias, each person must be deeply introspective and honest about his or her bias. I do not believe there is ever a moment when I say I am not biased because the work to be without bias is ongoing.

We decided to have a planned conversation with the hope that our talk would lead to a more honest dialogue about identity and mentoring. We talked on the phone and recorded the conversation. Shantih then transcribed the recording and we both



Photo Credit: Jared Stone-Rigg

Frances A. Boyce and Shantih E. Clemans

reviewed it and pulled out parts that seemed especially meaningful. We also reflected on what the conversation meant to us.

Our Conversation

S.C.: It's very nice to have this conversation. I was thinking of a question from the book *Breaking Bread* by bell hooks and Cornel West (1991). bell hooks asks something like: “What does it mean to engage in a collaborative process?” I got the idea that we are sort of doing the same thing. Maybe that is a good way to start our conversation. I was thinking one of the reasons why I wanted to have a conversation and write this article was that mentors don't talk enough about differences, especially race and gender, as these factors influence us and our teaching. I think we are on to something.

F.B.: I agree with you completely. I don't think we talk about race at all in a comfortable way. It is complicated to talk about.

S.C.: I was thinking about teaching Cultural Competency to a group of mostly black women students as a white faculty member, and you teaching your diversity studies as a faculty member of color – maybe our

experience as women are different; maybe similar. What is hard and what is easy for you in teaching Diversity Management?

F.B.: I think the things that are easy for me are areas where I am part of the dominant culture. So when it's religion, because I am Christian; sexual orientation, because I am heterosexual. It's those areas that are easier in the conversation, because there is no concern about my interpretation, because I am dominant or that's the perspective of the student. When is it easier for you?

S.C.: I think that it is interesting when you say that, when we talk about heterosexism, as a lesbian, that is when it is really hard. I am not in the dominant group anymore. I always come out to my students ... not in a big way, not like making a big announcement, but I may mention my partner, my kids, that we are a two-mom family. I notice that my students are hesitant, they may feel homophobic about something, they are unsure about their feelings. I always feel that fear in my gut, that the students will not want to say something honest, or they will say something hurtful and heterosexist, forgetting that they may insult me. On the other hand, I want them to be honest; I don't want them to protect me. I think they don't want to talk about "white people this" or "white people that" with me in the room, as their teacher. I would not say that it is uncomfortable per se, but I am conscious of it. They are afraid of being honest about white people because I am there.

F.B.: I think it is a really difficult thing because I have a race that is not readily identifiable, so there are times when we get to discuss the Asian population when the students can see clearly that is not me, that is not my race, so they loosen up a little bit. But it is really challenging to get to the point where they feel comfortable, and I always talk about the fact that we all have biases, even if we think we don't, we all do. So I have started using a YouTube video on the neuroscience of implicit bias [available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzz5Ae-Jq0s#t=47>], so it sort of takes away the judgment and lets people see that it is this chemically ingrained response in their brain. This is my first term using it. I am hoping that eases some of the tension in saying what you are.

S.C.: I think a similar thing happened in my study group this term. Many of my students toward the end of the term talked about what they got out of the study. Students overwhelming said, "as a black woman ... I never thought I was racist, I never thought I had biases against gay people ..." or whatever, but they learned how to identify their biases through being in the study group and I thought, "That's great!" As hard as it is, I thought, that is really great.

F.B.: It is interesting because I had one student last term, a black woman, and she recognized through the course that she had been biased toward one of her co-workers, and she had this incredible emotional response because she knows what it is like to be treated with bias, and realized that she had treated someone else in that manner. And what came to the student is that she would like to design her research project around what happened here. The student went to the woman (her co-worker) and said, "Would you be OK if I did my research project on our experience?" The co-worker agreed and the end result was really interesting.

S.C.: What is the research assignment that your students in this study have to do?

F.B.: I want them to research a group they know nothing about. They need to understand the biases and prejudices of that group. In this example, it was a Hindu woman and this student did not know anything about the Hindu faith, or about the prejudice they face or anything. This actually was a beautiful thing, because the Hindu woman said to my student: "Let me introduce you to my faith ... so you can get an understanding. ..." Even how children are named in that faith is very important. It was really an incredible moment for me.

S.C.: That is really amazing! I really appreciate hearing that. It sounds like this student had an aha moment. Do you *require* your students to research a group that they know nothing about?

F.B.: Yes.

S.C.: In my study, I require an interview but I have not been brave enough to say, "You have to do something you know nothing about," so many of my students interview someone they

know, someone who is the same or different, Next time, maybe I will say, "You have to interview someone from a group you know nothing about." I like that idea.

F.B.: Generally, I don't pick topics for my students. I like students to go through the process of picking out a topic on their own, with my help, but sometimes a student will say something and I may say, "That is something for you to research and we will discuss further." There have been a few times ... part of it is that I don't fully step out of my human response and I am thinking, "What you just said is really a problem. And it indicated that you have some things that you don't understand." I think this is one of the reasons why people don't explore what their biases are; they don't recognize they have them.

S.C.: I think you are right. In CHS, there really is an emotional component in identifying one's biases. It is painful, for me and for the students. Some students don't want to go down that path or they are not in the right environment where it is going to feel safe and supported, so I am not surprised that people don't recognize their racism; it is painful.

F.B.: One of the things that I feel I am trying to show students is that people in general make so many decisions about people's careers and lives and people are making these decisions based on biases, and you are affecting somebody else's life, whether they get a job, whether they get a promotion, whether they get a raise – it can lead to so many other things.

S.C.: There are so many parallels to something that you just said. Many of my students in CHS are working in substance abuse, working with families, working in shelters and we talk about similar things – not so much about hiring and firing, but about how their biases are going to influence how you work with this client, whether you provide service to this family who walked in the door, your assumptions about what this person needs. One's biases really do affect how someone is treated in employment or the services they are getting. I see a lot of parallels.

F.B.: It is really interesting because one of my students also from last term is a white woman who is on public assistance and she talked about her experience going into the waiting

room of the public assistance office and how people looked at her like, “Why are you here?” Because she looks like the stereotypical, “We think you should be fine” person – she is white, she is blond, she’s got blue eyes, and “she should be fine.” She had a really different perspective on things. And she was really stunned; it was really interesting how she approached her project.

S.C.: That is interesting: so she had privilege in one way and invisibility in another way.

How the subjects of human diversity and cultural competency are addressed in our respective areas of study is something Frances and I discussed next. We had a lot of similarities and differences.

Perception is impactful and pervasive in all types of human interaction, whether the interaction is in a business setting, social service or personal, the first impression impacts behavior. There are many studies that demonstrate discrimination in hiring practices. The wage gap for women is openly discussed. However, in teaching business, the discussion of diversity is isolated in one study. It actually impacts many areas of business.

S.C.: Does BME require diversity studies?

F.B.: Yes. It is driven by the industry. In 2000, when they did the census, we learned that the demographics were shifting and there would not be enough white men graduating from college ... to fill all available jobs. So you need to start to train your upcoming workforce on how to deal with a diverse workforce. Diversity is there, but because it is a response to the changing demographics of a changing population.

S.C.: In your mentees’ degree plans, what are some examples of studies they take in BME to fulfill that guideline?

F.B.: Basically it is either Diversity Management or Diversity in the Workplace.

S.C.: In CHS, we have six guidelines and it was only recently that “Diversity,” as a separate guideline, was added. I always have students figure out a specific study. I am happy to have this requirement, but I also want diversity content to be infused in everything. Do we assume studies are all from one perspective? Maybe, but it shouldn’t be.

F.B.: It is interesting. One of my colleagues said to me: “If you don’t understand diversity, you don’t understand how to do your job.” She was actually the first person who was reading the Derald Wing Sue books (Sue & Sue, 2012) and saying, “You should actually take a look ...” because cultural diversity has implications everywhere.

S.C.: Yes! The way that I have taught diversity, whether it is right or wrong, I don’t know, and you and I have talked about this – that it is more about the student, it is an internal process that happens through being self-aware and recognizing your own biases. It is not, “Oh this group does this, and this group does that.” Seeing the internal transformation that can happen – and it does not always happen – but that is something that will hopefully stay with the student.

We talked extensively about self-awareness. It is through that struggle for self-awareness of our biases that leads us to a deeper understanding of who we are and the people around us. There is a quote from Breaking Bread that makes sense to our conversation: “That the struggle to be critically conscious can be that movement which takes you to another level, that lifts you up, that makes you feel better” (hooks & West, 1991, pp. 16–17).

The idea is that one must struggle, but through that struggle you grow as a person. The previous section is framed around the belief we share of the importance of self-awareness. Without that, it is difficult to recognize biases.

Diversity is an important aspect of student learning and what we think about as mentors. It is crucial to students to know that mentors believe they can be successful at college. For marginalized students, that may be more impactful due to the level of microaggressions they experience in everyday life, and the subtle interpreted messages that higher education is where the student belongs.

Our Conversation Continues

F.B.: It is interesting. I think a lot about prejudice. We have always looked at prejudice and thought we have to fix other people. I don’t believe that. You have to look inside yourself. You have to be brutally honest about your words and our actions and about how you go forward. I used to call it “passive racism” because that was just a term I gave it, but reading about implicit bias, this is what I

meant, and sort of seeing neuroscience to back it up, and this is what I am talking about. Now there is a word that goes along with what you were thinking.

S.C.: I think that the “Women of Color” PLA [prior learning assessment] project is one of the first things that you and I talked about. It was really interesting when you talked about the fact that it is really so important for women of color to do PLAs. I did not know then that women of color who do PLAs are more likely to graduate. It was really exciting. Because of that conversation, I have been encouraging my students – who are all women of color, as we know – to do PLAs. I really feel that because of you and Cathy Leaker [associate dean, Metropolitan Center] and your collaborative project, my eyes were opened to how meaningful the PLA process can be. Just having a mentor say: “Have you thought about PLA?” And the student saying, “Me? I don’t have anything to offer.” It was an interesting, eye-opening experience for me.

F.B.: Cathy Leaker and I started this project, “Women of Color: Valuing Experience, Identifying Learning” in 2011. One of my biggest issues and challenges personally doing the project was that I did not have an adult vocabulary or an academic vocabulary to talk about race. I moved to an all-white town when I was 7, so I had sort of this stunted vocabulary about race, and that had to sort of evolve and grow. And actually realizing and figuring out a way to articulate feelings about race, there has actually been a lot of research done. I was just busy with other things.

One of the things I have been thinking about recently is that one of the reasons I think doing PLA is so impactful – and I don’t have anything to back it up, it’s just an idea I had – is that we are looking at people who are coming to the college who didn’t think they would fit in an academic setting. They didn’t have the feeling they would belong, and you have an academic person saying, “I think that knowledge you already have is college-level and worthy of college credit” – I think that helps them feel more connected to the college, more connected to the idea that they are part of this. When you talk about how much it costs to do PLA ... how much does it cost to change a person’s view of themselves?

S.C.: That is priceless.

F.B.: Yeah. We have seen some women come back to us. It has taken them maybe longer to do PLA, but part of the reason is because they felt empowered in other areas of their lives, they came back and said, based on the PLA workshop series saying: “I went out and got a new job, because I wasn’t being treated well where I was working.”

S.C.: I don’t think we always see the results. There can be things that happen down the road, for example, students also learn self-confidence and the ability to go after something else. So are you going to continue to do the project?

F.B.: Yes. The problem is that we don’t have time to write and go to conferences and do the project. There is just not enough time to do it all.

Our conversation moved to related topics of gender and sexual orientation.

S.C.: One thing we did not yet touch on in this conversation is gender: maybe we view the colleagues who are women a certain way, maybe we perceive them differently for being women, how talkative they are, how strong they are. I am always conscious of gender issues in the college.

F.B.: Yes, among the women. I notice that people do not respond well to a strong female voice. Even women don’t always respond well to it.

S.C.: Women are often the ones challenging any notion of feminism; it is often the women who are threatened by this.

F.B.: I ask my students, “Are you a feminist?” And when they say no, I say, “Let’s Google what that means” and I have them read the definition and I ask them what part they disagree with.

S.C.: I do the same thing. I ask my students: “What part of women’s equality do you disagree with?” I really feel not wanting to identify as feminist is connected to students’ feelings that if they love or even like men, they can’t be a feminist.

F.B.: Yes and it means “If I am a feminist it means I am a lesbian.” And that connection is made and people think, “Oh no there must

be something really wrong if people think you are a lesbian!” So they think you should be fearful of this and you better say you are not a feminist.

S.C.: It is really rooted in our broader culture.

F.B.: This is an area where I can say, “You are stepping away from everything that will benefit you so someone won’t judge you. I ask my students: What would happen if somebody judged you for being a lesbian?”

S.C.: Yes, exactly. Even in this last year, in the Cultural Competency study that we talked about in the beginning of our conversation, my women students had to read bell hooks, so many of them selected hooks’ (2004) book, *The Will to Change: On Men and Masculinity*, and they loved it. However, it struck me as noteworthy that all of the women wanted to read about changing men and it wasn’t so much direct fear of being thought of as lesbian – that did not come up directly – but I think the students felt more connected to challenging notions of patriarchy because they are more connected to men and male culture in their families and their lives. As women, they are part of a patriarchal cultural.

F.B.: Yes, this goes along with my thinking on prejudice: people feel we can fix other people, but it is much harder to look at yourself.

S.C.: This conversation was great, Frances. I really enjoyed talking to you.

F.B.: I loved it.

Reflecting on Our Conversation

After we each read the transcripts of our conversation, we wrote a reflection on what the conversation meant to us and what our reactions were to reading the conversation in its transcript form.

F.B.: As we discussed the challenges we face teaching these studies, I felt a strong kinship with Shantih. While the challenges we face are different, the need we each feel to empower students to address the difficult issues is similar. We had the opportunity to share ideas on engaging students.

In reading the transcript, I was struck again by the openness of the conversation and the feeling that this was just the beginning. We touched on so many areas that I felt we could explore in more depth.

S.C.: I was excited before Frances and I spoke. I also was a little nervous. Even though talking about race is something I do often (and certainly something I think about all the time), I was conscious of the ease in which I can talk openly about this subject and of my privilege as a white woman. I also asked myself if I really do engage in open conversation about race or do I just think or hope that I do? During the conversation, I felt an immediate connection to Frances. I also was careful to stay open to our different perspectives and experiences, as well.

I knew right way that we had tapped into themes that are not often spoken about between mentors, for instance, racism, bias, and especially a white woman and a woman of color in open conversation about identity.

Closing Thoughts

We see this as both a beginning of a longer conversation and something powerful and meaningful in and of itself. Talking together across difference is powerful.

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Scholars Across the College 2013-2014

The Journey Continued: Five (Six) Ancient Egyptian Goddesses

Susan Tower Hollis, School for Graduate Studies

When I learned, early in 2013, that my application to be one of the Scholars Across the College for the 2013-2014 academic year had been successful, I was delighted. I had just completed a half-year sabbatical during which I had developed all the major parts of a book I've been under contract to write on the origins and early roles of five, actually six, ancient Egyptian goddesses, and I knew that being a "scholar" would allow me to share some of that work with my colleagues across the college. Indeed, as it turned out, most of the opportunities I had to discuss my work involved the topic titled "The Journey Continues: the Origins and Early Roles of Five Ancient Egyptian Goddesses," the choice of nearly all centers for my presentations/discussions.

The title derives from my Susan B. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship presentation at the All College Conference in 2007 titled "The Travels of Hathor: Journeys with an Ancient Egyptian Goddess." I presented on my journey with Hathor, a major Egyptian goddess from very early times about whose presence in the ancient Syrian city of Byblos I was asked at a professional meeting of biblical scholars in 2000. That is not to say I began my journey with this goddess or ancient Egyptian goddesses in general at that time, for I had been researching, presenting and publishing on various goddesses in professional meetings since 1986 – even in a faculty meeting at the Central New York Center (CNYC) when I worked there in the late '90s. Thus Neith, the oldest, followed by Hathor and then Nut, Isis and Nephthys, and including Bat, the very oldest and linked to Hathor, have been part of my research agenda for over a quarter of a century.

It was that question about the presence of Hathor in Byblos, asked of me in Memphis, Tennessee, however, that really pushed me to follow up on the origins, or at least the possible origins, of these deities in what continues for me as fascinating research. Few people actually are working on goddesses at all in the field, even on these important deities, though many are very interested in them, and my current research actually addresses their formation such as can be determined and hypothesized, as well as their early roles. Since I gave a poster session (my first ever, as we have not tended to do them in humanities until very recently) at Origins 5: Fifth International Conference of Predynastic and Early Dynastic Studies held in Cairo, Egypt in April 2014 suggesting a new approach to understanding how Hathor came to be, my various Scholars presentations during 2013-2014 tended to reflect that research and thinking, as I was actively engaged in developing the material during this time period. And marvelously I was able to speak with faculty, staff and administrators at every center in the college save the Center for Distance Learning (CDL) – all of which was great fun and made possible because of the efforts of Alan Mandell and Terri Hilton who helped with needed funding to support the travel and the many faculty chairs, deans and associate deans who welcomed me to the different centers.

My Scholars year began in late September at the Genesee Valley Center (GVC) with an invitation to speak at the center's "Discussion Day." Because of the late notice, my presentation made use of a presentation I had been invited to give at the University of California, San Diego at a four-day international conference devoted entirely to papers, posters and exhibitions related to questions surrounding the biblical Exodus. My



Susan Tower Hollis

particular assignment (when one's way is totally paid, one presents as one is assigned) was to address Egyptian literature and its reflection in the Hebrew Bible, so my topic there was titled "Out of Egypt: Did Israel's Exodus Include Tales?" When I presented a variant of this paper, which I'd spent my Faculty Reading Period revising for the conference publication at GVC, it was informally retitled by a couple of colleagues who felt it was better titled "Sexual Harassment in Ancient Narratives," a presentation also given at the Historical Studies area of study (AOS) meeting during the 2013 Fall Academic Conference. The actual presentation discussed the Ancient Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers," the topic on which I wrote my dissertation, and my GVC presentation reflected some of the discussion that had occurred at the Exodus conference along with reflections and thoughts I've entertained in the years since it was published

by the University of Oklahoma Press and then by Bannerstone Press in a second edition some 18 years later.

The reason my GVC colleagues wanted to retitle the presentation lies in its content: The hero of the Egyptian narrative was approached unsuccessfully for sexual favors by an older woman, in this case, his sister-in-law. The episode appears more commonly under the moniker of the Potiphar's Wife motif found in Genesis 39 of the Hebrew Bible, but even older variants – and the Egyptian narrative predates the biblical by many centuries – date from the early second millennium BCE (Before the Common Era). Of course, comments about the what, when and from where an “original” was derived, if such an original even existed, comprised part of the discussion. Clearly, however, the issue of a young, virile male gaining the attraction of an older female is a common part of human relations: eye candy! However, the fact of such harassment's presence over three, even nearly four, millennia ago, clearly led my colleagues to relate it to current issues of sexual harassment. Quite notably, this theme appears ubiquitously throughout cultures over time.

Both of the fall 2013 engagements resulted as much from convenience and availability as anything else. GVC needed a speaker; I was a scholar with a ready-to-go topic; and the rest is history. The Historical Studies AOS typically asks at least one of its members to speak on his or her current scholarship and research, a way especially for us to get to know new faculty in the field, at the Fall Academic Conference, and although not new, we also ask Scholars Across the College to present when they're historians, and so I was the one. Thus, I did two Scholars presentations in the fall of my term. However, history shows that the vast majority, if not nearly all, of the engagements for the college's Scholars Across the College occur during the spring and early summer of the scholar's year; that is, during its last half. This fact suggests that rather than having the Scholars' appointments for the academic year – September through the end of June – the award might rather encompass a spring-summer-fall appointment. After all, Scholars' presentations tend to occur during center meetings certainly all save the AOS and the Metropolitan and Van Arsdale Centers'

Dialogues at Noon sessions – and there are limited times and dates for these to happen if one can effectively book only January through June. If one can book from January through November-December, setting up a schedule during the preceding fall, a broader array of opportunities is available. Such an approach also reflects the reality of scheduling. Although the announcement about the actual new Scholars occurs in the late spring/early summer with reminders coming right after the summer Faculty Reading Period, organizing and arranging a presentation for the fall, both for a center and for the scholar, can be challenging. For the scholar, as implied by the circumstances surrounding my initial presentation at GVC, fall presentations present significant challenges as well, especially in an age when one doesn't simply lecture but one provides visuals and maybe even artifacts, all of which need considerable preparation. The situation becomes even more complex as a scholar is asked, on his or her application, for several possible topics among which the inviting body may choose.

As a specific example, I had four possible topics: “The Journey Continues: The Origins and Early Roles of Five Ancient Egyptian Goddesses”; a second topic focusing on our changing understanding of history and particularly on the beginnings of Egyptian history; a third addressing our ongoing fascination with both ancient and modern folktales; and a final one titled “International Interconnections in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean,” in which the focus would be on the “global world” that existed thousands of years ago and on the impact of different cultures on each other. Obviously, I could present on any one of the four, but I did not have “canned” presentations for any one of them. Hence, when I was asked to present at GVC in September 2013 with about two weeks' notice, what with the beginning of the term, new students, new studies, and in my case also a Graduate residency for which to prepare, I had to do something that was really pretty well ready to go, lacking time to develop a solid presentation with visuals specific to the occasion. The topic on which I did speak then was available, as noted, because of the conference at which I had presented early in the summer with subsequent work on it for publication. The situation was truly

serendipitous, as I had almost a ready-to-go presentation for that opportunity. Not all can be so lucky.

Furthermore, to arrange presentations actually falls largely on the shoulders of the scholars themselves, despite the several public announcements and general emails to associate deans and faculty chairs. Both Lorraine Lander, the other Scholar in 2013-2014, and I mostly made our own direct contacts with faculty chairs and/or others in the different centers to arrange for presentations. These contacts get made in the fall, so naturally spring and early summer engagements ensue – and such was definitely the case with me as I began in mid-January with a visit to the Hudson Valley Center (HVC) at their Newburgh location, having the chance during that trip to speak on the narratives topic for a nearby church, and then traveling in February, March, May and July, with a second presentation at GVC's Festival of Ideas in June (technically not part of the Scholar award itself). In each one of the centers – initially at HVC; February at the Niagara Frontier Center; March at the Northeast Center, School for Graduate Studies and Metro/VanArsdale Centers for Dialogues at Noon; May at the Long Island Center (LIC) in their Hauppauge location (a one day JetBlue round trip); and



Charles Edwin Wilbour's "Hathôr ou Ahtôr (Atar, Athyr, Aphrodite, Venus)," 1823-25.

Photo Credit: JEAN-FRANÇOIS CHAMPOLLION (BROOKLYN MUSEUM), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

finally, after the “year” was technically over, in July at CNYC – I found a welcoming group of people and engaged in lively discussions.

Each of these centers basically left it up to me to select the topic, and because numerous members of the faculty, staff and administration of every center had been present at my 2007 Susan B. Turben presentation on my journey with Hathor, as well as because of my poster session at the Origins 5 conference in Cairo in April, I chose to speak on my journey with the goddesses. Each presentation varied from the others to a degree, mostly reflecting my ongoing thinking as I prepared for my Egypt poster and trip, though obviously the presentations in May, June and July reflected the outcome of the trip. And the discussions and questions in each center led to further new thinking, for I had about an hour with each center; sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less.

The real outlier occurred at Metro/Van Arsdale as part of their Friday Dialogues at Noon, a studio-like situation with a very small group in actual attendance but broadcast on ESC-TV and recorded for others to see, thus possibly reaching CDL, and, in my case, students in a specific CDL course. The discussion there was really lively despite the small numbers, with the most surprising question of my entire Scholars experience coming during that experience when Dean Mike Merrill asked me what I as an Egyptologist thought of Thomas Mann’s magisterial *Joseph and His Brothers*. Wow!!! While not related to the goddess topic, it clearly was related to the narratives topic and to my overall work as an Egyptologist with connections in the biblical field. What he could not have known but does now, is that that question is what led me to where I am now. I first read Mann’s work in the early ’70s and was determined to learn if the embellishment of the Genesis narrative he developed in the novel – which uses all of Genesis from Chapter 12 through Chapter 50 with a major focus on the last 17 or so chapters – actually really reflected the world of the time. Intending to focus on the Hebrew Bible in graduate school to answer my question, I ended up as an Egyptologist, but I did answer that question: Yes, Mann engaged

in solid research and his work truly reflected the contemporary world as presented in his novel. But Mike is the only person I know who has actually read that work, a volume that is actually four volumes totaling over 1,400 pages in translation. Further discussion should occur.

My presentation at Hauppauge with the LIC people – and subsequently at CNYC – perhaps differed the most because it came post-Cairo presentation. By that time, my somewhat radical approach to Hathor’s beginning had been presented and discussed in Cairo with various Egyptologists, among whom was one of the real authorities on iconography from the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, Stan Hendrickx of Belgium. I was really ready to share that Hathor – and later Isis and Nephthys, too, (as will be presented, I hope, in Italy at another international conference of Egyptologists in August 2015) developed from a function, that is personifying the space in which the earliest kings were acclaimed, acknowledged and accepted as king – chosen by the god Horus as the ruler. While gods and goddesses in traditions with multiple deities tend to be related to nature and natural elements and functions (e.g., a storm god like Zeus, a goddess of love like Aphrodite and Venus), such is not the case for any of “my” Egyptian goddesses. Each of them, at least as I see them, derives from a function of some kind, though Nut, the sky goddess, can be argued otherwise, as well. This novel approach, goddesses developing from functions, first really appeared during my scholar year in my LIC discussion, though it had been suggested to a degree in the earlier ones. The resultant discussion was lively – and too short – as was the case for all my discussions. Indeed at HVC, the suggestion was made that SUNY Empire State College should have an occasional scholar-in-residence opportunity, a period of time when a scholar might come and present in various venues, both in the specific center for students, faculty and staff, and perhaps locally in the surrounding areas, thus providing significant outreach for the college. This interesting idea is just that: interesting, but it would be fun.

And in fact, while fitting all the trips in was a challenge, the opportunity to share and discuss as well as meet many people whom I had not met previously, and to visit locations of the college I had not been to previously, was a wonderful and invaluable experience and one I recommend to others.

I thank all who made my term as one of the Scholars Across the College such a rich and rewarding one: Alan Mandell and Terri Hilton, the Empire State College Foundation, center faculty chairs, associate deans, deans and especially my students who were understanding about my time spent elsewhere than in my office.

Thinking About Military and Veteran Students

Susan McConnaughy, Hudson Valley Region; Penny Coleman, School for Graduate Studies; Marina Privman and Maureen Kravec, Central New York Region; John Beckem, Center for Distance Learning; Desiree Drinkdak, Office of Veteran and Military Education

At the 2014 Fall Academic Conference, members of a panel titled “ESC as a National Model: Innovations in Academic Program Development for Veterans” shared their experiences serving veteran and active-duty military students. As a continuation of this discussion, we invited presenters and others to comment on their own work with these students. This compilation concludes with a set of “tips” from Desiree Drinkdak, interim director of the Office of Veteran and Military Education and mentor with the Center for Distance Learning, which can be useful to all of us as we help these students succeed.

For additional information on literature in this area, see the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning’s 2012 document, “Best Practices for Serving the Student Veteran” at <http://www.cael.org/pdfs/best-practices-handout-final>.

Common Life Trajectories for Veteran and Military Students at the Hudson Valley Center

Susan McConnaughy



Susan McConnaughy

Here I report the initial results of a small research project undertaken at the Hudson Valley Center (HVC) in order to profile our veteran and active military students (49 overall) so that we could grasp the range and diversity of veteran and active military students in our college.

I was inspired to do this research in June 2014 during our graduation ceremony for HVC. In our ceremony, we always ask the graduates who are veterans or active military to rise and be acknowledged for their service. It’s always a very moving part of the ceremony and they always get a standing ovation. This past June, when their names were called, I realized that one of my mentees/graduates was a veteran; he had told me this, but it had not really registered with me.

It surprised me because I felt that I had come to know him quite well over a year and a half. It struck me at that moment that I didn’t really have a sense of who our veteran students were in general, or what their military experiences were like. So I decided to try to describe them as a group so that I and others in our center would have a better sense of who they are.

I gathered information by first researching our 17 HVC 2014 graduates who were vets or active military. I pulled their concurred degree programs from NotesDP and their rationale essays from the center file. Then I got information on our remaining 32 current veteran/military students by interviewing their mentors.

Five common life trajectories emerged from this look at our veteran students. The categories break down into older and younger students; long out of the military, recently out of the military and still active in the military. Here I will give a composite profile of a student for each trajectory.

Trajectory 1. (Older veterans with substantial careers outside the military)

These are older students for whom military experience was an early life choice that is now in their distant past. In the intervening years, these students have had substantial careers outside of the military. When they come to SUNY Empire State College, they are in the process of retiring or transitioning from that civilian career and want a college degree. This is our most common student trajectory for veterans at HVC.

A typical student is “Bruce” who joined the military at 17 to leave a bad situation at home. He served in Vietnam and learned valuable skills in engineering. He served out his enlistment and when he came home, he built a company that was successful for several decades. Now he is retiring and wants the chance to do something very different – a B.S. in environmental science. He was able to use 29 credits gained from his military service during the Vietnam era. This boosted his motivation and enthusiasm significantly for earning his degree.

Military service may not play a significant role in the current lives of these veterans. In fact, you may never hear about their military service; you will hear about their current substantial career in law enforcement or aviation, for example. And they will be very happily surprised when they learn they can actually earn legitimate college credits for their long past military service.

Trajectory 2. (Older students with substantial military careers, either recently retired or planning to retire)

These are recently retired veterans or active military students who are preparing to retire from the military. They have completed a substantial career in the military, and they are looking for a college degree in order to transition to their next career or chapter in

civilian life. These students often find that a college degree is required in order to translate their military skills into civilian contexts.

A typical student is “Mitch” who, in his military role as station commander, became adept at managing projects, building consensus, inspiring others, preparing and presenting persuasive arguments and ensuring accountability, along with other skills. He wants to earn a B.S. in the Business, Management and Economics area, with the goal of managing people and programs in a corporate setting.

Trajectory 3. (Young recent veterans who are “launched”)

These are younger students – in their late 20s and early 30s – who have recently left the military as veterans of conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq. These are the veterans who were able to get a head start in their civilian careers through their experience in the military. They may have entered the military knowing that the military would train them and provide them with college benefits. They took it and ran with it.

“Andrew” is a young veteran from a local air force base, who gained substantial technical training in the military. He is quite clear how he wants to parlay these skills into a civilian job. As a recent vet, he is aware of the fact that he can get college credit at ESC for his military service. He is sailing through his ESC studies toward his degree.

Trajectory 4. (Young recent veterans who are struggling)

These also are younger students – in their late 20s and early 30s – who have recently served in Afghanistan or Iraq. But these students are more overwhelmed in the transition to civilian life, and they come to ESC searching for ways to reconstruct their lives in a civilian context. These students may have had a positive experience in the military overall, and yet the transition to civilian life is more daunting than they expected: taking on responsibilities for parenting, seeking work, charting a new course on their own, etc. There are other recent veterans who are struggling to process a negative experience in the military. Not all of these students have done so well in their first

terms at HVC – several have stopped out. A full-time academic load may not be realistic for these struggling veterans even though it is required in order for them to get financial support.

“Jason” is trying to work out housing, employment, medical care and school – lots of moving parts in the transition home, especially for someone without financial means or family to help. Every benefit he gets has bewildering requirements: just think of educational planning times 100! He really could use a life coach until he settles in. He is hanging on by his teeth. These young “searching” and somewhat overwhelmed students need our deep listening and the patience and flexibility ESC can offer its students.

Trajectory 5. (Active military, National Guard or Reserves)

We don’t have many active military students at HVC, but the members of this group of students typically serve in one of the Reserves or National Guards. They live in our area and do their service one weekend a month. It’s more like a second job that may or may not significantly affect their ESC studies, especially now that they are less likely to be deployed. As a result, mentors may not even hear about their service. “Madeline” is completing her degree at ESC as she serves in the Army National Guard in a military police capacity. She is hoping to use her service to segue to a civilian law enforcement role.

Conclusion

This small data mining study has brought to light some of the issues that shape the lives of our veteran and active military students in HVC. My sense is that we mentors will engage more with these students knowing something about the shape of their lives and what they may want from us here at ESC.

Veterans Studies and Progressive Values

Penny Coleman



Penny Coleman

At the Fall Academic Conference last year, I was part of a panel discussion on how successful SUNY Empire State College has been in its accommodation and support of student veterans. Following the conference, I received an email from Alan Mandell, within which he raised an issue he described as “the hardest,” one that “deals with deep, deep feelings.”

“Why is it,” Alan wrote, “that in our college we are not as quickly interested in so-called ‘peace studies’ – or other opportunities to deal with a very different orientation to our history and experience? I completely understand,” he noted, “the sincere effort to respond to the personal, academic and professional needs of those in the military and veterans; still I worry about some underlying ideological assumptions that are hovering around.”

As that is an issue that I also find extremely hard – one that touches deep, deep feelings in me, as well – so I’m going to take this opportunity to try to answer Alan’s question in a more thoughtful and detailed way than I answered it at the time. I, too, worry about those “underlying ideological assumptions hovering around.” In spite of a profound and

occasionally immobilizing ambivalence about the choices I've made, I wanted at least try to make a coherent case for what I prefer to think of as a "fifth column approach" to, rather than an abandonment of, what Alan calls "peace studies."

Some brief personal history. In 1970, I married a Vietnam vet who never managed to bring his heart and soul all the way home. At the time, there was no conversation about post-traumatic stress injuries. In retrospect, he had all the symptoms, and I now believe that his later suicide was either an execution for crimes committed or euthanasia to stop the pain of his memories – or some terrible combination of the two. That continues to break my heart.

The book I published in 2006, *Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Lessons of War* (Beacon Press), used the stories of other women who had suffered similar tragedies to frame a history of American responses to military trauma and suicide. The book launched a short journalistic career and a longer career as an advocate for the men and women whose lives might have been saved had they not been doubly betrayed: first by being sent to fight dirty, and finally unjustifiable, wars; and second by returning home to broken promises about the care and support they expected, and yet another round of blame and demonization when the untreated symptoms of their illnesses got them in trouble, and the expense of caring for their injuries became a political inconvenience.

Publically voicing my righteous outrage at the Bush administration's criminal propagation of our most recent conflicts and accurately predicting another round of inevitable soldier and veteran suicides offered some easy gratification. But after five years of targeting and smashing low-hanging fruit, I wanted to be involved in something more hopeful. With that in mind, and with the help of many colleagues, I conceived the Graduate Certificate in Veterans Services here at the college.

Veterans are respected and honored. According to a 2013 Pew Research Center poll, the military is currently held in higher esteem than any other profession, including teachers and doctors. Veterans are held up as exemplars of patriotism and citizenship. They have

legitimacy. They answered the call and know firsthand the risk accepted and the suffering endured by both soldier and family. They carry the burden of both individual and collective guilt, and know the terrible betrayal of empty thanks for their service. They have a right to anger and they aren't likely to forget. With a little history under their belts, a little help connecting the dots, in company with the equally committed, and supported by a vital academic community, theirs would truly be voices to be reckoned with.

In truth, when I find myself as the public face of this certificate program, I'm feel like I'm in drag. A nasty, but shrewd member of the House Armed Services Committee once dismissed me as a pinko lesbian from New York; but for the most part, as a Gold Star widow and a published author, my credentials go unchallenged. They serve as my "moustache" – part performance, part truth. I am aware of the irony. At the age of 67, married to a woman, with a long and proud commitment to antiwar and LGBTQ activism, I am coordinating a program that focuses on veterans and military families, a program in which most of my students call me ma'am, sign their emails "VR" (the proper military closing indicating a person of higher rank), and in which the morality of specific wars, or for that matter war in general, is generally not a topic of conversation.

What is a topic is the aftermath, the real costs and consequences, and the remedial interventions that have traditionally taken a back seat to the wars and their heroes that we tend to treat as the main events. The toll of invisible injuries and official efforts to dismiss their reality is a topic. So is the traditional misogyny of military culture, complicated by the fact that more men than women are the victims of the current epidemic of rape. And so is The Bonus March and the national disgrace, largely forgotten, of government turning military tanks on a tent city of desperate veterans in 1932.

All of these are examples of the notion, implicit throughout the program, that we have to find new ways of thinking and new ways of solving our problems because it is explicitly obvious that the old ways aren't working. That means questioning assumptions and authority, interrogating history and tradition, and

recognizing institutions as the often-flawed constructions of limited human beings. That sometimes means learning that constructive criticism of individuals or institutions isn't disloyalty, that leaders and American wars have not always been honorable and that our most sacred values, like freedom, are often reserved for some and not others. Even in America, lawful attempts to organize have been called rebellion. It's reality testing beyond the trenches for both civilian and military students. So we focus on promises that are kept and those that are not; policies that offer real support and those that don't; good will when it comforts and when it is undermined by ignorance; and advocates who succeed because they listen and those who fail because they know better.

Specifically, the course, Veterans Service and Public Policy (POL-623000), gives students a critical historical context within which to better understand that the conditions of military service and the current array of available benefits are the outcome of fierce debates grounded in ideological differences that have defined our politics since the Revolutionary War. Veterans Programs and Benefits (POL-623002) uses the VA manual as a central text, but the multidimensional situations they are likely to encounter that aren't necessarily covered in the manual serve as a reminder that the current policies are the result of centuries of debate and adjustment, warranting continuous critical review. Veteran Outreach, Services and Advocacy (POL-623001) provides a broad contextual grounding in the experience of war, the challenges of homecoming, the psychosocial landscape within which veterans services are offered and what ethical research and respectful community organizing looks like before they try their advocacy skills in a real world situation. Military and Veteran Culture: Developing Cultural Competency (POL-623004) asks students to recognize that "military culture" is convenient, if often misleading, shorthand that often obscures the very real differences in the ways that culture is experienced by individuals, depending on variables like rank, race, gender and sexual preference, and that without first examining their own perspectives, beliefs and cultivated sensitivities, the best-intentioned provider may actually do more harm than good.

What all four courses emphasize is the mutual responsibilities of citizens and their government, the imperative of an equitable allocation of government resources, and the cultivation of respect and understanding across differences – including military and civilian.

Which brings me back to Alan's question and those pesky underlying ideological assumptions hovering around. Clearly, I have been operating with the belief that educating veterans is an important progressive undertaking. Not more important than others; I don't believe that veterans deserve more than other citizens. I *do* believe that health care, education, housing and employment should be available to all citizens. We rise and fall on the same tide, and biopsychosocial disease in any part of a body is a contagion impossible to contain. In the current environment, veterans are a political third rail. They and their advocates are uniquely positioned to command federal, state and local attention and resources. My hope is that educated, empowered and organized veterans will imagine and advance solutions to problems that, when shown to be effective and economical, will serve as a template for the larger community.

The so-called civilian-military divide is real and dangerous, but no more so than disparities of wealth or race or religion. Learning to embrace cognitive dissonance and accept the destabilization of comfortable binaries is a practice that, if encouraged, becomes a habit of mind. The specifics – who is entitled and who is not; who is ally and who is enemy; who deserves treatment and who deserves punishment, etc. – are not the point, and in the course of the program, our students come to understand that they are not well served by facile and politically-interested distinctions between deserving vets and undeserving civilians. We're in this together – the injured veteran and the single mother. What is important is learning from past mistakes, open-minded listening, civil forms of disagreement and peaceful resolution of differences.

This is the mission of institutions like Empire State College: located in the public sector, rooted in the fusion of liberal arts with professional education and committed to social justice. We can, and we should, offer these students a historical perspective, a hawk's eye

view, a theoretical frame and a forum in which to practice independent thinking, research skills, civil debate and community building.

Going forward, I want to expand the reach of four graduate courses in several directions by:

1) Establishing veterans studies as a concentration at the undergraduate level.

Many institutions are competing for the label "veteran-friendly" and the sizeable cohort of potential students (with their desirable benefits packages) it is meant to attract. Among them are those private institutions Congress has labeled "predatory" and with which we can't compete in marketing or recruiting, and a number of public institutions, like UMUC [University of Maryland University College], that have been serving the military for decades.

Still, no other college offers a *degree* in veterans studies. I'm not talking about military studies – that's everywhere – but a program that focuses on veterans, on what military service and war and the experiences of homecoming have taught us, what needs to be done to bring them home and what important philosophical questions all of those topics raise for students about what it means to be human. Such offerings would enrich a multitude of other concentrations as well.

Just to make this a little more specific, some of the electives I have imagined include:

- Veterans in American Popular Culture
- The VA and Single-Payer Healthcare
- The VA: The Vanguard in Patient-Centered Care for the 21st Century
- Sexual Violence and the Warrior Ethos
- The Implications of Gender Diversity in the Military
- Alternatives To Military Service
- Complementary and Alternative Medicine for Veterans and Beyond
- Technology and Social Media in Rural Health Care Delivery
- Individual and Collective Trauma
- Treatment Courts: Alternatives to Prison
- The Stigma of Invisible Illness
- Serving Aging Veterans

- The Literature of Homecoming
- Trauma-Informed Care

2) Increasing veteran-specific content in professional graduate education at Empire State College and beyond.

According to the Institute of Medicine (2001) report, *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century*, patient-centered care, with its emphasis on personal relationships and individualized service, and cultural competence, with its emphasis on awareness of and respect for differences in values and perspectives, are essential to improving our national health care delivery systems.

The follow-up report, *Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality*, points to silo structures, disciplinary boundaries and overly crowded curricula in graduate education as slowing progress toward realizing those current standards of care (Greiner & Knebel, 2003, p 37-38) and standing in the way of an adequate response to the national imperative to educate a generation of competent service providers for veterans, military and their families.

I recently received a grant from SUNY's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI), which allows us to bring together faculty from Buffalo, Oswego and ESC to discuss what can be done within our institutions and the SUNY system in general. The group of faculty supporting this grant recognizes both the dearth of veteran-specific content in their curricula and the opportunity for collaboration. Our goal is to establish a SUNY-wide network of educators who will meet regularly to share knowledge, expertise and curricular design/development. Ultimately, we hope to generate a critical mass of energy and ideas that will inspire an institutional response and establish SUNY as a national model for preparing professionals equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively serve veterans, service members and their families.

At the risk of repeating myself, when policies that address issues in the veteran community are shown to be effective and economical, they serve as models for the community at large. For example, in health care alone, and often lost in all the rancorous stories about problems and failures, the VA is a

single-payer system that cares for more patients with proportionally fewer resources and still it consistently outperforms the private sector in measures of quality of care, safety (Krumholz, 2014), and patient satisfaction (Hicks, 2014). I find that an instructive example of what a little camouflage might do to counter all the hysteria about socialized medicine. And if any of those above claims surprised you, they come from the most mainstream of media sources, but are only a tap lost in the high-decibel drumroll.

Then, despite what David Brooks, political commentator from *The New York Times*, calls the “certain fundamental reality” that over the last three years primary care visits at the VA went up by 50 percent while the number of doctors increased by nine percent (Dionne & Brooks, 2014, para. 13), still the VA is successfully pioneering the transformation of U.S. health care from the stagnant medical model of care to a patient-centered model, central to the Institute of Medicine’s (2001) recipe 21st century healthcare system. The VA also is in the vanguard of research and implementation of clinical informatics and telehealth systems designed to increase access to care for veterans in rural and medically-underserved areas (Yasin, 2015). All of the above offer solutions to problems that benefit veterans and civilians alike.

Returning to Alan’s question: What I’m doing isn’t exactly peace studies, if by that you mean studies in personal and global conflict resolution. It isn’t about unlearning violence or a “last-night-I-had-the-strangest-dream” kind of facile idealism. But it is about picking at the knotted threads of the social justice fabric without which peace will never happen.

I have two hopes for this approach: First, that this program is one among many teaching that the costs of war, by every measure, are simply too high and that they are borne unequally. As my Policy Studies colleague, labor historian Jason Russell said when the veterans certificate was presented to the graduate faculty for approval, “Veterans’ history is working-class history. Who do you think fight these wars?” Second, in 2006, I wrote in *Flashback*: “If preventing war in the first place is beyond our collective imaginations at this time – and I do not for a moment concede that it is – we are looking at a future that will include inevitable

casualties, wounds of both bodies and minds” (p. 11). Those casualties aren’t only military. It’s not hard to argue that our civilian society is equally addicted to militarism, and that is a form of national mental illness very much in need of healing. I think there is hope to be found in the comradeship and willingness to take responsibility for others that are integral to the military experience. This program encourages those values, and hope, thereby, becomes part of that process of healing.

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Military Spouses as Students at Fort Drum and Watertown Locations

Marina Privman and Maureen Kravec

SUNY Empire State College’s Fort Drum and Watertown Units serve not only active-duty military and veterans, but also their adult family members – particularly, military spouses. Working with spouses is not unique to ESC faculty and staff located at or near military installations. Families of veterans, Army Reservists, National Guardsmen and civilian contractors working for the military live across New York state and face challenges similar to those encountered by families of active-duty service members. While spouses themselves may have active-duty or veteran status, this paper focuses on civilians. A search of ESC and Fort Drum libraries reveals any number of publications that stress spouses’ experience. Yet we find that military spouses pursuing higher education remain an under-researched population. We would like to share some observations about this distinct and significant segment of our military-related body of students, since by better understanding their needs and strengths, we can serve them better as a college.

For five consecutive years, Empire State College has been listed among *Military Times*’ “Best for Vets” (SUNY Empire State College, 2015). The eligibility criteria for this designation focus on the features that make high quality college education accessible to active-duty military and veterans. These criteria are grouped into five broad categories: “... university culture, academic quality, student support, academic policies and financial aid” (GovMedia, 2014, para. 1). One of the additional factors considered when developing



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Maureen Kravec

the rankings was “extracurriculars,” which is the only factor that explicitly recognizes the initiatives to support military spouses, whose access to education also is closely affected by the vagaries of military life. Yet affordability, quality of programs, in-state tuition for military spouses, credit transferability and flexible alternatives to classroom-based education, as well as potential to earn competency-based credits, are features that are especially appealing to spouses (Montalvo, 2013), and make ESC an excellent choice for this population of students.

The U.S. military is largely a married force. Nationwide, there are about 13 million spouses of military or veterans (Montalvo, 2013). A large military installation such as Fort Drum, NY has all the attributes of “Smallville, USA.” Military family housing spills out of Fort Drum into the nearby communities, including Watertown. Thus, military spouses represent a significant portion of the student population of both Fort Drum and Watertown Units. They are a “renewable resource.” As military are regularly reassigned to new postings, new potential students move into Northern New York.

ESC’s military spouses are predominantly female (85 out of 86 spouses matriculated over the past four years at Fort Drum, and 10 out of 11 spouses presently served by the Watertown Unit). This population is racially and culturally diverse. Many are learners of English as a second language, coming from Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe. Many are younger than the average age of Empire State College students (some are in their late teens or early 20s). Although we have observed that a significant number of spouses work at least part time, some, particularly stay-at-home parents of young children, pursue college education full time. (For more information on military spouse employment, see Military Officers Association of America, 2014.) We find that many of the spouses are successful as students. As Gleiman and Swearingen (2012) noted, despite a range of stresses and challenges that test resilience of military spouses, they share significant characteristics with other adult learners: they are basically self-directed (p. 84), benefit from academic programs that can lead them further toward self-actualization and take pride in overcoming obstacles.

Spouses often say that in marrying a service member, one marries a service and its way of life. This lifestyle includes regular relocations from one duty station to another, prompting spouses to seek education leading to portable professions (Kersey, 2013). An income earned by a spouse can be an important contribution to the budget of a military family. After 10 years of service in the Army, salaries of lower-ranked enlisted service members – pay grades E-1 (private) to E-5 (sergeant) – range from only about \$19,000 to \$37,000 (MilitaryRates,

2015). Frequent deployments, temporary duty assignments and training cycles of service members at away locations often leave spouses in the position of single parents and handling numerous additional chores while far removed from support of extended family members. This impacts their ability to find and hold a job, be promoted, or pursue education. Cooney, De Angelis and Segal (2011) raised another key issue: that race, class and gender can affect spouses’ employment prospects as they move. In this context, a sound education and recognized credentials become especially important.

Another consequence of military life is stress and its impact on military families. Since 9/11, Fort Drum has been “the most deployed division in the United States Army” (Plans, Analysis, and Integration Office, 2014, p. 6). Spouses live knowing that their loved ones may not return from the next deployment. Not all those who do return come home physically and emotionally healthy. Caring for wounded warriors is one of the facets of being married to the military. Life changing injuries happen even during routine training exercises at home. Yet, reuniting after a lengthy separation also may be stressful for both spouses and children. Pavlicin (2003) described an emotional roller coaster of the deployment cycle, through various stages of pre-deployment preparation, deployment separation and post-deployment reunion. The stress of military life and frequent long separations contributes to relatively high rates of divorce among military families, compared to the civilian population. The length of separation correlates with increased rates of divorce (Zoroya, 2013). Among the myriad consequences of divorce may be the loss by a spouse of education funding tied to the military status of a service member.

Professional employees at Fort Drum and the Office of Veteran and Military Education, who specialize in working with military populations, provide ESC students with excellent support in navigating the hurdles associated with convoluted rules for securing education funding for military dependents. The Post-9/11 GI Bill made it easier for service members to transfer unused education benefits to their family members. In addition to in-state tuition, the federal Pell and New York state TAP (Tuition Assistance Program)

grants, spouses may be eligible to receive benefits under MyCAA Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts. MyCAA offers eligible spouses up to \$4,000 to pursue associate degrees, certifications or licenses for portable careers. Although this funding does not cover associate degrees in “general studies,” concentrations that are currently popular among our military spouses, under such areas of study as Community and Human Services (CHS); Business, Management and Economics (BME); Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT); Human Development (HDV) and Educational Studies (EDU), have been successfully funded.

At Fort Drum, where certain enrollment numbers are tracked and reported each term to the local education services officer, we know that over the past four years, military spouses have accounted for over 24 percent of the number of credits generated by the unit annually. Even more specifically, since the Fall 1 term 2014, spouses’ enrollments represented, on average, 28 percent of the total number of credits generated by the unit in Fall 1 terms, 15 percent in Fall 2, 25 percent in Spring 1, 29 percent in Spring 2, and 18 percent in Summer 1 and 2. In Watertown, spouse numbers are smaller and more difficult to track, as disclosure is voluntary. However, the observed trends are qualitatively very similar to those at Fort Drum.

The 86 spouses enrolled during the past four years at Fort Drum have pursued 95 degree programs. Some have developed programs for both associate and bachelor’s degrees. Of the 95 programs, 30 were for associate and 61 were for bachelor’s degrees. Based on NotesDP, 68 of the programs pursued by spouses have been concurred and 37, or 54 percent of these, have already been completed. The 68 concurred programs comprise about 30 substantially different concentration titles. Concentration titles of the remaining 27 programs are not listed in NotesDP. They belong to students who have not yet submitted their degree programs for assessment, have programs moving through the assessment process and listed as being reviewed by faculty, or belong to students who have withdrawn from the college.

In both Fort Drum and Watertown Units, the distribution of the spouses’ degree programs by area of study shows trends similar to those

observed for other populations of Empire State College students. Nearly half of the spouses’ programs fall under CHS and BME. At Fort Drum, the number of programs under CHS is 25, and BME is 22. Another 25 percent of the programs fall under SMT (13 programs) and HDV (11). The remaining 25 percent of the programs are distributed among Educational Studies (7), Interdisciplinary Studies (6), Cultural Studies (5), Historical Studies (3), Social Sciences (2) and The Arts (1).

Within an area of study, concentrations preferred by spouses can be substantially different from those by service members and veterans. The latter often develop degree programs that build on training leading to their military occupation specialties. Among the more common bachelor’s concentrations developed by military students are management for BME, criminal justice/homeland security, emergency management and healthcare management for CHS, and information systems/technology for SMT. Among the bachelor’s degree programs developed by spouses, the most common concentrations – 15 programs – fell under child and family/early childhood studies, distributed among CHS, HDV and EDU. Among the six different bachelor’s concentration titles for spouses in CHS, the most common one (eight of the 16 DPs) was human services. All four of the bachelor’s degree programs in Human Development were in psychology. These trends reflect spouses’ continued interest in careers in early childhood, social work and counseling. Large military bases provide child care and human services, and the related careers are portable. In BME, only one concentration developed by a spouse was in management. The most popular BME concentration for spouses proved to be accounting – five out of 12 bachelor’s programs. While only one of the spouses’ SMT programs was computer-related, five out of six were in biology/human biology. Spouses developing these programs were likely to be interested in careers in health care, requiring graduate degrees. Over the past several years, we have seen a significant decline in spouses’ interest in teaching, both at elementary and middle/high school levels. This was accompanied by some decline in the number of programs developed by spouses in Cultural Studies and Historical Studies.

Soldier and veteran education programs have provided a path to economic, intellectual and self-fulfillment for generations of soldiers. In turn, these veterans have enriched our society. In our current armed forces, a large number of military spouses from diverse backgrounds are finding similar pathways to success. We believe that Empire State College provides a positive, flexible learning environment for military spouses. We also look forward to learning how to provide them ever better opportunities.

Acknowledgement

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A Mentor's Experiential Learning: A Conversation with John Beckem

What follows is an edited version of a conversation with John Beckem, mentor in Business, Management and Economics at the Center for Distance Learning.

Alan Mandell: How have your own experiences in the military affected your understanding of the mentor's role in working with military and veteran students?

John Beckem: I'd say in a couple of ways. First, I am a firm believer that you can't take someone on a journey that you yourself have not been on. I was in the military and I was a student while in the service. This gives me a broader view, it gives me a greater understanding of a particular mindset; it helps me to see what this student may be encountering on the military side that might present roadblocks for that student. When you are in the military, you are a soldier first and everything else is secondary. School is often hard to fit in. I understand that. I also understand what students are dealing with when they come back from active service,

for example, I understand the importance of trying to work around schedules, giving extensions, telling student that they'll get through it. Second, I understand the mindset of military students. Most soldiers are goal-oriented. They also might be dealing with some difficult emotional and psychological issues when they return stateside. I am able to ask them: Have you talked to your local psychologists? How about services on the base? Do you know what you have access to? I also can sometimes recognize when a soldier is becoming withdrawn or shuts down. These are advantages that help provide the right resources and I think they benefit the students, too. The connection I can make with a military student is a way to start a dialogue that could open up a student who may have been withdrawn. It's a big help to communication.

A.M.: Do you think it makes sense to think about military/veteran students as a special "cohort" with particular characteristics and needs? Are these students so different from other adult learners?

J.B.: No. I don't think these students should be in a special group. They are adult learners. Most just want to fit into civilian life. No stigmas; no labels. You want life as you knew it. But, at the same time, there are resources that should be available to military students such as special grants and scholarships – the financial benefits allotted to a military student. It's important to make sure there is no break in

their academic pursuits. The key is to know the rules, to be aware of the requirements, to help students know the options.

A.M.: Sometimes we act as if those students who have been, or are currently, in the military have personal/academic and professional interests that continue to tie them to their military experiences. Is this typically the case? Might we – at times at least – be developing stereotypes of these students' interests and goals?

J.B.: I believe that a military student should be encouraged to study whatever that person wants to study and be prodded to participate in discussions like any other student. At the same time, I strongly feel that asking military students to relate things in the course to something they may have experienced in the active military is a danger. You just don't want to talk about some of these experiences. There are no connections between these experiences and the academic world. As a soldier, I may have buried those thoughts as a coping mechanism; that's my natural way of dealing with my experience. If you try to pull those things out, if you are making me relate my experience to something I am studying, what are you replacing them with to help me cope? Without purposefully doing this, you may have created a more volatile student. Most mentors don't understand the military; they don't understand war. Just because it is intriguing to you as a mentor doesn't mean that it should be in academia. From a military standpoint, unless you have been in battle yourself, you don't have the right to be in that discussion. There is nothing glorious about battle. Those who have experienced it rarely want to talk about it except with those who have been in the trenches with us.

However, and this is important: There are times when the training someone has gained in the military (which is different from that gained in battle) will really help a student think about options in civilian life. A military job classification might help someone think about PLA [prior learning assessment] and use their past experiences to help them land a job once they transition out of the military. For one of my students, for example, supply chain management was a good concentration choice because for the last 20 years while in the military, he managed warehouses across several



John M. Beckem II

states and was responsible for their logistics. Human resources was a perfect connection for a female military student because she had already trained in this area. It was something she could see herself doing in the civilian world. So thinking about military jobs and training is different than thinking about battle. Think about managerial leadership: if you have managed soldiers; if you had to lead soldiers, how does leadership apply to other industries? Students can make that connection in terms of a civilian job.

A.M.: Government policies regarding aid to our military students seem more stifling, more constricting, than policies affecting other students? How do these realities affect these students' options at SUNY Empire State College?

J.B.: I think that as a college, we should go out of our way, above and beyond the call of duty, to accommodate our military students. Without the service of our military, our college could not exist. The only reason that other nations have not attacked and invaded American soil is because of the might of our military, so the least we can do in gratitude for their service is to accommodate them and do whatever it takes for our military students to be successful academically. People are dying or have died so that we can sit in an air-conditioned building in complete comfort. The only reason we exist as a college today is because of these peoples' service. The least we can do is help them in their academic work.

A.M.: Does race play a role in your point of view and in your insights about our military students?

J.B.: I have been a minority – a minority in a number of various forms – my whole life; I have had to overcome barriers. Being a minority has made me more compassionate and empathetic toward any group – military or even, more broadly, adult students. I have a compassion for individuals who are overcoming barriers. I am willing to lend a helping hand, to go the extra mile, to help someone get on the best path. I have no doubt that this is my responsibility to my students.

A.M.: If you had a chance to set up a college program for veteran and military students, what would that program include? What would be a necessary element in your ideal program?

J.B.: Other than providing adequate resources and financial support, I wouldn't create a special program for military students. However, I would institute a "Military Appreciation Day." We could invite soldiers and their families and let them know the resources we have available for them. It's the "appreciation" that's important; it's our efforts to show them that we know that we enjoy the comforts we have because of their hard work. Maybe we should even give them a 10 percent discount on their tuition! I have to say this again: Even when a soldier is injured in combat, that soldier doesn't want to be seen as handicapped or any different than anyone else. Specialized programs: No. I have learned that looking at things from economics first is most important: How can I serve more people? That should be our driving force. I was the military student; I was the adult student; I was the minority student who tried to juggle family, work, studies and other responsibilities. I have been that student. More important than any special program is always putting myself in the student's shoes. What would I want someone to do for me if I were in their position? I always am trying to put myself in their shoes – pushing them, yes, but with passion and empathy.



Desiree Drindak

10 Tactical Tips: Engaging Service Members in the Mentoring Process

Desiree Drindak

As a nationally recognized leader in military education, SUNY Empire State College is committed to serving active-duty, guard, reserve and veteran service members, and their families. By effectively engaging service members in the mentoring process, we can address their unique needs, provide transparent information and ensure both students and mentors are informed and supported throughout the degree development process. With over 1,600 enrolled service members and their dependents at the college, mentor engagement is essential to retention and success.

Consider these 10 tactical steps for engaging service members in the mentoring process:

Step 1: Ask. "Have you ever served in the U.S. military?" It's important to know up front that you are working with a military member – whether your mentee is a veteran, guard, reserve or active-duty service member, it can make a difference on how, when and what they study.

Step 2: Acknowledge. Taking the opportunity to thank the service member for his or her service will affirm the college's commitment to our veteran and military students, and may open the communication for future discussion and opportunities for support.

Step 3: Confirm. Please confirm what financial benefits the service member will be using. There are different requirements for each funding source that can affect coursework and degree plan selection. Active-duty tuition assistance (TA) funding is limited by each service branch and the number of credits service members can enroll in per year. Veteran education funding requirements vary by GI Bill Chapter. The Office of Veteran and Military Education (OVME) is available for consultation and support to both the student and mentor throughout this process.

Step 4: Review. Review your mentor file for the service member's military transcript. All Army, Navy, Marine and Coast Guard members should have a Joint Services

Transcript (JST) on file. These credits have been evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE) and are transferable as “CBE [Credit by Evaluation] Credit” in the degree plan. Air Force service members should have a Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcript. CCAF is regionally accredited, so credits will transfer in as “Transcript Credit” on the degree plan.

If the service member is missing his or her military transcript, the student should request an official copy be sent to the college’s Admission Office right away. The JST is free and sent electronically. For more information about requesting military transcripts, go to: <http://www.esc.edu/veteran-military/requesting-military-transcripts/>.

Step 5: Complete. All federal and state funding requires that a degree plan must be in place prior to funding approval. Any mentee using TA or VA (Veterans Affairs) funding will need to have a draft degree plan completed before registration can be approved. For mentors who are unable to complete this draft degree prior to the service member’s first enrollment, OVME is available to provide a preliminary review, in the interim, to ensure that the student is able to secure funding.

Important note: Any course that service members register for must be noted on their degree plan. The degree plan can be updated at any time and should be revised upon completion of educational planning.

Step 6: Register. We strongly encourage those service members using federal funding to register for educational planning in their first term. As noted in Step 5, not only is a draft degree plan required for federal funding, but it also provides transparency for our service members regarding their potential transfer credits and the remaining courses they need to complete for their degree. If changes are needed to the degree plan, the amendment fee is waived for active-duty, guard, reserve and veteran service members.

An additional benefit for service members is that the iPLA (individualized prior learning assessment) fees are waived. This gives mentees, especially those with limited funding, an opportunity to transfer prior learning for no additional cost.

Step 7: Submit. Please submit learning contracts (LCs) prior to the term start date. A service member’s enrollment cannot be certified without the LC, and a service member’s funding will be delayed if his or her LCs are not approved in DocPak. This does not pertain to students taking online studies.

Step 8: Be Aware. Please be aware that although not all service members have a traumatic brain injury (TBI) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), they often experience stressful transitions. This can be true for service members transitioning out of the military and into civilian life; service members transitioning from war to “normal” life – especially guard and reserve that are settling back into our civilian communities versus a military community; and service members transitioning into a college community.

As mentioned in Step 2, opening the lines of communication and acknowledging a safe place for service members to discuss their concerns are important. However, if a situation arises, please don’t presume or question a student about their experiences at war. Please address the behavior or concern, be sensitive to the situation and refer them to community or college resources as appropriate.

OVME has created an online resource to help faculty and staff become more aware of signs and symptoms of PTSD. This resource is not specifically for issues related to service members, but for anyone who may have experienced a traumatic event in their life. This resource, along with the training mentioned in Step 9, provide suggestions for appropriate responses to concerns that might arise while working with service members. To access the online training module, go to commons.esc.edu/trauma-and-stress.

Step 9: Attend. Collegewide training is available through a virtual interactive program called Kognito. This program teaches strategies for supporting service members in the college community. Although the format is geared to a more traditional college setting, the issues and conversations are relevant and helpful when supporting service members at ESC. Please attend. Create your individual account using the enrollment key “esc518” at <https://www.kognitocampus.com/login>.

Step 10: Be Flexible. Active-duty, guard and reserve service members’ lives can change in an instant. Please be flexible with coursework and modes of communication. If a mentee is deployed or changes duty stations (jobs) and is not able to complete their coursework, they may be eligible for a military withdrawal. Please contact Student Accounts for more information at StudentAccounts@esc.edu.

The Office of Veteran and Military Education is available to support you and your mentees throughout these 10 steps. OVME works collaboratively with other offices around the college to facilitate a positive learning experience for our service members and their family members. Please reach out to OVME any time with questions or concerns related to your mentees. For support, contact Desiree Drindak at military.programs@esc.edu or 518-587-2100, ext. 2779.

On the Eve of Retiring from SUNY Empire State College

Miriam Tatzel, Hudson Valley Region

I joined Empire State College as a mentor in September 1974. In February 2015, I retired. As you can imagine, Empire was a big part of my life for so long a time, and now it was about to be over. From time to time during those last months, I jotted down thoughts about what I was experiencing.

The Last Term

Fall 1 2014 is the last time I am working with students as a mentor. I want it to be a good ending. I am pleasantly surprised that I am still finding ways to improve my work with students – a better way to give feedback, new types of assignments and trying to have a personal connection with each student. My thoughts automatically project into the future. I have ideas for courses, new readings to share, I'm enthusiastic, and then the trajectory comes to a halt. I need to savor this last term.

Some very good things have happened. Although few students signed up for my Consumer Psychology or for Topics in Political Psychology studies – a disappointment – for the few who did, I enjoyed what they had to say and I think we enjoyed engaging with one another. A master's final project brought me back to a former interest in fashion. How good it felt to revisit my interest in clothing and the mix of the social and historical meanings. One Consumer Psychology student took it upon herself to review all the transitions of her youth and adulthood and the types of consumption they triggered – I was blown away. I find I am feeling tenderness toward my students, maybe especially the ones who are in over their heads.

I feel good about leaving at the top of my game, as I think of it – good about my student work, and good about my creative work. For my last sabbatical, I had the opportunity to put together a volume on consumer well-being, for which I was editor and an author (*Consumption and Well-Being in the Material World*, 2014: Springer). That work, in turn, led to a series of

presentations that have been well-received. A capping delight was to see the photo I took in the ESC calendar, January 2015.

These last months, I am cleaning out my files. When I arrived here after four years at Hunter College (CUNY), I kept my reading notes and the assignments I created. I continued to use some of those materials, certainly when I started here, but even up to this last term. What do I take away from all my creations now, when there is no future where I envision needing these materials? My files bring back memories, no surprise there. More surprising are all the notes and activities I made that I don't recall at all. I hate to see all this effort and creation just gone. So for the time being, I am culling. For example, I am consolidating the many versions of Consumer Psychology contracts from several decades (why didn't I write down the year on any of it?). With somewhat of a heavy heart, I've been pruning the files of my "early" graduates from before the year 2000. The first 25 years. The process feels kind of funereal.

Are we there yet? Come December of that final term, feelings of nostalgia for my life as a mentor are giving way to impatience. Another month and still so far to go. Students are not finishing on time and degree programs are in limbo. But the work really is winding down and I can taste freedom.

The Beginning

It was the spring of 1974 when I heard about a new alternative college. My interest was piqued. It was time for me to leave Hunter College and I wanted to find a place more in tune with my educational philosophy. Then I saw the ad for a "mentor" in Rockland County. This was for me. It was mentoring that drew me to Empire State College: working with students one-on-one in student-centered, self-directed learning, integrating experiential and academic learning, and seeing the interplay of theory and practice. It also was timely for me



Photo Credit: Claudia Robinson

Miriam Tatzel

and my husband, Ed, to leave the city for a more countrified setting with our one-year-old daughter.

My job interview was in the basement of the library at Rockland Community College in Suffern. I met with a small group of mentors who were creating "New Models for Careers," a pilot program that built upon students' work experience. I was to be one of two new liberal arts mentors forming the Lower Hudson Unit. Together with the New Models program, an associate dean and two support staff (one of whom was Bessie Walker, still with our unit in Nanuet, we set about pioneering a new college. In time, the Rockland Unit was joined by units at SUNY Purchase and New Paltz, and we became the Hudson Valley Center. I was there at the beginning of the center, and now with the upcoming restructuring, I seem to be there at its end.

ESC and I

I have had the chance to be part of a bold educational enterprise across nearly a half-century of history, and I was even a small player in its unfolding. But I don't have much to report about my current involvement with the institution. Since even before my 2012-2013 sabbatical, I had been withdrawing from collegewide activities. Once upon a time, I was in the thick of things. I was chair of

this and that, I coordinated and I convened. A reassignment to do research on retention led me to some eye-opening and inventive analyses. I co-chaired (with Marjorie Lavin) the 1999 Institutional Steering Committee for Middle States re-accreditation. Now I am watching from the sidelines. It's not that I don't care; it's that what happens in the college is no longer on my plate. It's for those who are moving into the future. Mostly I wonder, will this college, as conceived, keep the spark going?

Lifelines

In many ways, Empire has been a lifeline for me. In one obvious sense, the money I earned supported me and my family – no small matter – and will continue to do so in retirement.

Empire also has been a “lifeline,” like the line across my palm. My time here encompasses my own adult development and learning. This is where I matured in my two professions: as an educator and as a psychologist. My professional development has been nurtured by ESC.

Just as students were able to be self-directed in their learning, I could be self-directed in mine. It's amazing when I look back at all the interests over the years that I was able to actualize through learning contracts and study groups. My students were co-learning with me. Between my work with students and the reassignments and sabbaticals I had, I developed areas of expertise, especially in consumer psychology.

My colleagues from all over the college and notably at the Hudson Valley Center meant so much for my quality of life. Working together has been stimulating and often fun, and we formed personal relationships. I have made close friends. We started careers together and we retired; we watched our children grow up and we saw grandchildren arrive. We have moved through our lifelines together.

And then there is the lifeline of my family. “Baby Emily” was one year old when I started here. Recently, she pointed out that I have been at Empire all her life. Our second daughter, Claudia, was an Empire baby. And Ed has been the mentor's assistant, in many ways devoted to helping me to meet the demands

of the job and covering for all the travel time away from home. Our family life has been entwined with Empire State College.

Possible Selves

One of the concepts in positive psychology is that of “possible selves.” When we think about the future, especially during times of transition (“liminal states”), we imagine various scenarios for our life and the different “selves” we may become. The research supports the helpfulness of this kind of projection; it can give us a sense of control and of regulating our life. I'm in that liminal state and feeling the possibilities, but they are nebulous. People ask me what my plans are, as if they expect I have lofty ambitions. And yet, in a way, it is ambition I am retiring from. I've joked and said that what I want is my second childhood. But I return to a more adolescent query: Who am I?

Self-perception theory proposes that we infer our inner states by observing our behavior.

“Just as students were able to be self-directed in their learning, I could be self-directed in mine.”

What I observe about myself is that I like being up and about, on my feet rather than sedentary. No more desk job! (I put off writing this piece in favor of painting the basement, building a stone wall, organizing my photo files – almost anything). I am happy when I'm puttering around. And being a frugal, resourceful and DIY type, I get a kick out of making, fixing and repurposing. Over the past years, I saved up projects “for when I retire.”

Being a consumer psychologist, I ask myself how this transition is accompanied by consumption. My wardrobe comes to mind: less office wear, more leisure wear and work clothes. Will I have a new persona? An older one for sure. I'm getting a new car, like a graduation present. Now that I have more money to spend, I find there's little that I want or need. I'm not much interested in travel and I like eating at home. I've had a long-term (unrealistic and impractical) desire to buy

property and fix it up, or perhaps even to build a house. Now maybe there is a way to have property near my daughters. I want to spend time with my grandson.

With some thought to future possibilities in my career as a psychologist, I am integrating my files from Empire with my files at home – a sizable organizing job. I observe about myself that I take on organizing tasks with enthusiasm and patience. Perhaps I will write articles, maybe in political psychology, a newish direction. Maybe I'll be a blogger. Maybe I won't want to write at all.

Poet and Painter: A Collaboration

Elaine Handley, Northeast Center; Marco Montanari

The following combined works are part of a collection, "Creating the Third Mind: A Painter and Poet Collaborate" by poet/mentor Elaine Handley and artist Marco Montanari, which was exhibited in the fall of 2013 at "The Teaching Gallery" at SUNY Empire State College's 111 West Avenue location in Saratoga Springs. As the exhibit's program describes: "The exhibit itself is based upon two ancient and early traditions. Handley's art is a kind of poetry-making called ekphrasis. Montanari is an encaustic painter, using paraffin and thinly polished glazes to achieve a wide range of textures. The exhibit will highlight the visual dialogue that occurred between painter and poet as each was inspired by the others creative processes." We thank both Elaine and Marco for allowing us to continue to share their work.



"In Fond Remembrance of ... - I," 2013, Encaustic paint on board w/ gold, silver, bronze washes and dustings, 19"w x 34"h

Photo Credit: Marco Montanari

CHRISTMAS EVE 1983: AT THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL

I am not sure why
I wanted to be there
that night of nights.
All of D.C. seemed empty –
no one on the streets, barely
any traffic, just a handful
of vets keeping a kind of vigil going:
a few candles, hushed voices.
Dedicated just a month before
in sunlight: my reflection held
names of the dead inside my body.

I couldn't figure why
it was so sad, these wings
of granite with names.
And that night sadder still
in the dark, hollow city
where old men scheme
young men to war.

What was I hoping to find
there? A loneliness that
matched my own? I know
loneliness is bearable.
But other things are not.

I was looking
for you, even though
you were there with me.
You, who told me
how you tasted death
for a week
after you killed
the first time.
A boy
just like you.

Written by Elaine Handley, 2013

Inspired by Marco Montanari's "Torn
Open to the Fabric of the Warrior – I"

Inspired Marco Montanari's "In Fond
Remembrance of ..."



"Torn Open to the Fabric of the Warrior – I," 2011, Encaustic paint on board w/ gold, silver, bronze washes and dustings, 18"w x 40"h

Photo Credit: Marco Montanari

SECURING THE PERIMETER

I

Once I loved a man
who secured only
his own perimeter,
heart razor-wired shut
wandering eye on patrol.

I waited for him, hoping to dismantle
what ticked inside him
trying to navigate
the concussion of his moods,
to ignore his dereliction
of duty.

What did I know of war,
but what I tasted
on his lips?

II

If you don't tell it, maybe you didn't see it.
If you don't tell it, maybe you didn't feel it.
If you don't tell it, maybe you didn't do it.
If you don't tell it, maybe you can forget.

Maybe the war will stop some day
festering in your gut, marching
to the flat knock of your heart.

III

Who counts the bodies
after war is over?
How long does friendly
fire last? Who listens
to children crying in their beds
missing fathers
already home?

IV

He wears memories like skin
so close we are heartbeats
away from the flash.

V

The dead should not sit at table with us;
They have their own places to be.
We might then stop feeding the children
annihilation with every meal. And no, dear,
no wine for me, the color of blood.



"Dismantled to the Blood Moon - I," 2013, Encaustic paint on board w/ gold, silver, bronze washes and dustings, 23" w x 27" h

Photo Credit: Marco Montanari

VI

He lives in no woman's land, a boundary
between dying and dying. Between the war
torn raggedness of us now and what we planned.

VII

Were Adam and Eve this lonely?

Did they make love in the light
Of the blood moon?
Did she lie awake listening to
his breathing, patrolling the shadowlands
of his dreams?

Did Adam stalk the perimeter
of the garden while Eve watched,
brushing away the scorpions
crawling toward her
in the unforgiving sun?

Written by Elaine Handley, 2012

Inspired Marco Montanari's "Dismantled to the Blood Moon I"



Photo Credit: Marco Montanari

"Season of the Third Age - I," 2015, Encaustic paint on board w/ gold, silver, bronze washes and dustings, 12" w x 24" h

THIRD AGE

Lushness turns brown spotted,
 webs in every corner, some birds clearing out,
 flowers to pull back to pods,
 sky to new clarity, leaves curling up
 contemplating being dirt; soon smoke
 will embroider the air, frost will edge each
 blade crystalline, scarves will hold our breath
 in their folds, snow will eat the starlight,
 and we will walk tenderly on ice.

Written by Elaine Handley, 2015

Inspired Marco Montanari's "Season of
 the Third Age - I"

Sabbatical Report: Adventures in International Education and Publishing

Nataly Tcherepashenets, Center for Distance Learning

I am most grateful to SUNY Empire State College for funding my half-year sabbatical, which gave me the opportunity to finish a project on which I worked for two-and-a-half years: editing a book titled *Globalizing On-line: Telecollaboration, Internationalization, and Social Justice* (2015). The Cambridge International Conference, “Internationalization and Social Justice: The Role of Open, Distance and e-Learning,” where I had the honor of presenting in 2011, as well as developing and teaching courses with international partners through SUNY COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), were major inspirations behind this project. It unites work by researchers and practitioners who are currently located in the Middle East (Lebanon), Europe (France, Poland, U.K.) and in North America (Mexico and USA). The authors span a range of identities, experiences and disciplinary expertise. Some base their chapters on empirical work, others on theoretical dimensions, and many on both; all view telecollaboration as a promising learning environment for mastering intercultural communicative competence, global understanding and acceptance. These skills can enhance content studies, and they are indispensable for the personal and professional success of the individual in the 21st century and for responsible world citizenship.

It has been my pleasure and privilege to lead such a team of talented innovators in completion of what is the fourth volume in Peter Lang’s series, “Telecollaboration in Education,” directed by two major players in international education, Melinda Dooley and Robert O’Dowd.

This book explores the contribution of telecollaboration to democratic education, solidarity and social justice in the globalized world, as well as the complexities and challenges that arise from attempts to align

international collaborations and social justice. Taken as a whole, the volume argues that a focus on internationalization and social justice should be integral to debates about the future of higher education. Drawing on their own innovative teaching practices, the authors develop and extend these debates from a multidisciplinary perspective and from global contexts in the book’s three interrelated sections.¹

Part 1, “Telecollaboration as a Practice of Inclusion” combines both Western and non-Western perspectives in the exploration of effective pedagogical and institutional strategies aimed at engaging students from the Middle East with international themes, at educating teachers from Eastern Europe for successful work in collaborative setting and at preparing teachers of special education in the international learning environment.

Part 2, “Web 2.0 and Social Change” focuses on the new technological affordances that in response to social, cultural and pedagogical imperatives, can enhance cross-border quality education and learning opportunities around the globe.

Part 3, “Intercultural Encounters as Transformative Experiences” turns to learners’ identities and the impact of telecollaboration and technology-assisted instruction on the development of self.

The conclusion to the book returns to some of the key themes of its three sections, outlines possible directions for future research and suggests that cross-border education, which I view as a form of intercultural exchange where all involved are both resources and hosts at the same time, should become an increasingly important dimension of openness in higher education. This dimension calls for solidarity and innovation that would meet challenges associated with the internationalization of



Photo Credit: Dino Petrocelli

Nataly Tcherepashenets

education and social justice, and would bring educators to the forefront in the struggle for peace and democracy in a globalized world.

At the heart of the book is my argument that a concern for social justice is the responsibility of educators and all citizens who cherish democracy and would like to contribute to long-lasting peace in a globalized world. This concern has inspired a variety of philosophical, political and sociological discourses and informed multiple debates in the field of education. Two interrelated themes stand out in these discussions: the right of individuals for self-realization and the quest for recognition. These themes are firmly linked to the relationship that the Russian philosopher, Bakhtin (1993) viewed as intrinsic to the “architectonics of being,” around which all values of life and culture are organized: “I, the other, and I-for-the-other” (p. 54). At this time of global cross-mingling of people, this relationship becomes increasingly complex,

dynamic and unpredictable. Indeed, the nature of this relationship is at the core of my understanding of the concept of social justice.

Moving from abstract models to the world of action for the purpose of this book, I define social justice as an educational practice. The main objective of this practice is to make it possible for motivated learners of different social, economic and/or cultural backgrounds to receive equal educational outcomes and to become responsible world citizens. I suggest that this can be achieved through access to rigorous academic content, collaboration based on mutual respect and open-mindedness, and through teaching/design methods that enhance critical thinking, appeal to students' emotions and encourage exploration of controversial topics.

As the book illustrates, online intercultural exchanges can open numerous opportunities for the performance of this kind of educational practice, which acquires seminal significance at this time when the world paradoxically has become both increasingly interdependent and strictly regionalized. In spite of the constant subversion of inside/outside opposition in "the space of flows" (Castells, 1996, p. 406), created by the Internet, boundaries do not disappear. On the contrary, as Friedman (1999) perceptively observed, "they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighborhood of our world" (p. 14). Thus, globalization reveals one of the biggest challenges of our time: the exercise of the rules of mutual hospitality, which Kant in 1784 viewed as a basic human necessity.

Offering creative ways to achieve a shift from isolation to communication, telecollaboration can meet this challenge in addition to enhancing the development of a common understanding of the benefits of cooperation and coexistence. This requires recognition of the essential humanity of others, an ability to question one's own previously formed points of view, and openness to a dialogue that is informed by mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity. I suggest that similar skills and competencies are intrinsic to the peaceful and enjoyable coexistence of world citizens.

Many distinguished educators point out the strong correlation between the values nurtured by education and those that are

useful in everyday life and that help promote social justice. Thus, for example, drawing a parallel between democracy and education, Dewey (1997) considered both institutions as "methods of value-creation" (p. 4). Viewing education as a political act, Freire (1998) stated that "the posing of the problems of human beings in their relationship with the world" (p. 26) is among the major duties of education. Two relevant approaches – critical pedagogy and collaborative learning – emphasize that a key responsibility of education is to prepare an individual to participate in dialogue on equal terms in any setting, and to acknowledge her or his mission as a producer of history and culture. In his pioneering work on the social and relational character of education, Vygotsky connected learning and activism, and associated the ability to collaborate and a belief in collaborative achievement with the capacity to know and transform one's world and become oneself (Rieber, 1997).

Following these lines, and bridging collaborative learning, critical pedagogy and transformative practice, Stetsenko's (2008) concept of "collaborative purposeful transformation of the world" (p. 474) is intrinsically linked to the ideals of social justice and emancipation as the principle that grounds learning and development at all levels. Globalization, which de Sousa Santos (1999) viewed as "bundles of social relationships" (p. 215), shapes the interaction between the learner and the world today. This process, in turn, brings internationalization, which Knight and Altbach (2007) viewed as primarily policies and practices within higher education systems that are used to address the global environment, that are brought to the forefront of the agendas of education policymakers, and that engage the work of many researchers and practitioners.

Telecollaboration, which O'Dowd (2012) defined as the application of online communication tools with the purpose of bringing together classes of learners in geographically distant locations in order to enhance the development of content-related skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work, exemplifies internationalization practices *par excellence*. Evoking dynamics and diversity, which globalization brings

to everyone's lifestyle, telecollaboration (if approached appropriately) can encourage inclusive democratic education, and enhance tolerance and solidarity. This innovative learning/teaching approach, based on building knowledge and sharing experiences across the borders, can contribute positively to learners' intellectual growth, as well as their education in world citizenship.² Both processes are central to lifelong learning in the 21st century.

"Two relevant approaches – critical pedagogy and collaborative learning – emphasize that a key responsibility of education is to prepare an individual to participate in dialogue on equal terms in any setting, and to acknowledge her or his mission as a producer of history and culture."

Notes

- ¹ This sabbatical report is based on my introduction to the book.
- ² For an in-depth discussion of the impact of online learning on identity renewal, please see Tcherepashenets & Snyder (2011).

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Thoughts on a Changing ESC

Tom Grunfeld, Metropolitan Region

Once upon a time, there was an institution called SUNY Empire State College. It was purposely designed to be radically different from its counterparts.

Of the many ways in which this institution was exceptional was our commitment to see each student as an individual who had specific needs. In that vein, we committed ourselves to doing whatever was possible, within reason, to facilitate a student's ability to complete the work toward a degree.

We were proud of the fact that unlike traditional institutions where students with difficulties could easily fall through the cracks or hide in the back of large classes, we addressed each student individually. This is the major reason we score so high in the SUNY surveys of student satisfaction. It's certainly not for our sports teams, luxury dorms or cafeteria food.

Perhaps we took that philosophy to an extreme. Many years ago, the faculty/professional union filed a grievance against the administration of the college on the issue of workload. During the process of mediation, the administration contended that the faculty had excessive workloads because we were too solicitous of students by giving them an overabundance of time and help in completing their work. The administration saw this as a negative; most faculty saw this as a positive attribute, as it allowed more students to graduate and it invoked the ethos of the original ESC model.

The grievance was settled, but there was no change in the way many of the faculty worked with their students. Our workloads didn't noticeably diminish either. Changes would come later.

That original ESC is, by and large, gone as we have grown in size and become far, far more bureaucratized. An inevitability, perhaps. Nevertheless, in many corners of the college, there are faculty who are still working with

students as individuals and are committed to helping students overcome any difficulties that prevent them from completing their work.

All this came to mind recently when I had a deeply disturbing experience that called the original model of ESC in question.

One of my students was working at a distance. He fell behind due to personal and religious reasons. This is a student who had completed every study over several years and was committed to finishing this work, and was quite capable of doing so, given a little more time.

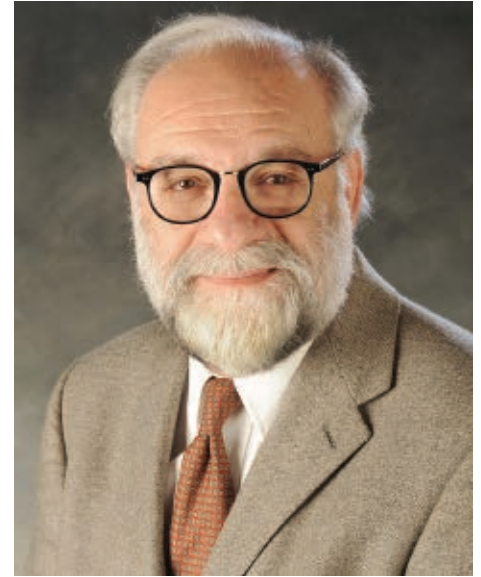
In my almost 40 years at ESC, I have experienced this scenario countless times, and each time it was quickly resolved through a discussion between the student and instructor.

In this case, the student reached out to the instructor but there was some misunderstanding and/or miscommunication. Later, to his surprise, the student discovered he had been assigned a ZW (administrative withdrawal) for that study.

The student's frantic attempts to fix this problem – it was his final term – were unsuccessful, and all he could get was a bureaucratic reply that he needed to file an appeal.

I serve on the Metropolitan Center's Academic Review Committee and I understand that there are situations that call for a formal mediating process in order that a matter be resolved in a manner fair to both student and instructor. But here was a situation that had a simple and fair solution without the need of a bureaucratic procedure involving multiple individuals. Don't we have enough to do already?

But rather than simply ask the instructor and student to work it out, the student was instructed to write a letter of appeal. To make matters worse, his initial letter was rejected as being insufficiently adherent to the college



Tom Grunfeld

guidelines. So he rewrote it only to have his appeal rejected! On what possible grounds could this happen? We don't know because, to add insult to injury, the rejection gave no reasons. In my opinion, this last bit was insulting to the student, and if this is how we now treat students at ESC we need to change – *immediately*.

He was then instructed to file a formal appeal. So now a simple and common problem with a simple and common solution had become a bureaucratic morass, creating unnecessary work for several people, while at the same time diverting the student from his work to write formal letters of appeal. How is this good for anyone?

The issue was resolved by the student dropping the study. But I am left pondering whether this was an isolated instance or a harbinger of what ESC is (has?) becoming. Recently a *New York Times* columnist coined the phrase "Rigid Corporation System (RCS)" where process trumps all. Are we enveloped by RCS? Are we putting process above the individual student?

Or are we still committed to helping individual students overcome the vagaries of life in order to complete their college education?

ESC cannot return to what it was originally; the circumstances we live under today are vastly different from what they were in the early 1970s. But if we are going to continue to consider ourselves unique and continue to maintain some links to our past, we must rededicate ourselves to treating each student as an individual and commit ourselves to providing whatever assistance that student needs to be academically successful. Otherwise we just become like every other institution of higher education.

“Recognitive adult education rejects the deficit model of adult education that seeks to assimilate migrants to the dominant social, cultural, and educational norms of the host society. It proposes instead to build an inclusive education that acknowledges and affirms cultural difference and diversity as positive and desirable assets. These assets are seen as a means of ensuring the participation of individuals from socially and culturally differentiated groups in social, political, and educational institutions.”

– Shibao Guo

*The Changing Nature of Adult Education in the Age of Transnational Migration:
Toward a Model of Recognitive Adult Education
New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2015(146), summer 2015, p. 15*

SUNY Empire State College Oral History Project: An Interview With Mentor Robert Congemi

Richard Bonnabeau, Center for International Programs and College Historian



Photo Credit: Lana Ortiz Photography

Robert Congemi

Robert Congemi is a founding faculty member of the Northeast Center, informally known as the Albany Center. Bob has been a mentor at SUNY Empire State College since the summer of 1973. The interview on which this edited version is based took place two years ago, on 26 April 2013. Thanks to Richard and Bob for offering this interview to us and for their work on this text.

Richard Bonnabeau: Let me start with question number one. What are your graduate degrees and subject areas?

Robert Congemi: I earned my degrees in literature at SUNY, with an emphasis in theatre.

R.B.: Of course, I've seen your acting and was very impressed by your performance for the 40th anniversary at the All College Conference.

R.C.: You mean when I delivered my little speech that Meg Benke asked me to give about getting an award for 40 years of working at the college?

R.B.: The one – maybe it was the year before – when you were doing a bit regarding Shakespeare, but it really wasn't Shakespeare. It was Shakespearian but *faux* Shakespeare. I thought it was brilliant. I loved it!

R.C.: Oh, yes ... the play I wrote for Alan Davis for a different All College. By the way, when I received my award for my 40 years of service, I said that I believed I was the longest continuously serving full-time mentor in the college at this point.

R.B.: Great achievement.

R.C.: Thank you. I heard about ESC in 1973 ... I walked into a coffee shop in early 1973. Bill Franconis, one of the very first mentors ever, was there, and said, "Bob, we're looking for a literature mentor. I think you may be good for this job."

So I asked him, "What do you have to do?" And, he replied, "Well, you have to think big. You're going to have to write articles and books probably, the usual. But you're also going to have to be able to deal with all the small stuff – the nitty-gritty and the logistics of mentoring; the nurturing kind of things day, after day, after day this job is going to necessitate." But, I told him, "I say something once where I am now and I'm reaching 175 people. Do I have to say it 175 times at Empire State?" And he replied, "Look Bob, they figured out that nobody can do this job for more than three to five years. Do what you can, and then move on. No human being can do this job, the on-on-one, longer. We have to find individuals who can think big, outside the box – excited about new ways of doing things – and yet put up with an awful lot of attention to the daily needs of students." *[laughing]*

R.B.: That is a long record of service for you, then – record breaking.

R.C.: I guess I still like the job.

R.B.: Was that enough of an enticement from Bill Franconis to sell you on joining up?

R.C.: Well, there was at the time, and I have it somewhere, a catalog or a handbook or something – it must have been about a 3-by-5-inch kind of thing, or 4-by-6. He told me to read up on the college. Richard, I must tell you, it was stunning, simply stunning; it was amazing. I had taught in high schools. (I've been teaching since, by the way, 1961. This is my 52nd year teaching.) I'd taught in community colleges. I'd taught at Pace University ... I taught as a doctoral fellow. I had never seen, heard, read anything like the early descriptions of Empire State College.

R.B.: I think it was the first bulletin that you saw. Or perhaps the second one.

R.C.: I wrote this 40th anniversary of the ESC Northeast Center graduation speech ... two years ago. I think it was published in *All About Mentoring* [issue #40, winter 2011]. It's on my website, on my writer's website [<http://robertcongemi.com/>]. ... What I was trying to say in the speech is that it was just, as you know, a revolutionary time in so many ways. The school was too good to be believed from my point of view. I was sold immediately. I told my wife – God bless her; she's gone now – all about the college. She was excited. She was a professional journalist and a publicist (she worked for Mario Cuomo when he was governor) who by the way, after a while, finished up her education at Empire State College. It was just too good to be true.

R.B.: Extraordinary.

R.C.: Teaching at our college really has been one of the great events of my life, and you know at the risk of sounding trite or disingenuous ... as I said that night at All College when I was given my 40 years award, "God bless Empire State College." It's been a wonderful thing to do with one's professional life. I don't have to say anything nice at my age

with my tenure, my celebrity [*both laughing*], with the money I have in the bank. If it weren't for the fact that I'm such a sensitive guy – I don't want anything I say in this interview to hurt anyone or harm anyone's feelings – there's nothing really to hold me back.

R.B.: So when you joined the college, you became a member of the faculty at the Albany Learning Center?

R.C.: Yes, it was the Albany Learning Center. I still make that mistake sometimes. I say the Albany Learning Center, and I'm corrected that I work at the Northeast Center.

R.B.: Now the name has changed, but in those early years, I think we referred to it as the Albany Learning Center, then the Albany Regional Learning Center. They've gone through many names. The center got started in fall of 1971, and you were there for what became the Public Affairs Center. ... You started directly from having had years of experience as a teacher without any formal association with the college, as I had as a tutor.

R.C.: Just except for one small matter – I was hired as a tutor while I was waiting to be officially hired as a mentor. I mean, I was offered the job, but I was waiting to get the official papers, so I was asked if I wouldn't mind doing an evaluation or a tutorial. I did that and I was waiting for the money for it. Unfortunately it took a while in those days to pay. I had to work to meet the monthly bills, like anyone else, and I think at one point I said: "I can't afford to do any more of this work – working for the college!" [*both laughing*] Forty years ago, we used to pay tutors \$80 to \$100 for a tutorial.

R.B.: Did you go through a formal interviewing process?

R.C.: Yes, I did. It was multi-layered. I was invited to talk to the faculty. Then there was the dean and the associate dean. And then there was Arthur Chickering [vice president for academic affairs]. I remember that most everyone in the college was a mentor in those days. I don't know how much staff there was. I recall being interviewed by lots of mentors, asking me questions to find out if I believed in the central ideas of the college. What would I do if I got the job? Then, at the next level, I was asked to go and talk with the dean, Irving

Barnett. He chatted with me for a while. I chatted with Mike Plummer, the associate dean. I don't remember extended conversations with either of them, but I do remember being really interviewed at some length by the faculty. You know, it seemed that 19 out of 20 people, were faculty! They wanted to see if I was one of them, that I had the same vision. They knew the job was really attractive. All kinds of people wanted to teach at the college and I think the search process went on for some time.

I was just going to add one more thing about being interviewed by Chickering ... I really tell this story all the time and it's still something of a mystery to me. I was told that I would be interviewed by Arthur Chickering. At the time, I think he had just written his first big book. Was it *Education and Identity*?

R.B.: Yes, that was published in 1969. He won the National Book Award from the American Council on Higher Education.

R.C.: I was going to be interviewed by this main man – the man who, to a very significant degree, was apparently the theoretical source of the college. ... Success has many fathers, as is often observed – and various people said that they were really the beginning, but in my experience, Chickering was one most people talked about as having a major part in the conceptual birth of the college. So I went up to Saratoga to be interviewed by him. The reason I want to make sure I say this is that I didn't know what I would be asked by this man, about whom I had heard such impressive things and who I understood was this theoretical source. What indeed would he ask me? And as I remember, he asked me one question. It was such a memorable question for me that I have not forgotten it over the years. As I remember he said, "Bob, tell me about something you've done in teaching that you feel really good about – very proud of, a real success." And I have thought about this question, Richard, on and off for over 40 years. That was the question he asked me. I don't know that he asked me anything else of this magnitude, or even much of anything else. Well, I just jumped at it and went on and on: about how to teach Shakespeare and Dostoevsky or Camus' *L'Étranger*, a big deal at the time. And over the years, I've wondered, why did he ask me that? What I've come up

with is that maybe the question wasn't really important. It was, I suspect, what psychologists and any number of people might do. They ask a question but they're really after something else. Maybe he knows much better than I do. He probably knew what he was doing, huh? He wanted to see what my answer revealed about this guy in front of him: about his passion or his not passion, his thinking and knowledge, his general way of doing things, how articulate he might be, how thoughtful he might be. I just went on and on. And as I remember, we may have talked about other little cordial, required things. And that was it. The next thing I knew, I had the job.

R.B.: Did you sense that there was any kind of institutional attention or conflict about preferred pedagogies?

R.C.: At first I didn't. But after a while, people were buzzing about the cognitive versus the affective domains. At one early meeting I remember up in Saratoga, and this was a prestigious group, I asked, "Uh, the *affective* domain?" And then this person said, "Congemi, yes, the affective domain? Don't you know what it is?" I thought I was in Colorado. [*both laughing*]

R.B.: That's great!

R.C.: So gradually it became clear to me that there seemed to be this duality. On the one side, there was Chickering's vision of self-actualization. Where do the students want to go? And how can you use your discipline to help that student get there? And then, little by little, I began to hear about this other side – the cognitive side where there is a body of information that needs to be taught. Self-actualization wasn't tops on the list for these body-of-information-people. A person should not necessarily self-actualize by learning how to be, but master a theorem or a legal strategy or learn how to perform a surgical procedure – information like that. But it wasn't as passionately a held belief as things were on the Chickering side. If I may, I did have an important conversation on this issue with a superb colleague, a great teacher, Angela Li-Scholz, the science mentor at the Albany Center at the time. We were driving to Rensselaerville for one of the retreats to think up the college. I think Angela talked about a conscious effort or a way of working at high

levels at SUNY at the time, which is often to have two theoretical positions going at the same time. That kind of confrontation would lead to a creative kind of integration of both polarities.

R.B.: Yes.

R.C.: I've often inferred from that a principal reason for our success, while other schools somewhat like us failed. Right from the beginning, we may very well have been so very different even in this strategy of creative confrontation of oppositions. There was no need for still *another* traditional SUNY school, so the argument went. We were to be different and yet well within the boundaries of traditional SUNY thinking. We were out there but not so far out there. We were different but not so different. And it was that kind of creative tension, if I may say so, that produced, I think, the viability and I think the longevity of the college. My sense is that from its earliest days, the college's pedagogy was not about a false dilemma or an either-or-situation.

R.B.: Right, exactly. So I think we have evolved over time, especially with the advent of the Center for Distance Learning. We have reached – in the long view of things – a kind of educational fulfillment of what Ernest Boyer had in mind for what became Empire State College.

R.C.: As for my tiny part in everything, I was hired by Chickering and I suppose I'm a Chickeronian. *[both laughing]* Somehow, he must have seen something in me that he liked. I must have seemed to be a person who intuitively ... who would be comfortable using the kinds of ideas that were important to him. Thank goodness. It was quite a special chance for me. Again, there was a lot of interest in the job. I'd heard stories about people coming in to interview even from out of the country. They'd been away on some sort of leave or sabbatical or vacation. People from all over. Empire State College was a very exciting prospect.

R.B.: Yes. I think we draw strength from those early years. We had some incredibly talented people who joined the mentoring ranks. I was pretty much fresh out of graduate school. I just got my doctorate. I was in awe of the mentors. They were just extraordinarily committed and enthusiastic. There was a wonderful sense of achieving so much with limited resources.

R.C.: I remember sitting in on one meeting where Jim Hall [ESC's founding president] was describing someone's work. It may have been one of the nuns who was working for us in the earliest days. I'm not exactly sure. Jim started talking about how certain learning contracts were developed that really made great use of interdisciplinary, bi-disciplinary, thematic, holistic orientations to achieve college and personal educational goals. And he finished by describing in specific detail two or three of these contracts that emerged *organically* out of these new ways of looking at knowledge. And he said, "*That's* the way it's done." *[laughing]* And by the way, for me, Jim was of course the *most* extraordinary person – our original, sure-handed president for more than 25 years, a wise and gracious man who did the job at the helm of ESC that needed to be done. He gave me a professional life. He was quite something.

This is where we come to the most profound thing I can say ... I feel that the most meaningful teaching and even living is what goes on between one person and another in trying to solve a problem, in trying to bring what you have to another person's aid. Meaning comes out of that very direct, one-on-one situation. I feel good because I'm helping. The person feels good because they're receiving something that's meant to be a gift. I write short story after short story about people trying to wrestle meaning, dignity and purpose from their lives. And that usually comes from a one-on-one exchange – a personal relationship and that's about as far as we can go.

R.B.: I think that's a beautiful statement. I'm delighted that you said that.

R.C.: You know, people look for transcendence, redemption in art, in politics, in money – the whole spectrum. I find redemption in this kind of thing, this someone giving to someone else what they think is helpful for the other person, to help achieve what the other person wants to do, [and] out of that, emerging as much meaning, honor, transcendence as you're going to get. It's very existential. I guess I'm a child of my intellectual age.

R.B.: When you started your career as a mentor with the Albany Center, did you jump into the water? Did you have any help in getting started?

R.C.: ... Aside from a general sense that we're all in this together – we mentors would chat about how to do this or that, we'd talk in the halls one-on-one – but mostly ... I was pretty much on my own because of my character, because of my philosophy, because of my life situation, my experience. I suppose it might have been very different for other people. But for me at least, we would meet in the hallway. We would have informal meetings and discussions. That was about it. There *were* some marvelous people. So inspiring. But in general, I just went ahead with it. Though the additional comment that I would make is – I hope this isn't unfair – but, I think, you were sort of expected to just do the job. You're working here as a supposedly gifted mentor for Empire State College: so, go to it. I don't know whether that was a matter of getting the immediate work done or partially [of] the philosophy.

R.B.: What was a typical day for you being a mentor at the Albany Center in terms of working with students and with colleagues?

R.C.: Well, as far as teaching was concerned, there were a lot of student appointments. That's how people worked with you. They came to see you, and I might have had appointments all day long. You know, if we have an appointment at 1 o'clock, say, it goes for an hour. So it was almost exclusively for me then one, one-on-one session after another. It was all in my field and so it was very, very exciting. In those days, there were enough people interested in literature and in being writers for me to have had lots of students. "The Beat Generation" was as hot as could be. Sometimes I think that different eras promote different kinds of concentrators or majors. In my day, being an actor was something people wanted to do; being a writer also was something people wanted to do; and reading great literature was something people wanted to do. I think as the years passed, things have changed. In the '60s, there were people who wanted to be social activists and historians. And then there was this, and there was that. Now it seems as though people want to be computer scientists, business people,

community and human services people. But in those early days, in fact until quite recently, there was plenty of work in my field and it was indeed one hour-long session after another. But I loved it because it was simply in my field of expertise and my major interest. Of course, the other thing I would say about a “typical day” is that for me, just in a different key, were the center meetings that were somewhat contentious and intimidating given the strong feelings of people from different backgrounds.

R.B.: What was the contentiousness all about?

R.C.: ... I think among the faculty at the Albany Learning Center it wasn't so much that we had different pedagogies. We were pretty much affective types – liberal arts, social science, humanities, community service kinds of people. I really feel as if there was pretty much unanimity with regard to our educational philosophies. We were all so strong minded. Regarding our *political* philosophies, however, I often refer to Camus' *The Rebel*, and to his distinction between a rebel and a revolutionary. The revolutionary would have you do what the revolutionary wants you to do for all situations, for all times; the existential rebel would have you choose for yourself, for each occasion. ... So I think we had political revolutionaries. I mean the '60s weren't far behind us. We had people who were either “with us or against us” types in the way we got business done. And there were others who, like me, were in the other camp. That is, we will choose for ourselves for each particular occasion, and we would not be scooped up by the robust spirit, shall we say, of the political far left. There were a number of us – good people, talented people on both sides – who felt we'll all work together and get significant things done; and others who felt, well, you know, I want to be freed from the right *and* left ... I want to be freed up as much from my faculty colleagues, as well as from the administration. I can't deny believing myself more in that rebel camp, more than in the revolutionary one. I don't want to make everybody do what I want them to do all the time for every occasion.

R.B.: That's a very interesting and important insight.

R.C.: You got locked in the same room, in the same situation. People who are psychology people, people who are literature people, people

who are theater people, math people, science people. This was not merely a meeting of the English department, or the history department, or the psychology department. Here we are with real fundamentally different academic backgrounds and prejudices trying to make the college go. And I don't know if that's always appreciated as much as it should be.

R.B.: Yes, I know I was very much pleased with that in my own professional development at the college – the opportunity of working with colleagues from various disciplines. I found it to be enriching, very enriching. It helped me to think more about the possibilities for students – what I would be able to do with them in suggesting what they could do with the interests that they expressed. It was valuable.

R.C.: You hear philosophy people talk, psychology people talk, history people talk, sociology people talk, and suddenly you're developing interdisciplinary learning contracts – a psychological look at this particular novel, a Freudian look at these plays, a historical look at Faulkner. It was a very exciting teaching situation to be in.

R.B.: Extraordinary. I remember I had a conversation with the then chair of the history department at Skidmore College. I mentioned to him about how enriched I felt by the experience of having colleagues with different disciplines. He was completely unmoved by that, and I think he might have been disgusted by it – that I had betrayed my discipline. I'm not sure, but I certainly was pleased.

R.C.: A major experience in my life at ESC was all the years I spent representing the college at the Office of General Services at the [Empire State] Plaza. Indeed, I claim a lot of credit for the presence of our college on the concourse of the Plaza right now. It wasn't easy, though. I remember that ESC felt there were great numbers to be educated at the Plaza. I thought about all the people who didn't want to go to college. I thought about the people who already had a bachelor's degree and a master's degrees, etc. When you keep subtracting, it seemed to me that there weren't a great number of available students for us at the Plaza. ... But for some strange reason, I had enough numbers and a great time at the Office of General Services. Maybe the odd, but

happy combination of an English teacher and the Office of General Services for goodness' sake, and of course [OGS] Commissioner John Egan, made it work. I think so. Here you have this creative writer, this literature-type guy serving the needs of the Office of General Services.

R.B.: Wonderful. [*laughing*]

R.C.: There was something very pleasant about it. I think I looked at OGS as different from me. And they looked at me as different from them. We were very curious, but it worked out just fine. Maybe it was a “yin and yang” kind of thing. I didn't have any trouble. I didn't say to myself, “Wait a minute. I'm not sure that I want my professional life to be at a desk somewhere outside the college. I'm not sure that I want a shared desk perhaps for a great deal of time at a state agency, or authority, or division, or whatever.” Again, as audacious as it must seem, our work with OGS is clear. It's in the record. I graduated 65 to 70 people from OGS alone. Commissioner Egan made it a point to say to everyone that this was the commissioner's program. He told me, “We really like what ESC is trying to do. What it's trying to do for us. Bob, you tell my people that Commissioner Egan is behind the program. And to let their people go – to go see you.”

R.B.: Do you ever use materials that were generated by the Center for Distance Learning, the courses that we offered on a term-by-term basis in those early years [1979] and later on?

R.C.: Originally, I didn't choose the modules that some were developing. And the Center for Distance Learning did things differently from the way I did things. But then Meg Benke came along and worked her magic and the Center for Distance Learning took off. What happened is that the word really got around finally about the developing value of CDL – its own, special ways of doing things, its great accessibility, its organizational qualities, its detailed online courses. ... Students would, more and more on their own, choose to study with CDL. I gradually learned to appreciate the values of CDL, so pretty much I got on board. I learned that lots of students want to work all day, go home, turn on the spaghetti sauce, turn on their computer, and do their

economics homework. It really worked just fine for so many people. I began to learn from other people about CDL's values ... to the point where I indeed got the message. Between my students choosing to do CDL courses and my understanding of its value, it has become a significant part of my helping students to get educated.

R.B.: More broadly, how did technology and specifically how did the computer, word processor, personal computer, the Internet and the resources that can be accessed through the Internet change your approach to mentoring?

R.C.: The big thing was learning to communicate by email. As I've said, most of my work was one-on-one. I'm always a one-on-one guy. Even a phone call before the computer was much less satisfying because all the visual and even aural cues that occur when two people are sitting side by side help in the communication, in the nuancing of what's going on, in what's being said, how people are reacting, how one question, and then the answer to that question, can immediately lead to another question. Because you're there in front of the person and you see and hear something of what's happening in their mind at the moment. That's always very important to me. Frankly, the computer allows me to communicate by email a lot these days. But I have to admit I was slow to appreciate emailing because it seemed that I had so much to say in my mentoring. ... The sheer act of writing it all out was very difficult to do, if not impossible. While another person would say, "Bob, why didn't you just write it all out?" That's the way it's done so much today ... it's down once and you just get it. Again, it's that one-on-one evolving kind of relationship which I so fancy that makes it difficult for me. I know where I want to go. I've had 52 years of doing this thing. I'll see where the student is and I go that way in good part. So writing it *all* down and having it firmly in place has always been difficult for me.

R.B.: Yes.

R.C.: The other thing is this idea of technology making the instructor the *hub*, the *teaching* hub. ... It is something that is gradually dawning on me [even though] it's somewhat different from the way I've always done business. (Lord knows, I've written about

professor as hotdog, professor as classroom star, professor as expert giving out knowledge, putting it to the poor, captured students.) I concede that there is already a tendency in the college to see the mentor as the center of an experience in which the mentor gives her or his take on things. Then through the use of this marvelous technology, the mentor hooks students up with an innumerable number of learning resources to enrich the students' educational experience, to undergird or facilitate independent learning. Somewhere – when I wasn't quite aware of it – *individualized* learning became *independent* learning. I understand that the kind of individualized learning I do is exhausting; it's overwhelming, especially when the numbers at the college have gone from five or 6,000 students, a warm and fuzzy situation, to 20 or 22,000 students! For the college to manage those kind of numbers the way I do things is too difficult; it's in the past. So, I'm learning to think of myself as this teaching hub or nexus, to teach a lot and to direct to other learning sources a lot as well, rather than be the source of all of the student's learning. That's refreshing, and I think it makes just as good sense as the other method. I do want to have my say about everything. But this teaching hub business I think is working out even better. I can sense that this is indeed right. ... A mentor as the teaching hub for and to all kinds of further learning experiences. No one single person really can deliver it all to a student. But it all might be delivered to a student because of technology. It takes a bit of adjusting for an old guy like me, though there is an example of someone who has managed to bridge the one-on-one mode and the use of technology: Sylvain Nagler [Northeast Center mentor]. There is no one more dedicated to the affective side of things, to one-on-one mentoring, and yet Sylvain has managed with gusto to embrace the technology and bring to it a good deal of the kind of one-on-one attention that he gives to students in general. I think it's a great effort on his part. But I think it's also connected to great teaching that he lives for.

R.B.: During your first five years or so at the Albany Center, did you feel that you were more part of a larger entity than you were part of the center? And, if so, what were the ways that made that possible for you?

R.C.: It was before these miracles of technology. I have to admit that we at the center had a sense we were a little bit of a college on our own. There was a Metro Center, there were the Rochester and Buffalo Centers, and the Albany Center. You felt very, very keenly of course that you were part of a particular center. On the other hand ... there *were* collegewide meetings of many kinds. I think that what's happened over the years is that the technology, and perhaps more sophistication in dealing with such a statewide institution, have brought a sense of one college stronger and more keenly to all of us. For the longest time, I felt my life was predominantly about the Albany Learning Center – you know, local answers to local situations – with some very fine colleagues and with some very interesting All College meetings. However, I think that for me, now more and more good friends, excellent colleagues, common experiences have been multiplying as the college has moved along. ... Recently, for instance, I was asked to be part of a poetry reading – streaming this poetry reading at some point last year throughout the college – the idea being to show everyone another of the many activities and accomplishments of the college. In some ways this streaming throughout the college ... can be virtually as good as having people in the room. People are even larger on the screen [and] an old guy like me can see and hear them better. I'm very pleased. And suddenly I'm finding that my good friends, intimate friends, cherished friends are not only at the Northeast Center but in places far-flung across the state.

R.B.: Have you noticed over the years any change in the caliber of the students? I've heard people say that initially the college really benefited by having that first wave of students who were really quite talented – students who were quite close to completing a college degree and who had some extraordinary professional achievements. Subsequently, perhaps, we didn't have as many exceptional students. ...

R.C.: ... It seemed as if there were any number of very accomplished and talented people throughout the state who were our students in the early days. They were tax payers of the state of New York, but for one reason or another were not able to finish their degree at the time. And I referred to them

with the phrase “the *crème de la crème*” – the finite number of people out there who were just waiting for us to appear on the scene because for one reason or another they hadn’t finished their degree – many because they had different kinds of ideas about what pedagogy should be, what college education should be. ... There were lots of talented, accomplished people out there. We came along and they took advantage of us and life was happy ever after. I think that was indeed a finite number. I think we got them all! Then various parts of our program, our multidimensional program, began appealing to lots of *other* people – maybe they always did? But other parts of our program were very attractive to these other people, a spectrum of people, people who needed easier access, people who needed perhaps a little bit more attention, a little bit more understanding, a little more of any number of things. They made important use of certain parts of our college that may not have been signature characteristics of our college in its earliest days.

I wrote a piece that Alan Mandell published years ago [*All About Mentoring*, issue #30, winter 2006], a piece of fiction called “The Mentor,” in which this guy after many, many years as a mentor looks back on his previous students in his earliest mentoring days. It was what we call in my business a kind of “half-envelope” story. He’s in the present; he looks back in time. People at [the] Northeast [Center] passed it around as addressing an important change. “Bob Congemi,” they said, “is talking about the kind of students we used to have versus his perception of the kind of students we now have.” So we started to attract more of different kinds of students, students who liked us for reasons somewhat different from what was initially important to us and what attracted our first students. The college’s mechanisms, value systems, and ways of doing things were all functions for students who needed less rather than more supervision. It was doable one-on-one because people needed *less* attention rather than *more* attention. That if the job could be done at all, it could be done because these people were so bright, so accomplished, so motivated. So, believing in the authenticity of what we were doing, just give them a beginning, help them in some valid way to do what they wanted to do and watch them run with it. And again, I think we took care of those people. It seemed

as if we began attracting students who needed *more* rather than *less* attention, often, and our fundamental ways and procedures for working were somewhat strained to accommodate these students. And I’m not sure if we have solved that change enough even today. I think the technology in CDL goes a good way toward dealing with that.

R.B.: Another question that I had for you is about managing your work as a mentor and keeping up with your scholarship. Apparently you’ve been very successful with writing.

R.C.: Shortly, I’m hoping that I’ll be announcing my 10th published book. Nine are written and published, and I’m working on number 10. What happened to me is that I postponed for a long time really digging into writing and trying to manage teaching at Empire State College at the same time. There also were things personal and familial. At one point it seemed to me that doing both wasn’t manageable. But apparently I was skilled enough. So, I asked myself, if it is not now, when will it be? Since then I have worked very, very hard. And I think I paid quite a personal price for working night and day trying to meet the legitimate demands of the mentoring – really the quite noble demands of mentoring – and still being able to think about one’s field, be aware of what’s going on in one’s field and coming up with some kind of product that reflects your thinking, your performance in, your research on the key aspects of your field. Now again, I live to read and write books.

R.B.: Yes.

R.C.: I still am excited about it. And I make that point to say that I may be different from some other people for whom it’s a job: a fine job, a good job, but it is not their reason for being. And I honor and accept that position. I think good work can be done by both kinds of people. It’s like when you’re talking to Bob Congemi, you’re talking to a guy who thinks he’s dedicated a good part of his life outside of his family to teaching literature and to knowledge. I have a very keen interest in history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, all of that *vissi d’arte* – Puccini’s opera *Tosca’s vissi d’arte* – I live for art stuff. And I don’t mean that has to be the way other people do things. I had the commitment to do both. Once I thought I was a teacher. Another time

I thought I was a writer, then a teacher. Then I thought I was a teacher and not a writer. Now I think I’m a teacher and a writer. It’s been hard; there’s that big price to pay.

R.B.: Can we return to the changes that you have seen in the college?

R.C.: ... I think that for the first many years of the college, it seemed as if the affective side of things held center stage, but now I think after so many years, the Baritz side of things is in the ascendancy.

R.B.: I think you’re right about that. Chickering had quite an impact on how those early years focused on individualized learning – student purposes – and having less emphasis on prescribed curricula: not having group studies unless they truly reflected student interest in having group studies. The alternatives, the modules, the approaches that were being taken with the adoption on British Open University materials, the telecourses, etc., had less importance in terms of the entire academic program. They were there, but they were not prominent in terms of what we valued as an institution as was expressed by the majority of the faculty. But over time, you’re right, the ascendancy has been one of more prescription, less choice.

R.C.: ... I said in my [40th anniversary] speech that the 1970s are gone. The 1970s are not 2010. It’s a different world. It’s a much different world than we worked in at one time. Good for that time and now this is a new age. But I think both are good responses to student needs and goals. The blending continues, but perhaps in a different percentage configuration. I’m very hopeful I’ll leave the college as if a new way of doing things is being forged, the way that is appropriate for our times, as long as we continue some effort toward individualizing and utilizing the magic of personal interchange. Continue to be innovative – this kind of mentor role that we discussed – mentor as teaching hub or nexus is very exciting. I’m very excited about the college and the brilliant young people who have grown up with these new pedagogical ways as well as the knowledge of technology they have. We just have to keep both schools of thought going. We’ll be OK. We are still not like other places. Good thing.

Going Meta: Information Literacy and Teaching Research in a Fluid Information World

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A Review of:

Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners

By Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson

“Information literacy” is a phrase that has been around for many years and is generally used when teaching research (especially to undergrads). When put to use, information literacy often conjures up images of academic journals, library stacks and, more recently, Google searches. Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson (2014) aim to change these “associations” in their book *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*.

Conceptualizing Metaliteracy

The meaning of the term “Metaliteracy” can be tough to nail down because this requires understanding a student’s disposition toward information. It may involve information literacy skills like evaluating and using information, but also recognizing and acting within a social context. Metaliteracy emphasizes the interconnectedness of the communities in which we live, and asks educators to consider how we prepare students

to participate in the conversations that are taking place in a social media-driven society. It is not enough to just teach research skills, although research remains important. It is not enough to teach the writing process, although that may be helpful for most students. It is not enough to teach rhetoric, although debate skills and argumentation may be more important than ever. Metaliteracy reaches out to connect all of these, but also calls on us to acknowledge the changing nature of our information world. As Mackey and Jacobson put it,

The metaliterate individual has the capability to adapt to changing technologies and learning environments, while combining and understanding relationships among related literacies. This requires a high level of critical thinking and analysis about how we develop our self-conception of information literacy as metacognitive learners in open and social media environments. (p. 2)

My Facebook Feed

These days, sharing an article in my Facebook feed feels like a fairly mundane task; most of us do this several times a day. An article may catch our eye. We may read it, write a comment, hit “post,” and then the discussions begin as friends comment. Pretty normal stuff. We may not recognize it, but a simple post may involve complex interactions of skills and awareness. Sharing an article may start as an act of reading, but may become an act of interpreting as we update our status to accompany the post, or an act of curation as we select some posts to share over others, or even

an act of discourse as we write and reply to comments. As all of these acts are taking place, we also are navigating a social space that may include actual friends, family, coworkers and casual acquaintances.

In some ways, none of this is exactly new. People have done this for centuries. In ancient times, scribes voiced their own opinions through comments in the margins of texts. Later, scholars published letters to each other debating new findings. Pamphleteers pushed ideas and fomented revolution. Letters to the editor in newspapers offered feedback and commentary on articles. But today’s version, bound up in Twitter, Pinterest, Facebook and a plethora of social media tools, offers immediacy and pervasiveness beyond the domain of traditional, flat information tools of the past. The space is beyond traditional literacy (teaching people to read), beyond information literacy (teaching people to research), beyond media literacy (teaching people to be savvy news consumers) and beyond digital literacy (teaching people to use technologies). Mackey and Jacobson explore each of these “literacies” and indicate that each remains necessary.

However, they also note that information literacy underlies all of them. It is a “transliteracy” that is required in order for the others to have value. Finding, understanding and using information connects all of these literacies together. The authors work to establish a new space that goes beyond the existing notions. For them, the term “metaliteracy” moves information literacy forward into the spotlight.

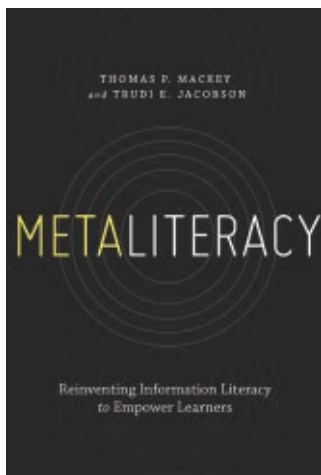


Image Credit: American Library Association

Evolving Information Literacy

As educators, it is abundantly clear that the technologies we have in hand today will not be the technologies our students will use tomorrow, so we need a conceptual model that provides the needed structure to teach but is flexible enough to adapt. It is not enough to create a set of standardized skills around information literacy and take them into the classroom. Mackey and Jacobson noted,

In a social media age, the idea of developing discrete skills must be replaced by the formation of a comprehensive knowledge set, informed by multiple information sources through individual and collaborative practice. (p. xx)

Of course, there are times that we must teach skills, but skills alone are not enough. The move that educators must make is from approaching the information world with a skills-based focus, to that of a more comprehensive, knowledge-based focus. The mechanics of finding and using information are increasingly less important because the technologies are becoming easier to use while constantly evolving into new forms. It is not the *use* of the technology, but the *understanding* of the information delivered by the technology that presents the challenge.

In the year 2000, the Association of College & Research Libraries' *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* defined a more skills-based approach. Students will:

- determine what information is needed
- access that information using various tools (catalogs, search engines, databases, etc.)
- locate sources through these tools
- understand the sources
- use the sources to do their own research.
- understand the broader legal, social, and ethical context surrounding the use of information.

As the age of Google unfolded, achieving these competencies guided educators who taught research. Mackey and Jacobson noted that while these outcomes remain important,

they are not enough to constitute information literacy today. They expanded the standards to include:

- collaboration with others to create information
- participation in communities (virtual and face to face)
- sharing information through these communities.

In their own words,

Today's post-information environment has moved beyond search and retrieval to the making, mixing, and sharing of knowledge through multimodal and constantly shifting technologies. The idea of a 'post-information' age suggests a postmodern definition that signals the end of information. The 'post' prefix in this context, however, primarily describes an end to the concept of information as we knew it, as something simply accessed and retrieved in a one-way modality in print to networked ways of knowing through social media. (p. 49)

The confines of physical media underscored our notions of information. Physical containers locked up information. *Information was a thing*. But now we have made the move from physical media to *social* media. Now, the social context charges information. The "one-way," flat information world is gone, and now, *information is a relationship*. Mackey and Jacobson have worked to incorporate this social aspect, and to me, this is the most significant distinction they make in the book. Teaching flat information skills is not enough. Students learn to recognize the social side to information. Of course, relationships are a two-way street and understanding relationships can focus on the self as much as it focuses on other people. Students who want to understand information may have to look inward first in order to recognize how the sources connect to their own world views. That is, students may need to ask themselves: "Why do I agree with this source?" In terms of our relationships with others, students may need to ask another kind of question: "Why do I agree with this source but my classmate does not?" The heart

of metaliteracy is understanding how belief systems connect us with sources, and, at the same time, with others.

Self-Assessment

Throughout their text, Mackey and Jacobson call on educators (librarians especially) to reinvent information literacy as a metaliteracy. They emphasize the *meta* in the term, and they spend time discussing ways to incorporate metacognitive (thinking about thinking) approaches and making information literacy more reflexive.

To return to my earlier example of sharing an article, two things happen when I hit "share" on Facebook. First, the article is *decontextualized* from its native environment. In the past, articles lived together in a physical form that was connected by a date and edition. It felt as if they were cemented together in time and space. This remained somewhat true when articles were posted on a website, and we discovered them through browsing that website. In the social media sphere, the article is removed from this existence and pushed out into a flow of thoughts, images, videos and other articles. This leads us to the second thing that happens when I share an article on Facebook: The article is immediately *recontextualized* within a new social sphere. It is connected to the individual making the post, connected to commenters offering thoughts and connected to the time that the article appears in the social media feed. The information environment where articles are discovered is more fluid and unique for each of us as no one shares the same social network. An article shared within an online group may have a very different context around it than an article shared in a general feed.

As the reader discovers new information sources, she or he must evaluate this shifting context. This means not only evaluating the source, but also evaluating the relationships that delivered the sources to the feed. This often involves evaluating one's own beliefs and values, and also the values and beliefs of others. For example, if my old college roommate who tends to be politically liberal shares an article on the minimum wage, I may see it differently than another article on the minimum wage shared by an old childhood friend who I know to be politically conservative. For each of these

articles, I make assumptions based on who is sharing them. Without even reading them, I may be able to guess what they will say. And, when I consider my own beliefs and values, I may be able to guess which article I will find more agreeable. That is, through these online contexts, I make judgments not only about the articles themselves but also about those who share them. Finally, prompted by the article, I look inward at my own beliefs. This is the complex, *meta* dance that we must do, and Mackey and Jacobson are pushing educators to help prepare students for this dance.

It's in this context that Mackey and Jacobson discuss the need to self-assess. Learners must be in a position to "... make decisions about their learning" (p. 2). Does one know enough? Or, is additional knowledge needed? How does the social context shape the interaction with a source? Again, the metacognitive aspects move beyond teaching skills and move toward a more comprehensive approach. The learner must recognize new tools, new technologies and new information types, and utilize a capability to adapt to changes all the while self-assessing previously held knowledge. Metaliteracy purposefully invokes the metacognitive aspects of learning. This thinking about thinking engenders self-assessment and awareness.

Self-reflection is the key. Stepping back and observing that self. Mackey and Jacobson noted,

We argue that, based on a metacognitive perspective, learners develop skills and acquire knowledge through self-reflective awareness and understanding of their own literacies. This is accomplished when students apply a range of literacies in an associative way in collaborative learning environments. (p. 15)

The Metaliteracy Model

Mackey and Jacobson's model of metaliteracy is really a framework that builds connections to multiple intelligences, multimodal literacy, transliteracy and metacompetency.

They outlined four overarching goals that move beyond skill development toward an integrative approach that is behavioral, cognitive, affective and metacognitive. Their goals are:

1. Evaluate content critically, including dynamic, online content that changes and evolves, such as article preprints, blogs, and wikis.
2. Understand personal privacy, information ethics, and intellectual property issues in changing technology environments.
3. Share information and collaborate in a variety of participatory environments.
4. Demonstrate ability to connect learning and research strategies with lifelong learning processes and personal, academic, and professional goals. (p. 86)

Given these important insights, if I were to level one criticism against this book, it would be that the use of the term "metaliteracy" itself does not feel necessary. There is power in defining new terms, but I am not exactly clear why metaliteracy should replace information literacy as opposed to evolving the meaning of information literacy itself. Mackey and Jacobson do a good job outlining the "meta" nature of our information environment. I wholeheartedly agree with their argument, but I am not sure it necessitates a new term that feels confusing at times. This criticism does not necessarily undermine the heart of their argument. The need they define and the approach they advocate remain relevant no matter the name.

Broadening the Vision

Mackey and Jacobson's book is timely in that it arrives at the moment when the academic library community is wrestling with expanding its definitions of information literacy. Following a multi-year process, the Association of College & Research Libraries (2015) has issued its *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*. Similar to Mackey and Jacobson, this document takes a bold step beyond the searching-skills that have been the domain of academic librarians. The *Framework* outlines six "frames" that define thresholds for college students to cross. Most of the frames are conceptual in nature such as "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" and "Scholarship as Conversation." I had the privilege of serving with Jacobson on the task force charged with writing the *Framework*. It is not surprising that

the approaches Mackey and Jacobson outline focusing on metaliteracy connect nicely with the *Framework*.

Even as campus libraries become more virtual, academic librarians are increasingly in the classroom partnering with faculty members to delivering instruction. Mackey and Jacobson's book, along with the *Framework* present two valuable tools in expanding these partnerships. Mackey and Jacobson's work is especially useful in that it builds a theoretical foundation connecting information literacy through metaliteracy to the broader educational discussion of teaching and learning. It also is especially useful in that it provides examples and approaches that can be adapted across the curriculum. Faculty members who may not be aware of the pedagogical work of the academic library community will find this to be a useful entry point, and faculty who are aware of that work will find Mackey and Jacobson's contribution to be a nice bridge to expanded existing approaches. Broadening the vision of information literacy and helping students build the dispositions to cope with the changing information environment is work that none of us can do as isolated individuals.

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Found Things

“IV. Focus: The Mentor” from *Retrospect and Prospect: Strengthening Learning at Empire State College* (1989)

The following is an excerpt of a chapter taken from the 1989 SUNY Empire State College self-study prepared for the Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in anticipation of the college's periodic Middle States review. It was intended to describe and evaluate “The Mentor” – how we define the role and responsibilities, required skill set and expected workload. The publication's other areas of attention were: “The Student,” “Academic Programs” and “The Academic Process.” The college's institutional committee was co-chaired by Jane Altes, vice president for academic affairs, and Darrell Leavitt, Plattsburgh Unit coordinator at what was then known as the North Central Regional Center. Thanks to Terri Hilton for helping us to prepare this document for All About Mentoring.

IV. FOCUS: THE MENTOR

The mentor is one of Empire State College's unique contributions to nontraditional higher education. In 1976 this distinctive faculty role was defined in College policy:

Mentors must serve in various educational roles. In all cases, they will help students articulate an educational plan, and help them implement it. Frequently, this process will include direct tutorial work with the student in those areas in which the mentor can contribute intellectually to the student's academic goals. In other instances, the mentor will help the student locate and obtain appropriate learning resources suited to the student's needs. In either case, it is the mentor who must retain the primary responsibility for guaranteeing the quality of the student's work.

The range of mentors' functions creates intellectual challenges on a number of levels. The dominant emphasis on the individual student's needs and goals demands that mentors bring together the worlds of college and career, and apply their knowledge to a very broad field of learning activities. Like other faculties, mentors are trained and represent the various disciplines but they must work with each student according to that student's needs and goals. With appropriate support they must often work beyond the boundaries of their disciplines and apply their intellectual skills more broadly.

Furthermore, mentors participate in the development of the College, especially in all questions relating to the academic processes which constitute the mentor-mode degree programs of Empire State College. The College as a new institution especially needs and desires the involvement of its faculty in the ongoing process of developing policies, to meet the needs of its students and the special problems faced by its staff. As the primary full-time core faculty of the College, they participate in the governance of the College at both the College-wide and regional learning center levels of decision making and policy development. They play a key role in the formation of academic policies, including the development and evaluation of new teaching and institutional techniques and arrangements, short-and long-range planning, and the evaluation of personnel for purposes of appointment, reappointment, promotion, and the granting of continuing appointments. Mentors help identify and evaluate the tutors, field supervisors, and adjunct-community faculty who work with students.

The mentor-student relationship is, then, one pivotal element of the Empire State College academic program and requires that the mentor:

- Counsel and advise.
- Assist students to design individual degree programs and contracts.
- Provide appropriate instruction.
- Assess and evaluate.
- Manage and develop instructional resources

The program planning function is achieved when the mentor acts as an academic counselor, helping the student explore academic alternatives, discover his or her goals and purposes and identify new areas of exploration and query. At the same time, the mentor shares with the student primary responsibilities for the student's intellectual development by coordinating learning activities and providing instruction. Because the mentor operates within the context of understanding developed in his or her role as academic counselor, the relationship of learning and instruction to the student's purposes is made clear and is embedded in a solid base.

Students also need to have their work evaluated, not only to provide comparisons of where they are in relation to others, but also to help them understand where they are in relation to their goals.

By working with a mentor, students are expected to plan and clarify goals, assume significant responsibility for their education, and understand the purposes for their learning. In other words, the mentor's role is both to provide a context for students and to encourage them to become active participants in the learning process. The ability to effect (*sic*) this process requires that mentors know the key elements of the learning process and the importance of moving learning and life closer together. At the same time, the mentor must ensure that students are developing critical faculties and consequently establishing the durable ability to learn in other contexts at future times; that is, the mentor must help each student become an independent learner.

College faculty participate in personnel selection and review through Center committees and through the College-wide governance structure. Faculty hiring, for example, is undertaken through search processes which utilize peers at the Centers. These searches are in accord with the institution's commitment to affirmative action and to the continued development of a cadre of faculty who are well credentialed, who find excitement in the teaching of adults and who are committed to a student-centered learning approach. The retention, promotion, and tenuring of faculty involves personnel committees at the Centers and the College as well as the administration.

Indeed, all aspects of institutional planning and policy development involve the College governance structure based in a Senate made up of faculty members, the College President, and the chairs of standing committees. These are the Academic Personnel Committee, the Professional Personnel Committee, the Student Affairs Committee, and the Academic Policy and Learning Programs Committee. In addition, senior faculty and administrators participate in the Program, Planning and Budget Committee which brings together those concerns, issues and ideas arising throughout the College. These have an impact on the present and future of the institution and on the allocation of its resources. Thus, the Empire State's (*sic*) College faculty retain traditional collegial roles, while undertaking an extensive variety of duties and involvements which are less common at other institutions.

After nearly 20 years of experience with the mentor role, the College has now turned to a careful assessment of what mentoring has come to mean. During the self-study, faculty called for more recognition and support for diversity and individualization in the role of mentor. A recurring theme in the self-study discussions is the challenge of keeping creativity alive in mentoring at a point in the institution's life cycle when much energy goes into meeting the needs of a large student body.

These recommendations are consistent with an important objective in the College Master Plan which is:

Enhance the Quality of Faculty Work Life

There is a recognition that professional satisfaction is key to maintaining academic program quality. A number of initiatives have following upon that objective and are currently underway, including the establishment of a long-range staffing plan and a series of development opportunities for faculty, including opportunities for research, for study, and for leadership.

Distinctive Features of Mentoring

The College's individualized approach to education is centered on the one-to-one relationship between the mentor and student, and the role of the mentor grows directly out of that relationship. Since there were few models to follow in American higher education, mentoring practices developed as the College matured, and the development was not painless. The underlying anxiety, which plagues those who pioneer, has been exacerbated by the heavy demands placed on the faculty – demands often unlike those of their academic colleagues in other institutions. Indeed, the self-study focused on the fact that mentors simultaneously perform a variety of tasks within an academic context. It seems clear that from the student perspective this approach is effective. It is not as clear, however, that real coherence relative to the mentor role has emerged from practice. That, along with matters of workload, is a major professional issue in the College.

Mentors provide services to students and to the institution which are not traditionally professorial: career; academic; time management; financial aid; and even personal advisement; public relations and student recruitment; community resource development; faculty development and training; policy development and administration; staff supervision; and clerical tasks. While faculty at other colleges and universities engage in some or even all of these activities, ESC mentors regard them as central rather than ancillary parts of their professional duties and skills.

A distinctive, if not unique, feature of mentoring is the wide range of academic content and approach which individual mentors make available to students. Because the College is geographically dispersed, a discipline is represented in any given location by only one or two faculty, who must provide the diversity of content, approach, and philosophical attitude toward their disciplines which ordinarily is supplied by the membership of an academic department. Most work with students who are interested in subjects beyond the disciplines in which the mentors did graduate study. And nearly all mentors normally teach at any given time a variety of subjects (with a variety of approaches to those subjects) within or near their "home" disciplines. These typically exceed the number of "preparations" required of faculty at other colleges.

Mentors attempt to meet and manage these student needs by increasing their own intellectual breadth and by using tutors, cross registration, and CDL. Such use, across great distance, is enhanced by the special communications efforts of the College. Since the last Middle States review (indeed in very recent years), the College has developed computer linkages across the State. Now all administrative offices, nearly all full-time faculty and many part-time faculty and students have access to an electronic mail system. Thus, communications have improved, but the geography of the College is a reality in the role of the mentor and requires attention.

The assessment of prior experiential learning constitutes another distinctive feature of the mentor's role. Rather than serving as the sole source of expert knowledge and imparting it to students, a mentor may be called upon to assist students in identifying and expressing the college-level learning they gained in noncollegiate settings. For mentors in areas such as business and human services, evaluation of prior learning forms a significant part of their academic responsibilities.

Distribution of Work Responsibilities in Mentoring

Is there one mentor role? Wide variations across the College in the manner in which faculty satisfy the requirements of being a mentor lead to the view that rather than one "mentor role" there are indeed many roles, and that these roles, while sharing common elements, are nevertheless quite different.

Mentors at the Regional Centers and Units typically, although not always, work with students one at a time rather than in groups and provide a wide range of educational and advising services. Mentors in the special purpose Centers (the Center for Distance Learning and The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies) work in academic programs structured very differently. The Van Arsdale School associate degree program is conducted through a classroom-based curriculum in which full-time faculty have significant responsibility for coordinating the activities of part-time lecturers. In CDL's course-based program, full-time faculty provide direct instruction, coordinate the activities of tutors within a given subject area and oversee the development of course materials.

Further, the work of full-time faculty at Empire State College is enhanced through the use of part-time faculty to meet needs in most cases in specific disciplines. But the nature of the College makes it almost impossible for part-time mentors to limit their involvement, as is usually the case at other institutions. Part-time mentors are drawn into many College activities, and part-time employment can mean a significant personal and professional commitment on the part of these faculty. At the same time, full participation is often not available – generally for reasons of resources, but sometimes of matters of policy. Efforts are continually under way to alleviate any sense of "marginality" that such situations could create, because part-time faculty are, indeed, integral and necessary to the conduct of the programs.

ESC PERSONNEL BY EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY AND FT/PT STATUS FALL 1988

| Employment Category | FT | | PT | | Total | |
|----------------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> | % |
| Faculty | 124 | (39) | 91 | (78) | 215 | (49) |
| Administrative Staff | 79 | (25) | 12 | (10) | 91 | (21) |
| Support Staff | 115 | (36) | 14 | (12) | 129 | (30) |
| TOTALS | 318 | (100) | 117 | (100) | 435 | (100) |

N.B. This breakdown includes State payroll employees at ESC excluding tutors and adjunct faculty.

The College further expands its academic expertise through the use of tutors, adjuncts and evaluators. Tutors are normally hired for short periods to work with students in specific areas, or on specific learning contracts. Adjunct faculty, often faculty members at other academic institutions, are sometimes hired for longer periods of time. Finally, evaluators are used to establish the nature and extent of collegiate-level “nonsponsored” learning – learning derived from experiences outside of a traditional higher education institution.

While all full-time faculty engage in academic, administrative and professional development activities, the percentage of time that they spend in those activities has changed somewhat over time. Studies of the allocation of mentor time were conducted in 1973/74 and in 1985. In approximately a decade, the average age of the faculty has increased by about six years to 45.6. The proportion of females has grown. The average length of service by mentors in the College has increased from three years to nearly nine years.

In the 1985 sample, faculty estimated spending somewhat over half their time in academic activities, slightly more than a quarter of their time in administrative activities, and the remainder, slightly less than one-fifth, in professional development.

The 1985 study also indicated some differences among the Centers with direct instruction ranging from one-fifth to one-third of faculty time and the development of degree programs with students varying from one-tenth to nearly one-fifth. Faculty also noted heavy but differing proportions of work spent on what they felt to be administrative tasks ranging from one-fifth to two-fifths. Faculty development varied from one-tenth to nearly one-third.

A comparison of the 1985 study with the previous study period indicated that:

- The amount of time that faculty now report spending on degree program planning has not changed markedly, remaining just over 20%.
- The amount of time that faculty spend in direct instruction has decreased slightly, to just under one-third of faculty time.
- The amount of time that faculty report spending on administrative activities has increased from 20 to 28%.
- There has been a marked increase in the average time reported in faculty development from 2% in 1973 to nearly 19% in 1985.

Nearly all of the self-reported time estimates suggest the existence of “mentor roles” rather than a unitary “mentor role.” Differences across Centers seem to result from varying student demands or differences in the mode of instruction (guided independent study on the one extreme as compared with classroom instruction or structured distance learning courses on the other). These role differences must be taken into account with regard both to faculty evaluation and to professional development.

Diversity and Development

We hypothesize that the small percentage of development time reported in 1973 and 1974 was a function of the emerging nature of the College itself. Energies were directed toward developing the College and the academic aspects which comprise it. While the College continues to innovate and to move in new directions, many of the fundamental issues of policy and practice are now established and experienced faculty wish to explore other avenues in their professional development. The marked increase in reported time now spent on faculty development emphasizes the importance of the Master Plan objectives regarding work life. Implementation of the objective would include development opportunities appropriate to the needs of the individuals and to the needs of the institution. The College also recognizes development needs of support staff and has established a committee to consider such opportunities.

Another aspect of faculty development is the introduction of new mentors to an institution whose approach is sometimes unfamiliar to those who have had their training and experience in more traditional institutions. The College has relied on various means for such acculturation, recognizing that senior faculty serve as mentors to their new colleagues in very important, if informal, ways. A College mentoring workshop was reinstated in 1988 and has been expanded to two regional workshops in 1989. While these workshops support new mentors, they also facilitate discussion of new approaches among more seasoned faculty.

As yet another means to offer creative opportunities for faculty research at Empire State College, as well as to faculty and students from other parts of higher education, Empire State College has established The National Center for Adult Learning. Called for in the Master Plan, this Center seeks to improve the state of the art regarding theory, research and effective practice of adult learning. This Center, headed by a council of national repute, will hold major conferences, establish and maintain a clearinghouse of information on adult learning research, inform public policy in regard to the theory and practice of adult learning and will finally strengthen Empire State’s connections with others interested in adult learning, innovation and change.

Coherence, Commitment, and Competence in the Mentor Role

Though mentors might variously define what they do, nearly all would select “serving student need” as the animating principle of their activities. Mentors who regarded disciplinary scholarship as primary would find the sheer diversity and amount of mentors’ work to be unendurable. There is by now a rich (regrettably, uncollected) aggregate of tales about mentoring. They rarely have to do with publishing, consulting, grant getting, or discovery making. The theme is almost always the same: student and mentor finding a way to achieve learning.

The emphasis on learning is important. Mentors interpret student need differently, with varying emphasis on personal growth, vocational preparation and advancement, and acquisition of the skills and information customary within an academic discipline and for a liberal education. Similarly, mentors differ – often profoundly – about how much authority students should have in identifying and explicating their needs. But, however various mentors interpret educational purpose and authority, nearly all suggest that the outcome of the student-mentor association should be that students (and sometimes mentors as well) should understand something they did not before.

Background and Approach

What skills do mentors possess to fulfill their basic commitment? The self-study yielded the following categories: disciplinary expertise; academic breadth; competence in teaching basic academic skills; administrative skills; advisement; promoting student self-direction and independence. Each of these categories contains issues for the professional development of mentors; and in each instance there is a tension added by the cumulative demands from all the other skill categories and the numbers and diversity of students on whose behalf those skills are to be exercised.

Academic tradition, the State University of New York, and ESC faculty are consistent in expecting that mentors be expert in an academic subject. The College thus collectively possesses conventional expertise in the areas in which it is certified to give degrees. Indeed, Empire State College mentors have excellent and, for the most part, traditional academic credentials and these faculty members are available to each other directly or through computer linkages to offer advice and counsel. Nonetheless, the geographic structure of the College can allow a sense of “disciplinary isolation,” only partially mitigated by the thrice annual meetings of the area of study faculty of the College and by the All College meeting held once a year. Faculty are offered opportunities for professional travel and for participation in conferences and other disciplined(*sic*)-based gatherings, but there is recognition that responding to other demands of mentoring leaves little time to contribute actively in their discipline.

Nearly every mentor at ESC works with students in a broad range of academic subjects. The importance of academic breadth runs counter to one of the traditions of the professoriate. On one hand, mentors report anxiety and frustration at being spread so intellectually thin. On the other hand, mentors also report considerable joy and satisfaction in the range of their knowledge, their ability to make do, and their opportunities to explore so many different subjects. “I read – read about everything,” one mentor enthusiastically comments. The favorable side of this intellectual breadth might be pushed even further: ESC faculty can contribute to current national discussions about “the meaning of higher education” and the poor consequences accruing from over-specialization in education and other professions.

[“ESC Faculty by Primary Teaching Areas, FT/PT Status, and Highest Degree Earned, Fall 1988” table omitted.]

Fundamental Skills

In attending to students acquiring basic collegiate skills, ESC swims smoothly in the academic mainstream. Over the years the College has devoted considerable effort to developing activities and programs, especially in writing, and faculty are increasingly attentive to these matters. It is not clear, however, that all mentors have been able to integrate student skill development with content studies, though empirical research supports the view that it is through such integration that students best acquire and retain these skills.

Mentors are clearly divided about this matter. Some report that the development of skills, especially numeracy skills, is simply not their business. Others would like it to be, but report that they have not the ability or time to do it. And yet others are doing so with increasing facility and success. The Van Arsdale School faculty, for example, have developed a program in writing across the curriculum which was the focus of their faculty development activities in 1988-89.

How able mentors should be at helping students strengthen basic academic skills has been and remains an important issue. Faculty awareness has increased and diagnostic activities have been instituted at all Regional Centers; but it is not clear that faculty who are not skills specialists have become actively involved or that sufficient resources have been devoted to these matters.

The Mentor as the College

Every mentor operates a small organization that directly serves many students and makes connections for them with other parts of a large organization. In providing these services, mentors interpret and implement policy; recruit, train and supervise specialists (tutors); develop and use learning resources; delegate work to clerical staff; integrate their own services with others in the organization at the same level (other mentors at Regional Centers) and at different levels (Coordinating Center); and develop and manage records so that their work is intelligible and accountable.

Although these tasks are accepted as essential to the College's academic process, many mentors feel that they have too little training and support in those aspects of their role for which their previous academic work has not prepared them. Further, all mentors perform clerical tasks and, when asked what duties they would most like to reduce, these are most frequently cited.

The individualized nature of the College's degree programs and contract studies makes advisement a central element of the mentor's role. The one-to-one mentor-student relationship precludes a clear demarcation between the academic and the nonacademic. The presence of the nonacademic in mentor-student interaction is inevitably a feature of a college whose students have little contact with each other, see faculty individually, have few other academic services apart from faculty, live in the real world rather than on a campus, are often returning to academic study in order to address a nonacademic issue in their lives, and fully intend to suffuse their studies with their experience. Students often seek their mentor's counsel on matters which go beyond the academic and into personal, family and financial problems. Addressing these concerns appropriately within the context of an educational relationship requires special interpersonal skills, such as listening and setting of limits, which also are not part of the professional preparation of most faculty. The College must support activities directed explicitly to the development of these skills.

Finally, there is a group of mentoring skills and attitudes which have to do with helping students become independent, self-directed learners. Mentors often prefer to speak of "working with" rather than "teaching" students. Further, many mentors believe that learning occurs most deeply and effectively when it is active, when, through a variety of means, students are given responsibility for shaping and managing their learning. Given numbers, curricular variety, and different schedules of students, mentors simply could not serve them unless students do for themselves much of what other institutions do for students through lectures and course syllabi. Perhaps the subtlest of mentoring abilities and the one closest to representing the essence of "mentoring" is that of enabling students to take on educational responsibility and independence.

The Unit Mentor/Coordinator

Most ESC mentors have more skills and commitments in common than not. Nevertheless, there appears to be a "different" sort of mentor, the Unit mentor/coordinator, who works alone or with a small number of other colleagues. For all practical purposes, each Unit provides all the services (academic and otherwise) of the College. Thus, while coordinators are in almost no respect absolutely different from their Center colleagues, the needs for academic breadth, organizational management, community relations, and supervision are significantly greater. Student problems must be solved on the spot; mentor leaves, vacations, illnesses, and mere fits of inattention or fatigue create significant scheduling and resource management problems. Finally, some Unit coordinators are expected to carry higher student loads, through the use of tutors and cross registration, than are "Center mentors." Such differences are perceived by nearly all Unit coordinators to create a distinctive professional role and workload responsibility. The College will examine and address the need for Unit coordinators to communicate with one another and to engage in professional development activities geared to this role. Further, we intend to focus on the additional administrative responsibilities of coordinators to see how they might be made easier to accomplish.

Mentoring and the Workload

The issue of the mentor workload is not new in this College. Throughout its history, the variety of tasks undertaken by mentors and the demands of individual work with students have meant that the faculty put in long hours at the Center or at the Unit. Budget reallocations over the past ten years have improved Empire State College's relative position among SUNY institutions, and the ratio of 25 FTE students per faculty is about average for the SUNY arts and science institutions. This has occurred, for the most part, as a result of ratio increases elsewhere, rather than through improvements at Empire State. Attempts to obtain a funding level which lowers the ratio have not been successful, as yet, nor has the College been able to significantly increase the budget for tutors and evaluators, which might have a positive impact on mentor workload. The College has devoted considerable effort to the matter of workload and it is engaging in a series of efforts to streamline the academic process as a means to address some of these issues.

It is, nonetheless, important to understand the influence of the problem. "Workload" becomes the underlying theme in most significant discussion in the College. And in so much suffusing these discussions, "workload" may weaken the development of a well-articulated College culture. It affects the emphasis of discussions about fundamental issues of practice and philosophy, such as services to students with basic skills problems, the legitimacy of less individualized academic documents, and the distribution of professional development resources. It affects the consideration of major programmatic initiatives, such as the development of the Graduate program, and of new procedures, such as the introduction of a new enrollment and billing system.

In addition to concerns about the absolute level of workload, the self-study discussions raised questions about the equitable distribution of workload. The College's monthly mentor/student rosters provide some data about workload which seem to indicate considerable variation among faculty. Some of this variation is accounted for by the nature of the information, which cannot differentiate regular mentoring loads from those that are affected by brief leaves, governance responsibilities, and special instructional roles in such areas as basic skills. Further, some academic activities,

such as the evaluation of prior learning, are not reflected in the mentor student roster. Although comprehensive and unambiguous information on this question is not readily available, what material is available suggests that, even when all explanatory factors are considered, workload is inequitably distributed. Data related to this issue must be considered in any efforts to address workload.

The nature of the College's program and patterns of enrollment helps to identify some of the problems associated with workload. Described below are contributing factors which include first-contract ("front-end") attrition, heavy part-time student enrollment, "ghost load," load variability among Centers and faculty, and differences between traditional faculty expectations and the realities of mentoring.

First-Contract Attrition

It is well recognized among mentors and administrators that students enrolling for their first Empire State College contract require more faculty attention than veteran students. The unfamiliarity of the instructional mode, the College's formal complexity, the opportunities and demands of independent study, all require time and support to learn. Further, most new ESC students have been away from any academic environment for enough time (sometimes many years) to need help re-implementing their academic skills. It is, therefore, during the first contract that mentors are most called upon to be teachers and counselors.

Most student attrition occurs during or at the end of the first contract, as students determine that their present learning style is not served best by the instructional processes of the College. The College budget is dependent upon meeting its enrollment targets; thus students who leave must be replaced. The higher the College's attrition, the greater the number of new students and thus the heavier the mentoring tasks. In recent years the College as a whole and individual Centers have made deliberate efforts to reduce first-contract attrition; these efforts should continue.

Part-Time Students

In terms of the College's enrollment targets, two half-time students equal one full-time student; but in terms of the distribution and focus of a mentor's attention, two half-time students equal two persons requiring separate services. Thus, an increase in the proportion of part-time students increases mentor and staff workload as well. Part-time enrollment has grown significantly. In 1976, part-time enrollment comprised about 40-45% of the total; it is now 84%.

Two sorts of solutions are possible; both are difficult to accomplish. Some success has been achieved by ESC and other SUNY institutions in obtaining budget recognition of the increased service needs which are generated by a greater number of part-time students. But the fact that direct instruction demands are basically the same for full- and part-time students is a function of the ESC educational model, and supplementary funding for this purpose has not yet been accepted in SUNY budget considerations. The College has lobbied to this purpose but this fiscal model has not yet been adopted in this time of general, system-wide financial limitations.

Alternatively, the College can try to increase its enrollment of full-time students, and there have been some efforts in that direction. However, that approach would seem to contradict the access and enrollment flexibility which, by mission and tradition, the College has fostered.

Tutors

By supplementing the academic expertise of the mentor, tutors are the irreplaceable and necessary means by which the College fulfills its mission. They provide the academic expertise and diversity which, at any given location, mentors may not be able to supply themselves; and they embed the College in local communities in ways consistent with its educational assumptions. Tutors, however, are associated with two somewhat contradictory aspects of the workload issue. Although every tutored study represents a teaching responsibility mentors do not have to perform themselves, it also means an administrative and supervisory duty some faculty are less than comfortable undertaking. Moreover, available funding seriously limits the pay level for tutors, and payment is sometimes slow. Consequently, they are difficult to recruit and to retain.

The Ghost Load

It is common for mentors to work with students who are not currently enrolled. Usually they are students in transition. They may be considering enrolling in the College or they may be between enrollment periods, finishing up work on a prior contract or planning and arranging resources before beginning a new contract. This is the "ghost load," so called because these students are not visible on mentor/student rosters or in the College's enrollment counts. Mentors commonly report that the ghost load comprises a significant part of their overall work. Precise studies have not been done, but a rough estimate made by mentors at one Center indicated that about 20% of appointments were made with unenrolled students.

Mentors do not seem generally to object to this "extra" work, but they feel it should be administratively acknowledged in some way. Ghost load should be carefully considered and monitored, and its existence should be recognized and managed.

Workload and Role Expectation

Most ESC faculty have attended traditional academic institutions and, prior to coming to ESC, their academic experiences were structured in traditional ways: clear breaks between semesters and from one academic year to the next, working with students primarily in groups in institutional structures large and complex enough to take up slack. Although the range of formal faculty responsibilities at Empire State College is probably not all that different from those of traditional faculty, the organization and distribution of mentors' attention is very different. Despite several weeks set aside in the academic calendar for professional development, most mentors find it extremely difficult to take a real break from the demands of their students, which by and large remain constant throughout the year. The pace of meetings with students, the lack of closure in a college that operates year-round and enrolls students daily, and the mix of simultaneous responsibilities create a work experience for which traditional academic culture provides inadequate preparation.

One reason why the workload issue has remained so intractable may be that mentors' work has been understood primarily in relation to the model of the traditional professoriate which is only partially appropriate to mentoring. The lack of closure, of periods when external demands on time and attention cease or are dramatically reduced, is more typical of the human services professions, as is the need for case management and administrative skills. The same analogy applies to the overall amount of time mentors must "put in at the office." The 46-60 hour workweek typically reported by the mentor is very similar to the pattern in clinical practice.

Handling the workload issue by reconceiving and more realistically specifying the nature of mentors' work would be a delicate and difficult enterprise. First of all, the fundamental problem is one of resources, not definition. Second, because the College's mission is to educate students, it cannot merely embrace a clinical model for the support and development of its faculty. Third, mentors seem generally to conceive of professional development in traditionally academic and scholarly ways. Many see scholarship, research and similar activity in their academic field as an opportunity to gain some release from the demands of mentoring. These qualities must be respected as the College considers the means to make professional development opportunities more plentiful, varied and appropriate.

If the College community devotes more attention to the development of faculty in the role of mentor, it will have to come to terms with just how "innovative" its educational mission must be. What does "individualized education" mean? What skills and virtues are necessary to engage in it? These are intellectually challenging questions and perhaps require a scholarship of their own to address. Contemporary culture may well lack specific, coherent, and just models of "the well and broadly educated person." But if mentors must be broad-minded, in both content and attitude, in order to serve the range of their students' needs, the College must help them to explore ideas, principles, and images they can use to acquire and sustain such breadth.

Recommendations

1. The College should support the development of a distinct mentor culture through workshops, publications, Center activities and other appropriate means.
2. The College should give increasing emphasis in professional development opportunities to activities focusing on the unique features of the mentor role.
3. The College should ascertain the professional development goals of faculty and match resources to these objectives.
4. The College should examine the Unit coordinator's role with respect to needs for professional development and opportunities for communication.
5. The College should develop ways of reducing mentor workload or making it more manageable.
6. The College should develop improved tutor orientations, including supplementary information on the basic procedures and on the methods of tutor-assisted learning.
7. The College should recognize evaluations of prior learning as part of faculty workload data.

Remembering David DuBois

Colleagues from SUNY Empire State College

David DuBois was mentor emeritus from the Genesee Valley Center. As a BME mentor at ESC, he became very involved in advocating for persons with disabilities and championed that cause with immense dedication, clarity and abiding strength. In recognition for his many years of work for the disabled within and outside the college, in 2002, Dave DuBois was awarded the Altes Prize for Exemplary Community Service.

Adele Anderson, mentor, Genesee Valley Region; part-time mentor, School for Graduate Studies

When I was a part-time mentor at GVC in the late 1990s, David DuBois's corner office overflowed with books and papers at the back of a labyrinthine and shambling hallway in the 8 Prince Street building. Looking back it seems as if a different world existed then. Faculty members argued policy and philosophy at a regularly full-house colloquium, with the dominant theme of higher education as liberating the mind. For many faculty members this was a quest. David DuBois was one of these, but he also put a special emphasis on employability, educational access, and making a living at the front of his priorities for students.

Everyone with anything to do with disability and advocacy knew him (and he them), nationally and internationally. His empathy and advocacy for learners lacking traditional advantages, and his outrage at job and educational access inequities for people with disabilities could be intense, at times searing. He completely embodied both of the two college cultures of the time – individualized independent education that maximized credit for outside learning and extensive use of distance learning, in the Boyer sense of all possible avenues, transcending space, place and time. This included university correspondence and extension courses equally, as our distance learning studies and his command of all available resources was stunning. Coaching students through bureaucracy and hurdles of

credentialing was a passion, and he was often defiant about what he saw as barriers in the college's structures.

David mentored many people in business, had many, many accounting students, and was primary mentor to many whom he attracted from various fields of human services and disabilities. His was a personal approach evincing a very strong philosophy and direct guidance. He thought big about every project, conference, and endeavor and organized tirelessly, undeterred by risk of failure or disagreements along the way. He had an agenda for education and for society.

The Genesee Valley Center later moved, and now is on the verge of another move to a new building. In many ways it was a different place when I first got to know David. In the college community, many still carry on developing a quest that bears common threads of the agenda David DuBois championed. But in student-centered mentoring, motivation, sheer effort and personal courage in the face of adversity, including illness and physical impairment, his legacy remains exceptional.

Nancy Gadow, mentor emerita, Genesee Valley Region

I was very fortunate to have known and worked with David DuBois for a number of years at Empire State College. His interest and concern for helping persons with various disabilities led to several conferences and events that focused on disability issues and effective strategies to help these learners. We wrote a book on this topic: *Adult Learners with Special Needs: Strategies and Resources for Postsecondary Education and Workplace Training* (1997, Krieger).

It was a special friendship and I learned many things from Dave.



David DuBois

Wayne Willis, mentor emeritus, Genesee Valley Region

Dave DuBois was one of the longest serving and most valuable mentors in the history of the Genesee Valley Center. When I joined the faculty in 1977, Dave was already a seasoned part-timer for students in the unglamorous but high demand subject of accounting. Later, as a full-time mentor, he continued his excellent work in all areas of accounting, while expanding to a wider range of business and educational studies. But surely his most distinctive and pioneering contribution was in the field of disability studies, where he did so much to create new learning opportunities for our students and to heighten the awareness of his colleagues. I especially recall the enormous energy and commitment that he devoted to conceiving and organizing several annual conferences (under the theme “Disabled but Enabled”) that gathered scholars, activists, and students from around the country and the globe to examine the full gamut of disability issues – legal, political, economic, social, psychological and educational. These very high quality conferences were the largest and most recognized public events ever sponsored by ESC in the Rochester area.

The way that Dave coped with his own severe health problems, I believe, made him an inspiring example to his many students, and really to anyone who knew him, of persistence and success in the face of difficulties, just as it gave him a knowing empathy with others' struggles. There was much to be learned from being around Dave, going far beyond the academic.

Dick Butler, mentor emeritus, Genesee Valley Region

David DuBois was a large man, not just physically but in his vision and his approach to life. Drawing on statistical studies of the disabled and his personal experience, Dr. DuBois had recently begun work on a major vision: a doctoral program in disabilities. He documented the need, and established the potential worth of such a program. Dave initiated discussions with colleagues at the University of Buffalo and University of Toronto to bring such a program into being. Dave's aspirations for nursing this doctoral program to fruition built on his longtime interest in the disability population: including ways to engage, empower and employ the disabled in fulfilling societal roles. Dave's work on disabilities led to a citation from the NYS Legislature commending his earlier work on disability issues. Given his accomplishments, it is likely a doctoral program in disabilities would have taken form had he not died.

Dave had joined Empire State full time after serving as president of an area business college. Completing his doctorate with Union College, Dave subsequently served as an advisor to several others completing their doctorates with Union, including Empire State Mentor Joanne Corsica.

Dave and I met through our work in the Business, Management and Economics (BME) area of study, and with our chapter of the United University Professions union, subsequently serving together in Genesee Valley Center. Dave mentored largely in accounting and finance, for both GVC and for Center for Distance Learning. He wrote detailed study guides used by many instructors, aiding accounting students. Reflecting his strong work ethic, Dave carried student loads more than twice that of the average mentor during the years I knew him in GVC.

Dave was an activist committed to changing the world. He was an influential voice in the college and the union for the handicapped – faculty, professional, staff and student.

By advocating for institutional support he needed, Dave became a role model for how a person with a disability can continue a meaningful and productive role in the world of employment.

David DuBois deserves a special place in the history of Empire State College: for his influence in directing the college's and union's attention to the plight of staff, administrators, professionals, faculty and students of the institution who have handicaps; for encouraging those of us "temporarily abled" on how college employees might constructively respond; and for modeling how a person with a handicap can lead a fulfilling professional and personal life.

Anne Cobb, mentor, Genesee Valley Region

David DuBois was a mentor's mentor. He was my mentor from the time he invited me to tutor one of his students in economics. Although I had been a college instructor years earlier, I was in the business world at the time I met Dave. He took me "under his wing" and gave me many opportunities to see mentoring in practice. He took me along and involved me in his group study in a Syracuse residency. He encouraged me to offer an all-day financial planning workshop to the public. He involved me co-authoring a proposed program for underprepared entering students. When a full-time opening appeared at Empire, he encouraged me to apply. He continued to mentor and befriend me. By example, he taught me the importance of working with students wherever we found them and to encourage them to grow beyond what they thought they were capable of doing. My life and my practice of mentoring have been greatly enriched as a result of his having mentored me in those early years.

Remembering Margaret “Peggy” Morrison

Colleagues from SUNY Empire State College



Margaret Morrison

Margaret “Peggy” Morrison was mentor emerita with the Central New York Center, retiring in 1999. She won the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching for 1981–1982, yet another sign of her passion for writing and comparative literature studies, and her impact on her students. She was a lover of antiques, an avid traveler and an honest and trusted colleague who offered important support to many mentors over many years.

Joanne Corsica, mentor emerita, Center for Distance Learning

Peg was my mentor, respected colleague and a much-loved friend; it is with great sadness that I write this piece.

Peg guided me through tenure review and promotion successfully and I will always be grateful for her help in the process. Her guidance was mostly gentle, but firm when I became my oppositional self. And she did not hesitate to point out that oppositional nature when appropriate; her wise guidance was always valued and trusted – and always right on target! When I was approved for a mini reassignment to study police K-9 training and police K-9 culture, a 13-week program of training spent with the Onondaga County Sheriff’s Department that required a commute (in winter months) from my home in the

North Country (Watertown area) to Syracuse, Peg offered her home to me. She not only housed me, but fed me ... she was unbelievable in her hospitality and kindness, to say nothing of a really fun person to spend time with. Over early morning coffee, we had a great time sharing stories about cops and dogs as well as students and the craziness of ESC. Each night when I returned to Peg’s home, she welcomed me to her warm house (K-9 training is always conducted outside and it was really cold) and a warm dinner. Her hospitality was unforgettable in its kindness and warmth. I miss her and feel very lucky to have such wonderful memories of a really neat lady and dear friend to carry in my heart. Rest in peace, Peg, and know you are loved and remembered.

Elma Boyko, mentor emerita, Central New York Region

Others will write about Peg’s skill at mentoring and tutoring and of her service to the college in a variety of ways. I was privileged to work with her at the Syracuse Unit; and I would echo the sentiments of those who knew her and appreciated those talents, and her dedication to her students and to those students she tutored and evaluated for others.

She had a further skill few knew about. When we moved into the Amory Square office she showed her skills in transforming the empty space, both in the spatial sense and in overseeing the purchase and placement of furnishings, etc., to make it a useful and pleasant environment in which to work. She also had an antiquing business which she greatly enjoyed.

Peg and I retired at the same time and it was at that time that she went from being a valued colleague to treasured friend. We went to India twice, once as part of a group and once when we rented a car and driver and toured a large portion of the country. She rode an elephant and a camel, although the latter was not her favorite mode of transportation! She so absorbed the sights, smells and sounds of

India that when we returned we had a schedule of meeting once a week to have lunch, watch a Bollywood movie while sipping a cup of chai, and discuss whatever book of Hindu literature we had been reading. Her keen ability to discern the subtleties within literature added to our exploration of the epics.

Peg was generous, compassionate and, if the occasion warranted it, feisty. She was a good friend. I miss her.

Maureen Kravec, mentor/ coordinator, Central New York Region

The first quality that comes to mind when I think of Peg Morrison is her honesty. A comparative literature professor by training, she had an extensive vocabulary, but she never minced words. Her other memorable qualities included her keen intelligence, her fairness and her loyalty to the core ideals of Empire State College. I first met Peg in the late 1970s, when she would drive Route 81 from Syracuse to Watertown several days a week to start a new unit at the small but growing city. At that time, there were few options for adult and place-bound students who had completed an associate degree. A vivid image is of attending an information session with Peg at the St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center, where many of these first Watertown-based students worked.

Through the years, Peg became both a mentor and a friend as I progressed from being a tutor (adjunct) to a mentor myself. We worked with many writing and literature students. Her guidance and enthusiasm encouraged many students to go on to graduate studies and careers in teaching and writing.

When I was hired full time in Watertown, I asked Peg to be my “new mentor’s mentor.” At first, I expressed nervousness about doing educational planning with the business students, particularly in accounting, but Peg assured me these were easy, as accountants needed a basic core of studies. (I also learned

that they often had individual interests quite apart from accounting that made each degree program unique.)

Over the years, Peg helped me understand many academic and interpersonal intricacies at the college. In occasional righteous indignation, she showed that she cared deeply about certain issues, but she could maintain an almost Zenlike perspective toward life as well. I believe that philosophical calm resulted from Peg's bravery in facing adversity and finding balance.

Watertown remained important to Peg even after she had returned to full-time mentoring in Syracuse. At a time when Watertown was understaffed after a mentor had left, Peg, who was full time then at the Syracuse location, volunteered to drive to Watertown weekly to help with the overflow of students.

Peg was an ardent feminist. She participated in the early Women's Studies residencies, and learned how to negotiate the challenges of what was at that time a male-dominated atmosphere. One of my amusing memories is of a Central NY meeting in which a male colleague, eager to participate, started to interrupt me. "Now let her finish," said Peg. And he did. This comment not only showed me that she valued what I had to say, but politely yet firmly reminded the men that we all could learn to be more effective communicators.

Dr. Margaret Morrison was truly a fine academic who balanced high standards and empathy. She also was a fine human being – a great lady in the classic sense of the term, and one to whom I will always be grateful.

Dick Butler, mentor emeritus, Genesee Valley Region

Peg Morrison (formerly Peg Spanos) served students and the college in her role as unit coordinator and mentor, with expertise in literature. She was a force on college committees, particularly the Academic Personnel Committee (APC), which she chaired at one time. I got to work with, and know Peg during the latter part of her career, from 1990 until her retirement.

Peg was one of our early mentors, serving first in the Syracuse Unit. She founded the Watertown Unit of Empire State College.

I understand Peg was expected to: find and rent office space, locate and hire a unit secretary, recruit and begin mentoring students, and establish necessary policy – all successfully accomplished. In the process, Peg evidenced a characteristic of entrepreneurs: the unspoken understanding that one has an ownership stake, and accompanying rights to a voice in the college's development. Peg Morrison is one of our college's founding pioneers, one who deserves recognition and appreciation for that role.

During 15 years, we shared students, lunches and management of the unit. I relied on Peg to review, edit and criticize documents I prepared for governance and professional meetings. She always found time to provide this much-valued collegial assistance. From her insightful guidance on our unit selection committees, we were successful in hiring some outstanding mentors, as well, including Nikki Shrimpton (later to become dean of the Central New York Center).

Peg Morrison had a particular affinity for helping single moms, those seeking an education to better themselves and their families. One illustration: Peg was leading a seminar for displaced homemakers, preparing them to enter the job market. She realized that many single moms on welfare would not have clothes suitable for a job, and consequently might be rejected due to appearance. Peg and her colleague arranged for a small fund, sufficient for each mom to purchase appropriate used clothing. She recognized that their students might be reluctant to dress in secondhand clothes. It was only when Peg announced that each student would have \$30 dollars for a shopping trip to Goodwill to purchase clothing to wear to job interviews that Peg revealed to the students that for the last two weeks, she and her colleague had been wearing clothes purchased there.

This incident illustrates several characteristics I came to admire in Peg Morrison – her concern for the downtrodden in society, a concern that led her to mentor this group and many similar students; her compassionate understanding of others that led her to model buying and using Goodwill clothing (to

eliminate stigma); and Peg's practical nature, which led her to both recognize the clothing issue, and to find a solution.

Peg grew up in New England, and exhibited some of those traits we associate with New Englanders, particularly that of being a private person. Peg also was a strong person with a set of values that led her to look for ability and to find potential in students and colleagues. She formed decisions quickly and firmly, and when probed, quickly supported her judgment.

The butter incident comes to mind as illustrative of this aspect of Peg's personality. We often lunched together. Peg was liberally smothering her bread with butter. Half teasingly, I asked her if she wasn't aware of the Surgeon General's warnings about consuming butter. Peg replied, "People have been eating butter for thousands of years. If butter was that bad for you, people would have stopped eating it eons ago." And she proceeded to consume, with obvious relish, the well-slathered bread. A few years later health warnings shifted, from butter to margarine.

Peg evidenced this same decisiveness in her judgment of people, and would specify the basis for her assessment when asked. While we didn't always agree in these assessments, as we discussed more cases, I increasingly came to respect Peg's quickness of insight and the foundations on which she made her decisions.

Peg dabbled in antiques. She purchased a used van and a former farm on Route 20, outside Syracuse, with the idea of opening an antique bazaar in retirement. I witnessed an amazing display of physics when this 120-pound lady provided karate-like hip blocks to large, very heavy, antique furniture, to move them.

Margaret Morrison touched many lives and left a lasting influence on our college in the form of the Watertown Unit, personnel she helped select and develop, and the role of the APC, which she helped define. Those in our community who knew Peg personally miss her friendship, down-to-earth assessments, sometimes feistiness, championing of the downtrodden, questioning stance toward those entrusted with power, and ... compassion. Our Empire State community honors Margaret Morrison for the pioneering role she played well; and for her continued efforts to guide the development of students and the college.

Deborah Holler, mentor, Central New York Region

When I first met Peggy Morrison in 1995, I had never heard of transformative learning or interdisciplinarity, and I had no way of knowing how my relationship with her would change my life. My introduction to the MALS (Master of Arts in Liberal Studies) degree program at Empire State began in a Utica hotel with no heat, and an advisor who was leaving for a six-month sabbatical. The cold hotel rooms and lack of an accessible advisor nearly ended my ambitions to seek a graduate degree at this “nontraditional” college. After a series of telephone calls to faculty explaining my situation, I eventually reached Dr. Peggy Morrison in Syracuse. I had been told that she had the academic background I was looking for but that she might not agree to work with a graduate student.

Our initial phone call was tentative and awkward until she asked me about my plan for the MALS degree. When I told her about the novel I had in my head, the conversation took off. Peggy’s cool demeanor evaporated as we found common ground discussing various authors and their works. She suggested a variety of topics and ways to expand and support my ideas for the novel, and I began to understand interdisciplinary studies. Peggy told me she wanted to think about whether she could work with me in the MALS program. At the time, I did not know about the sad death of her husband, the novelist and professor of philosophy, Dr. Robert Morrison, who was one of the pioneer faculty at ESC. Had I known, I would have understood why working with a budding novelist could be a difficult decision for her. Fortunately, Peggy called me back a few days later to tell me she had put through my “request” and that she would be my advisor for the MALS degree.

Although she declined to be my “first reader,” Peggy gave me the guidance and support I needed as I struggled through the first draft of my novel. When I doubted myself, she encouraged me to read “the writing life” narratives by favorite authors. When I got stuck midway through the novel, she suggested that it might be a good time to do an outline and read some “how to” books. When my first reader misread my work, Peggy sternly and

clearly explained the value and direction of the novel to both of us. When I completed the MALS degree, Peggy took me on as an adjunct, and when she retired, she called to encourage me to send in my resume for a position as a part-time mentor. From my experience with Peggy Morrison, I learned everything I ever needed to know about interdisciplinarity, transformative learning and the ways in which creative production fosters a climate for transformation. These topics have informed the philosophy of education that has inspired my research, writing and work with students for the last 15 years as a part-time mentor. For me, Peggy Morrison was the ultimate role model and mentor.

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.

Email submissions to 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 Microsoft 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, DC: APA, 2010] or http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM_APA_update_2010.pdf).

All About Mentoring is published twice a year. Our next issue, #48, will be available in the winter of 2016. Please submit all materials by September 25, 2015.

Scattered throughout this issue of All About Mentoring are quotes taken from a number of academic journals that focus on adult learning and mentoring. We hope that these words (pulled from journals over the last several months) will offer a glimpse into ideas, questions and problems being taken up by the adult education community today. If you would like to suggest a quotation to be used in a future issue of All About Mentoring, please send it to us!

