

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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Issue 55 • Autumn 2021



ALL ABOUT MENTORING

Issue 55 • Autumn 2021

*"The odds were hugely against this
strange new institution."*

— Ernest L. Boyer, 1990

*As cited in Richard F. Bonnabeau
The Promise Continues
The Donning Company, 1996, p. 35*

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MENTORING

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To so many people who have gone
above and beyond to help our students,
our colleagues, and our communities
during extraordinary times, and every
single day, for 50 years.

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the scenes for many years, helped to
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EDITORIAL



The Big 5-0

"The heart is revealed in the deeds."

— A.J. Heschel, *The Wisdom of Heschel* (1975, p. 24)

There is joy, there should be celebrating, on hitting the big 5-0. No tiny feat. We can think about other institutions that have failed or really thinned out, having lost their way or the vibes they once had 50 years ago. It's impressive that our college is still here, not having been knocked out of the box nor absorbed into something bigger and more powerful. So many people have kept this place going: mentors and tutors and administrators and professionals and support staff and people at the SUNY and community levels and, of course, at the core of it all, our students, who have trusted that they could do it here and be encouraged, and could achieve at least some of their goals that would have been harder, if not impossible, to achieve elsewhere. How lucky we have been to meet and learn from and try to understand and respond to these thousands and thousands of adult learners. What a gift, and we are still here doing it.

We are a college that began as a dream, as an idea about access and experimenting and with a vision of a qualitatively different kind of higher education that begins with the student,

and here we are a half-century later with a history of starting out and trying and getting stuck and observing and rethinking and agonizing and questioning and gaining so much pleasure and struggling and getting pissed off — all knotted together. But it's all here: an incredible history of a commitment to a sparkling educational mission.

It's impossible to miss the stunning changes that have occurred in every facet of college life over these five decades. Locations have opened and closed, academic structures have been transformed, college offices have been created, whole new administrative systems have taken hold, an array of technologies (changing over time) have reshaped our communication, and the very ways in which we work with students, every day, continue to shift. Fifty years ago, who would imagine this college as a place of registered programs and JITs (just-in-time studies) and TISs (totally individualized studies), and general education requirements, and schools and a course catalog, and a Blue the Bluebird mascot, and letter grades and Latin honors and terms and learning outcomes and so many students learning at a distance, and mentors working with so many mentees, and a million other changes that, in the moment, may not have seemed such a big deal, but have, in their accumulation,

amounted to the creation of a radically altered college. In 1971, who might have imagined the SUNY Empire State College of 2021? Maybe no one.

My point here is not at all to bemoan losses, to romanticize some mentoring purity, to claim some unspoiled teaching terrain in which every student worked closely and meaningfully with a mentor to create distinctive learning contracts and stunningly original and individual degree programs that responded to a particular student's academic, professional, and personal needs. That would be silly — certainly empirically way off base. Such a stance would also miss the significant means by which the college, right now, responds to students in ways that a mentor — or the college — in 1971 or 1980 or 1990, or maybe even in 2015 couldn't do. We now have a huge array of student supports (academic and otherwise), and colleagues with expertise and resources on hand; we not only have more students but a more diverse group of learners, we have more policy and process clarity and orderliness, we have more attention to and efforts to respond to stinging issues of race, class, and gender inequality, and I think, we have more students diving in and participating in the activities of the college as a working institution. How important all of this is, of course, with a

huge caveat: the recognition that there's so much more to do and so many challenges that are right in front of us.

But here's what concerns me: Are we as a college clear about what criteria we are using to evaluate every single move we are making? Why this program or that program? Why a program at all? What are the effects, over time, of doing this or that or moving here or there? How is this policy or practice affecting a student's learning or the

quality of the day-to-day lives of anyone who works at SUNY Empire State College? Can we, at age 50, get back to basics — not back to some image of the work people were doing in 1971 (or any other year along the way), but to the mission and the core values, and to the heart of this place? And I'd say the heart has to do with pushing the bounds of what most colleges do and questioning hard-to-change academic ways (that we should not reembrace), deepening our commitment to access,

creating imaginative and flexible ways for people to learn, finding room in all of our academic work for students to make decisions about what and how they are studying, continuing to reenvision what we mean by knowledge and skills, and above all, asking ourselves how we can sustain a humane place for all of us to learn.

Ann. Will.

Drawings by Shantih E. Clemans appear on pages 19, 54, 80, and 115.

A Peek Inside Series
Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

During the long months of quarantine, especially when I started venturing outside, I found myself wondering about, and feeling emotionally connected to, the ordinary moments occurring inside homes and businesses in my Brooklyn, New York, neighborhood. What was happening just out of my sight? For example, what was the experience of school for students of all ages learning from home? This series is my effort to illuminate funny, awkward, stressful, and tender moments unfolding during an extraordinary time of uncertainty.

The Pandemic and the Health Care System: Where Do We Go From Here?

Barry Eisenberg, Manhattan

One of my students, who is a nurse, described the final few moments in the life of one of her patients. In his 80s, he contracted COVID-19 at a small family gathering he believed to be safe. He was put on a ventilator for two weeks. A few days following its removal, he went into respiratory distress. He labored to breathe, gasping for every precious breath. It was clear he would not survive. He asked if he could say goodbye to his son, but visitors were not permitted in the hospital. The nurse FaceTimed his son from her phone. She wasn't successful in choking back her tears. They landed on the inside of the protective shield covering her face, blurring her view of his son's anguish. But she could hear him straining to contain his sobs, his voice cracking with helplessness. It was painful for her, but at the same time, she was numb from all the sickness and death all around her. A moment into the call, the patient in the next ICU (intensive care unit) bed, also suffering from COVID-19, lapsed into cardiac arrest, triggering what hospitals call a "code." As part of the code team, the nurse was required to rush to him. She had to end the FaceTime call.

How does one keep going when no moment is free of urgency, when lives are taken in numbers so vast they defy comprehensibility? Could the magnitude of this suffering have been prevented? Since the pandemic hit, sentiment in the public health community has been forming that the national response throughout 2020 was woefully inadequate, and we likely experienced substantially more spread of the virus and deaths than we should have.

Reliable judgments about the degree to which a more effective response could have contained the extent of contagion and the death toll will take some time and sober analysis. But a tragic picture is taking shape, revealing that the impact on those working in the industry has been severe; a survey by Mental Health America (n.d.) reported that the workforce is "Stressed out and stretched too thin: 93% of health care workers were experiencing stress, 86% reported experiencing anxiety, 77% reported frustration, 76% reported exhaustion and burnout, and 75% said they were overwhelmed" (para. 6).

The effect on hospitals has also been dramatic. For example, Research and Markets (2020) forecasted that when all is said and done, hospitals will have lost \$323 billion in 2020 due to COVID-19 and that operating room (OR) volumes will have declined by 35%, due largely to cancellations of elective surgeries and anxiety about going to a hospital for surgery in general during a pandemic. Hundreds of hospitals across the country, especially those serving rural communities, have a heightened risk of bankruptcy and closure. Those with limited financial reserves or that rely on nonpatient care revenue sources, such as government subsidies and grants, are at greatest risk (Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform, 2021).

Indeed, the pandemic has exposed weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our health care system that have been there all along. Perhaps chief among them — and this relates to society more broadly — is the shameful inequity in our system, dramatically verified by the pandemic. Simply put: If you are Black, brown, or poor, your chances of contracting COVID-19 and dying from



Barry Eisenberg

it are higher than those of your white counterparts in middle- and higher-income brackets. This disparity didn't start with the pandemic. A recent study conducted by researchers at New York University examined life expectancy across 500 cities. They found that as racial and ethnic segregation in neighborhoods increased, so did the life expectancy gap (NYU Langone Health News Hub, 2019). Among the most glaring of such gaps was found in the Chicago suburbs of Streeterville and Englewood, just nine miles from one another. The average life expectancy in Streeterville, a relatively affluent white suburb, is 90. Englewood, a poor African American community, has a life expectancy of 60 — a gap of thirty years (Associated Press, 2019)!

COVID-19 has shed a spotlight on the issue of racial disparity that should make it impossible to ignore. Black people have died at a rate 1.7 times greater than white people (Peck, 2020). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that Black, Hispanic, and Native American people were approximately

four times as likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 as white people (Chavez & Howard, 2020). In a late November 2020 Pew survey, “71% of Black Americans are likely to say they know someone who has been hospitalized or died as a result of COVID-19, compared with 61% of Hispanic, 49% of [w]hite and 48% of Asian American adults” (Howard & Andrew, 2020, para. 4).

Needless to say, these disparities are unsettling. Certainly, the problem extends beyond health care to sociocultural and socioeconomic underpinnings with deep historical roots that make it easier for some to access and enjoy the fruits of society while others are confined to the sidelines. If there is a silver lining to the pandemic — admittedly, a peculiar sentiment in light of the perverse price we have paid — it may be that we can no longer turn a blind eye to the disparities in health care. Fixing this national humiliation involves dismantling the barriers that have made it impossible for all to experience health care — good quality health care — as a basic human right.

But the pandemic uncovered other weaknesses in our health care system as well, weaknesses not unrelated to the uneven distribution and availability of care. These involve a failure to be fully — make that *adequately* — prepared for a broad-based health crisis like a pandemic; an inability to mobilize a coordinated response on a regional level, for example, in which resource sharing might occur; insufficient support for health care workers exposed to health risks and undue stress; a consolidation of hospital systems that has weakened governance at the local hospital level; and, of course, the enfeebling of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), slowing the pace of achieving universal coverage and diluting population health initiatives that, among other things, bring health care resources more directly into communities.

This is not meant to suggest that our health care system does not have many strengths. Like the health care systems of all countries, it has its assets as well as its limitations. All systems can be traced to national values, culture, and history. In order to explore where we may head to correct deficiencies that the pandemic has revealed should no longer be tolerable, it is best to start with a very brief chronicle.

How We Got Here

A starting point is almost arbitrary, but World War II largely accounts for the historical accident that is our health care system. As wages slowed or remained frozen during that period, health insurance became a popular enticement for employers to attract workers. In 1940, about 10% of workers had health insurance provided by their employers. By 1950, the number had skyrocketed to 50%. Thus, in just 10 years, employer-based health insurance had become an institutionalized feature of our health care system (Belasen et al., 2016, p. 2).

By the time the late 1970s and early 1980s rolled around, the basic structures of the hybrid system of employer-based insurance and government programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, were in place. Much of the change that occurred after was built on those structures, including the Affordable Care Act, enacted in 2010.

In the late 1970s, and for much of the following decade, health care inflation was running high, often at multiples of the consumer price index (CPI). For example, in 1982, the CPI was 6.2% (CPI Inflation Calculator, n.d.) while health care inflation was 11.7% (US Inflation Calculator, n.d.). Accordingly, there was much pressure to control costs. As a result, in that same year, the federal government implemented a major policy change that would have sweeping implications for health care financing and delivery. The policy, Diagnostic Related Groups, was a Medicare initiative in which fixed fees were developed for

roughly 500 diagnoses. This meant that hospitals could no longer easily pass along their costs for those procedures to the government, representing the first major shift from fee-for-service to prospective payment practices.

Hospitals had to respond by holding spending down. They did many things, like trying to reduce the length of time patients spent in hospitals and introducing new inventory models that limited how many supplies they would keep on hand. But of all the landscape-changing activities that took place, the most significant was the realignment with hospitals seeking economies of scale through merger and acquisition. Today, the vast number of hospitals across the country are part of hospital systems. In 2018 alone, there were 1,182 mergers and acquisitions, involving the exchange of over \$120 billion in assets (Lagasse, 2019). The average transaction in 2018 exceeded \$400 million and, by then, it wasn't just individual hospitals merging into hospital systems, but hospital systems merging with or being acquired by other hospital systems. The largest hospital systems in the country are vast enterprises. For example, the largest, HCA, operates 214 hospitals, has over 30 million patient visits per year, and had a value of almost \$47 billion in 2018, earning it a ranking of 67 on the Fortune 500 list (Fortune, 2019).

Health Care System Characteristics that Impeded Preparedness for a Pandemic

The trends over the past 50 years have important implications for how the U.S. health care system met the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Examining these markers can help explain how we have arrived in the current predicament. Broadly speaking, four conditions or characteristics of our system, natural outgrowths of those trends, may account for the health care system's less than stellar response to the pandemic: (1) unrestrained hospital system growth; (2) a dominant market-based culture; (3) lack of incentives for preparedness

in the hospital sector; (4) weakened structures for health crisis forecasting and planning.

First, the growth of hospital-based systems has occurred on a relatively unrestrained basis. For the most part, regulatory bodies with oversight responsibility, like the Federal Trade Commission, have approved virtually every merger and acquisition deal placed before them. Those proposing transactions have used three arguments to deflect and dispose of possible resistance: (1) The public will be better served by having a more comprehensive system in which greater coordination of care is possible; (2) Market domination is not the goal — rather it is to provide services in a contiguous geographic region; (3) Communities will be better served by systems with greater size and reach. Incidentally, quality has not been shown to improve as hospital systems enlarge (Frakt, 2019); but what does appear to increase are prices for providing care, due largely to reductions in competition (Abelson, 2018).

With system expansion, there has been something of a shift from the community-centric focus of independent hospitals to one of overall hospital system success; and such corporate success is a function of overall asset performance. This would be an expected consequence of hospital system expansion. To protect the system's interests — that is, to maximize its advantage in a competitive environment — market share growth and solidification are essential. After all, one's competitors would not be expected to sit still. Thus, building a comprehensive and complex corporation, one that integrates all levels of care — from the medical practice to the outpatient center, to the diagnostic facility, to the hospital, to the rehab facility — is an essential means of keeping patients in the system and enlarging the patient base. In such a high-stakes climate, competition supersedes coordination; that is, the relationships between and among

hospital systems may be defined more by how they compete than by how they cooperate.

Second, a market-based culture has prevailed in health care. This means that all components of the system are expected to perform well financially. For example, a hospital system that spends half a billion dollars a year on medical supplies will want to be assured that its suppliers have successful track records and durable business models. Moreover, as hospitals seek to manage their expense base, finding low-cost solutions for goods constitutes an important strategy; supply chains built on low-cost production and transportation models are most attractive. With many of the manufacturers of health-related products, like ventilators and personal protective equipment (PPE), based overseas, it is possible to get caught short in a crisis. Further, in keeping with the market-based culture, services that place a premium on return on investment will be promoted. Cardiac and orthopedic surgeries tend to offer the greatest profit margin. Infectious disease care, on the other hand, typically yields negligible financial benefits.

Third, in a market-centered system — one that promotes patient and resource accumulation, fortification of competitive advantages, and strengthened footholds in communities of strategic value — incentives for building resource inventories for potential use are in short supply. In this way, a preparedness mindset would incur a cost that does not align well with competition management. The public health perspective, which focuses on detecting disease and managing its prevention and treatment, has not had as loud a voice in guiding hospital strategy.

Fourth, the Trump administration did not consistently embrace priorities and recommendations from the scientific and health communities. The then-president of the United States acknowledged in a recorded interview with Bob Woodward that COVID-19

“moves rapidly and viciously” and that “If you're the wrong person and if it gets you, your life is pretty much over if you're in the wrong group” (Gangel et al., 2020, para. 16). And yet, in the same interview, the president presented a public communication strategy built on falsehoods with respect to the severity and scope of the pandemic, admitting that: “I wanted to always play it down” (para. 21).

Indeed, then-President Trump's dismissive position on preparing the nation for a health crisis predated the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, he demoted and, thus, weakened the National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense, the group responsible for forecasting a pandemic and orchestrating a national response. In an Op-Ed in *The Washington Post*, Beth Cameron (2020), the first director of the unit, equated the department to a “smoke alarm ... all with the goal of avoiding a six-alarm blaze” (para. 8).

History will judge our national leadership as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some distance will allow for a thoughtful, objective evaluation when the full extent of outcomes has been sorted out. Nonetheless, some things are clear. From the very beginning of the pandemic, the former president downplayed its severity, failed to galvanize support for the practice of proven mitigating protocols while chastising federal and state government officials who did, promoted unproven and potentially dangerous remedies, and touted administration achievements unsupported by any empirical measures.

Six Areas for Moving Forward

So, where do we go from here? Will we take an open, honest, and hard look at how we responded to the pandemic in a way that improves our capability for anticipating and managing a health crisis and is free of obstructions to access for so many? Will we commit to making the necessary changes such that dignity and

respect are not standard for some and unattainable luxuries for others? If we do, there are at least six areas we would be advised to address:

Create a more generous and inclusive health policy.

The good news is that if we look at the long history of health policy in this country, we see something of an evolution toward broader coverage, granting it to more and more groups. In 1965, with the passage of Medicare and Medicaid, health insurance was extended to the elderly and the poor. At various times since, coverage was extended to other groups, including children through various federal and state programs. With the Affordable Care Act, coverage was brought to millions more. Thus, over the past century, many groups — from workers to retirees, to the elderly, to the poor, to children, and most recently to remaining groups, including those with preexisting illnesses through the ACA — have become eligible for coverage.

The bad news is that progress has been largely glacial and inconsistent, often two steps forward, one back. Tens of millions of people remain uninsured and access to coverage doesn't neatly translate into convenient means for getting high-quality and timely care. As long as health policy allows for such gaps, honoring the principle of health care being a right will elude us.

President Biden has indicated he will build upon the Affordable Care Act by introducing a public option. This would add a federal plan to the mix of insurance programs. It is imperative that plans cover the 10 benefits considered "essential" under the Affordable Care Act: ambulatory patient services; emergency services; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance use disorder services; prescription drugs; rehabilitative services; laboratory services; preventive and

wellness services and chronic disease management; and pediatric services (HealthCare.gov, n.d., para.1).

Embrace principles of "population health" and "community health."

In the traditional health care model, hospitals, medical practices, and other providers waited, for the most part, for patients to initiate contact and then respond to their health needs. In an emerging population health paradigm, providers reach into communities to gain a better understanding of factors that influence the health of the residents and bring health resources more directly into the community. One CEO recently told me that this amounted to his hospital being defined more by its role in the community than by the physical building.

Bringing health services more fully into the community not only enhances access but allows for a greater understanding of how environment influences health, wellness, and illness. It provides opportunities for examining more fully how social determinants of health influence people's ability to obtain good quality care. Establishing networks of community-based clinics staffed by people who look and sound like members of the community helps dismantle the cultural divide, making visits to a provider not only more convenient but possible.

A recent graduate of SUNY Empire State College's MBA in Healthcare Leadership program manages a population health program for the Montefiore Health System. They set up screening systems directly in various communities in the Bronx, including going directly into residents' homes. The purpose is to gain insight into factors that contribute to their health profiles, including health literacy, economic stability, housing, substance abuse, violence, social connections, legal issues, transportation, and food insecurities. The focus on predisposition to health problems and the creation of health plans for community residents has had

an appreciable impact on incidences of diabetes and heart disease as well as disease comorbidities.

If we are to make headway on the disgraceful inequities of care, we cannot permit socioeconomic factors that underlie health disparities to be obscured by other priorities that special interests attempt to convince us are more pressing.

Strengthen the focus on social determinants of health.

In the 1990s, as the competition among hospitals was ramping up and as regulatory agencies were placing more emphasis on patient satisfaction, a wave of empathy and communication skills training for health care workers was set in motion. Sometimes they worked, sometimes they didn't. Hospitals that viewed patient satisfaction as dependent on a broad-based effort to strengthen communication experienced more success. This included revisiting the hiring criteria to be certain they could detect relevant skills; building communication into performance standards and evaluation criteria; ensuring that those in positions of leadership and management were role models; dignifying the training by focusing on subjects like health literacy rather than approaching the training as though employees had been doing something wrong; exercising sensitivity to workplace stressors that could impair effective communication ... and doing something about them; and conveying to employees that their satisfaction was as important as patient satisfaction.

Today, in recognition of the uneven distribution of and access to good quality care, hospitals across the country are implementing activities to sensitize employees to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The empathy experience should prove instructive. The rush to do something just to do something, which occurred in many cases with the empathy training, could

backfire if employees believe the full measure of a solution is linked to a deficiency on their part.

Social determinants of health are a complex matter. Building an environment in which barriers can be overcome takes a lot of work and commitment. It includes ensuring that the decision-makers are representative of the communities served, that members of communities are asked to contribute to the identification of their health care needs and play a role in devising solutions, and that understanding health literacy and its powerful role in influencing predisposition to engage the health care system will occupy a key learning goal in the organization's educational activities.

Further, it would be ethically unreasonable to ask employees to behave toward patients in a way not reflected in management's behavior toward employees. Thus, making sure that the workplace is a model of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles is foundational to a productive program of improvement. As such, compensation, advancement opportunities, and voice in decision-making should align with those values.

Enhance crisis planning and coordination across federal, regional, state, and local levels.

History is likely to judge the management of the pandemic throughout 2020 as a colossal failure of leadership; in addition to the former president downplaying the disease, the failure to mobilize a coordinated response between the federal and state governments will undoubtedly be viewed as fundamental to the disastrous effort. Aside from presidential failures, three factors account largely for the lack of a more broad and robust approach to crisis planning. First, it's expensive; saving for a rainy day — storing massive amounts of PPE, ventilators, and so on — involves building inventory with no foreseeable payback. Second, in a

market-based environment, competition supersedes coordination. Third, a sense of urgency ordinarily depletes after a crisis, accounting in part for the weakening of a public health perspective in policy development prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is not to suggest that coordination doesn't occur. Where it does, it is generally for common interests, such as policy advocacy, which, ironically, tends to promote the very ability to compete even more. Coordination also occurs around emergencies — for example, a plane crash or train collision — and most of the coordination involves the distribution of patients across a few

"... [I]t would be ethically unreasonable to ask employees to behave toward patients in a way not reflected in management's behavior toward employees."

hospitals located near one another. But this type of coordination is for a specific, generally isolated event, not a pandemic.

Developing a more comprehensive, synchronized response across communities, regions, and states is vital. It needs to start with restoring the credibility, preeminence, and integrity of the scientific community and agencies responsible for public health issues, like the CDC. Early signs from the Biden administration have been promising. For example, upon taking office, President Biden took steps to reverse the withdrawal from the World Health Organization and restore the role and capabilities of the National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense, strengthening

the U.S. capabilities for resource mobilization and coordination in the face of a national health threat (The White House, 2021).

The experience of 2020 should leave no misunderstanding about the importance of national leadership on this matter. Simply, in the face of a national health crisis, science should drive politics, not the other way around.

Institute stronger protections for health care workers.

In the fall of 2020, one of our MBA in Healthcare Leadership students, a nurse who works in the operating room, was reassigned to work in the ICU to care for COVID-19 patients. It is an entirely different clinical environment, requiring specialized training. She described it as walking into a new world. An ICU "buddy" nurse was designated to provide basic information about how to care for the patients. The buddy nurse was overwhelmed with patients, so "training" consisted of quick shouts across a crowded nursing station about how to handle a procedure. At the end of their stressful shift — in which the OR nurse felt like she was working in the dark and the buddy nurse was feeling awful because of an inability to provide support — they saw each other across a hall, stared into one another's eyes, and cried together, flooded by the sheer physical and emotional exhaustion. Words were not needed. They would do the same thing all over again the next day.

Burnout and worker shortages are on the rise. Over 20% of hospitals anticipate that during the pandemic they will experience critical shortages (McMinn & Simmons-Duffin, 2020). A complete plan for instituting a safer and more gratifying work environment would have many components, for example, taking proactive approaches in identifying and responding to burnout; implementing more generous plans for professional development; adjusting pay inequities; mandating and enforcing worker-patient ratios based on recommendations

from relevant professional groups; strengthening inventories to ensure proper supplies of equipment; and allowing for a greater employee voice at board and governance levels. An uptick in interest in unionization among health care workers, which began shortly after the pandemic struck, can prove instrumental in mobilizing worker advocacy and advancing the prospects of achieving a safer and fairer work environment.

Re-empower local governing boards.

With the expansion of hospital-based systems, centralized corporate boards have largely replaced individual hospital boards as the primary drivers of goal development, direction, and strategy. This is not surprising. After all, the corporate giants have responsibility for billions of dollars of assets and, in some cases, treat individual hospitals as entries on a balance sheet. While corporate strategy is essential, what can get lost in the corporatization of the health care industry is the presence and influence of the individual hospital governing board.

Hospital boards are expected to consider stakeholder needs in crafting a policy and leadership framework for senior management. Traditionally, as representatives of the community served by the hospital, board members' awareness of and sensitivity to local culture would make them more inclined to build an enriching environment in which to work and in which care could be provided. This could become obscured in an ever more centralized governing model in which competition management is a prevailing priority. By no means does this suggest that patient care and employee welfare will not be treated as important. But the order of priorities is influenced by where the board sits and the structural span of its organization. From a hospital employee perspective, a board seen as light-years away from a member hospital's workers

may find it challenging to summon the credibility to demonstrate that its heart lies with them.

Reconstituting a local governance presence should be pursued in order to help employees feel as though their lives and working conditions are important, that the culture of the organization aligns with and supports their values, and that quality of patient care is not an empty slogan but the core organizing principle of the institution.

Possibilities? Hope?

The six areas are interlinked. For example, a strengthened local governance presence may prove more capable of elevating the status of social determinants of health in hospital planning since they are closer to the communities served by the hospital. As such, they may be more inclined to exercise community outreach, knowing where health initiatives should be pursued. A more inclusive and generous national and state health policy should make it easier for all to obtain care, empowering those currently uninsured or underinsured to get care earlier when illness strikes and, ironically, when it costs less, creating a healthier population and at a lower expense. Greater worker protections lead to a more stable and satisfied workforce, strengthening their predisposition to make headway on social determinants of health issues, not to mention the proven benefit on care outcomes. Certainly, there are a great many other areas we might consider — for example, in the realm of the structural, cultural, legislative, economic, and political. But the six provide a starting point.

If necessity is the mother of invention, then we have an opportunity to recast our health care system in a way that makes it more responsive and more just. In normal times, political climates allow for just incremental change, tinkering around the edges. President Obama campaigned on and was able to usher the Affordable Care Act into

law. But just barely. The public option proposal, which President Biden had been advocating, had to be jettisoned by President Obama to avoid losing the entire plan in a political atmosphere that would tolerate just so much change. Republicans have not ceased attacking the ACA since and, had it not been for Senator John McCain's thumbs-down vote, the ACA in its entirety would have been killed outright in 2017. Instead, it was watered down by legislative action.

Public opinion polls have shown that while a significant majority approved of the Affordable Care Act, a far smaller percentage approved of "Obamacare." They are, of course, one and the same thing. Politics works by influencing perceptions.

I have a fantasy that one day the national discussion on health care can be held in a politics-free atmosphere. Reasoned debate will be the order of the day ... ideas coming from all over will build upon one another ... disagreements will serve as the basis for dialogue and for achieving mutual understanding. Back in the real world, this is a pipedream. But the pandemic does provide an opportunity to reexamine underlying and deeply rooted assumptions about our health care system. If so, such an opportunity will be fleeting, for sure. But maybe, just maybe, if we seize the moment, the health and dignity of the American people — all the American people — will be at the heart of the health policy discussion. Imagine that!

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Reflections on a Writing Group

Melinda S. Blitzer, Selden

“Every book is an image of solitude, the outcome of a great deal of time spent alone in a room. Literature is at once the product of an author’s solitude and a means by which a reader reaches through his own and the author’s solitude. In reading, an isolated individual becomes absorbed in something beyond his own preoccupations and communes with another mind. ... It is possible to be alone and not alone at the same time. Reading literature creates a kind of companionship that preserves the solitariness of reading and writing.”

— Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), p. 136

Writing can be lonely and painful, and easy to put off. One could spend countless hours trying to find a way to say a simple phrase with more pizzazz, strive arduously for perfection, or be distracted by external pressures. Taking the first step is the scariest part. Last spring, frustration with my writer’s block began to mount. Although my reluctance has always felt like laziness, the reasons go deeper: fears of being critiqued, fears of influencing others, and fears of not influencing enough! A leap from being an occasional writer to a more consistent one would be daunting. How could I initiate such a painstaking task? I was filled with ideas as well as fears, and in need of some structure and encouragement — something, a push to move forward, much like our own students experience at SUNY Empire State College. As mentors, we provide foundational tools for success in their endeavors; sometimes, we need mentors, too. I found them in a writing group.

In the winter of 2019, I was invited to present a paper that I titled, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Staying Sane in the Midst of Going Crazy Working with Couples: A Relational Revision of Gottman’s Theory.” The prestigious (psychoanalytic) Joint International Conference was scheduled to be held in Greece in May of 2020. The pandemic hit, and the event was postponed. I knew I would need corraling and inspiration to research and write my presentation, even though the deadline was now a year or two away. One of my clinical colleagues, another conference invitee, suggested I join a writing group with her. I was self-conscious. Why would I want colleagues I didn’t know to critique my work? I would feel judged, exposed. But the idea gnawed at me. Given the COVID-19 quarantine, help would be only a Zoom-click away. How could I say no?

The group began last June and meets for an hour weekly. Five New York area psychoanalysts, including me, are directed by a former professor whom I have always admired. She is widely published and teaches at several psychoanalytic institutes. Group members write about a variety of psychological topics, and each week one member presents approximately 15 pages for reading and critiquing. One writer is working on a memoir that details her childhood trauma growing up in Germany. Another is working on a book that examines “the sadomasochism of everyday life.” A recent retiree is putting together a memoir focusing on what her therapy office symbolizes and the role it has played in her journey to becoming a psychoanalyst. The fourth member is writing a book on various clinical experiences with her most challenging patients. I had been working on a paper on courage and another on the



Melinda S. Blitzer

pitfalls and complexities of working with couples in marital therapy. I knew I would have to present them soon.

At first, I found myself to be just as concerned about the quality of my feedback as about the work that I presented. The other group members, more seasoned writers, seem to appreciate my efforts. (They haven’t booted me out yet.) I learn from them and I agree that I am making progress. Their support has boosted my confidence and some of the writing roadblocks I once faced now seem to be pebbles! Aside from the group’s stylistic and organizational commentary, the discussion always encourages self-reflection. Each member gives their honest reaction in a direct way. This makes me feel cared for and safe; it promotes my trust. I’ve come to realize that the feedback I don’t like is the most valuable.

The group has become a refuge during the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing a comforting sense of normalcy to an abnormal, volatile time. While Zooming involves viewing each person in a small square on the computer screen, each

member's impact is big: reassuring, nurturing, and transformative. In some ways, the online format is as intimate as it would be in person, maybe even more so: we see people and are seen as closely as we want.

In my solitary writing activity, I find relief in envisioning my group cohorts, also hard at work. There are benefits, too,

in the writer's solitude: a sense of calm and peace. I resist the temptation for too much news — losing myself in the nation's problems. The day tumbles into a "timeless zone" and passes as though it is a dream. Being a therapist involves listening to, analyzing, and piecing together my patient's stories and forming narratives in my mind. In writing, I discover ideas and play

with them; I revise my own narratives. Particularly relevant to this audience of readers, the writing group has enhanced my mentoring talents. I keep in mind what it feels like to get critical feedback and how to do it skillfully so that it feels caring and constructive, even if occasionally painful. And I try to convey the sense that I am with my students; indeed, I am now one of them.

"Our understandings and beliefs are more dependable when they produce interpretations and opinions that are more justifiable or true than would be those predicated on other understandings or beliefs. *Formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions based on the resulting insights are central to the adult learning process.*"

— Jack Mezirow, 2012

Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory
In Edward W. Taylor, Patricia Cranton, and Associates (Eds.)

The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice
Jossey-Bass, p. 74

Fleetwood Cadillac

Robert Congemi, Albany

Finally, the weather had changed, the interminable, gray winter was over, which had made Dexter so tired he found himself worrying if finally old age were upon him. But now as he walked home from work in the glistening sunshine of an afternoon in May, birds were singing, the sky was cloudless and blue, and air as fresh as could be wished, even though, as usual, downtown was clogged with cars. His own street, tucked a few blocks away from any main road, had taken on a cozy, shady look, its trees abundantly green and dappling the sunlight, almost poeticizing the parked cars lining both sides of the street.

“Well, what do you know?” he said to himself. “Things may be right with the world, after all.”

Then, before realizing he was doing it, and not knowing why, Dexter glanced at the broad side of one of the parked cars, merely curious, and saw the car was a Fleetwood Cadillac, much like one he had owned several years earlier. The colors were different. This one, which was showing its age, was deep metallic blue, while Dexter’s had been a luxurious, metallic green, but they both were Fleetwoods, and that fact stopped him from taking another step. Suddenly, a dozen or so houses from home, the car brought back memories of his own Fleetwood, and thinking of that brought back to his mind the memory of his wife.

It was she who had gotten their family the Fleetwood — or at least she was the cause of their having one. They were a young couple, with two children, and she had answered a help wanted advertisement in the newspaper for people to sell Cadillac cars.

“We could use the extra money, Dexter,” she had said. “The kids are in school now, and I don’t mind working at all. In fact, I want to. It’ll get me out a little.”

“You’re sure, Kate?”

They were in the kitchen of the tiny house they had then, in the morning, before he went off to his job, selling insurance.

Kate hardly thought about it for a moment. “I’m sure.”

As it turned out, she never sold any cars, not one, though she did try, going off to the dealership every morning dutifully, Dexter driving her there in their old Chevy and dropping her off before going to his own office. In fact, the only sale Kate ever was involved in was the one where her coworker sold the Fleetwood to her. She was giving up the job — everyone at the dealership thought it best — and Phil Burt, a nice old man who had tried to show her the ropes — suggested she buy a Cadillac that had come in only the day before.

“It’s a beauty,” he said to her. “All nice and green, and only 3 years old. You can put your whole family in the car and drive wherever you want, in luxury.”

Kate was sold. When Dexter came to pick her up, Kate took him to the place in the lot where the car was, and said, “What do you think, Dexter? Phil says it’s a good car. We can put everybody in it and drive wherever we want, in luxury.”

Dexter asked Phil what he thought, for himself. “What do you think, Phil?”

“I’d buy it before someone else does,” Phil said.

They had a lot of fun with the car. They couldn’t afford it, of course, but it made them feel good and think they were much better off than they actually were. Dexter remembered how



Robert Congemi

the boys jumped up and down in the driveway when he and Kate brought the Fleetwood home for the first time, and how they all drove around the neighborhood that early evening, the boys bouncing around in the roomy back seat, Kate beside him marveling at all the dials on the leather dashboard, Dexter looking around while he drove, hoping someone he knew would recognize them and marvel over their having a Cadillac. At an intersection, it actually happened. A neighbor, who had a job working for an oil company, pulled up beside them and beeped his horn.

“We bought ourselves a Fleetwood, Tom” Dexter explained to him.

“I can see that,” Tom answered back, nodding his head in approval.

If the truth be known, Dexter learned to identify himself with the car more than he realized. Once, when the car had to be serviced at the dealership overnight, Phil Burt gave him a loaner car, a little compact car that was available on the lot. Right from the first moment, Dexter saw that he felt somehow diminished by being in that car, so used was he to the stature the Fleetwood apparently gave

him. When he stopped at a supermarket for some groceries, to help Kate out, who was feeling overwhelmed, now taking care of the family and working part time as a receptionist at a hospital, Dexter thought he noticed a group of teenagers watching him get out of the loaner.

"This isn't my real car," he said to them. "It's a loner. My real car is a Cadillac. Except for just now, I drive a Fleetwood, twice the size of this car."

The teenagers, who had been interested in themselves, horsing around and flirting after school, didn't know what to make of his speech.

"Like, it's OK, mister," one of the boys told him.

Once in a while, the Fleetwood led to something that made a good story, like the time a policeman followed Kate all the way to their house before giving her a ticket for allegedly speeding. As the policeman walked away from her, returning to his squad car, she felt so unfairly treated that she seemed to try to run him over.

"I'm still not completely used to driving this big thing," she explained to him, the policeman still shaking from the close call, Kate stopping at the last moment.

Other times, the story was not quite so good, like the time Tim Holmes, the kind man who worked on their car, lost his business because the county seized his land.

"To build a new highway," Tim explained, tuning the Fleetwood.

"Life is pretty lousy sometimes, isn't it?" Dexter said to Tim when he heard what had happened.

"It sure is," Tim concurred.

But because of the Fleetwood, at least they got to know Tim for a while.

Above all, of course, the family took long trips in the Fleetwood. It got them out of town, provided them with a nice change of pace and time away from

their troubles. Their first big trip was nearly 400 miles away, to the shore, to visit one of Kate's aunts, and enjoy the ocean and the boardwalk and rides at the amusement park only blocks away from where Kate's aunt lived. That was the time when Kenny, their younger boy, wandered away from their blanket on the beach, and Kate was terrified he had drowned in the ocean when she and Dexter couldn't find him for almost an hour. He and Kate had fought terribly then over her saying that Dexter wasn't watching the boys well enough, and, in some ways, that fight was the beginning of what happened to him and Kate in the end, at least that was when he knew for sure their marriage was in some kind of trouble.

But, despite their experience at the shore, over the years, the Fleetwood took them to about two dozen different states, Dexter once counted, and to almost every interesting part of their own state. They even took the Fleetwood north, to another country, for goodness' sake, a trip that was supposed to turn everything around for him and Kate, which it pretty nearly did. They certainly were working hard to turn everything around at the time. Dexter always felt they both wanted to save their marriage. On the trip, they took turns driving, which was fun, especially trying to get the other to give up driving a few miles before they were supposed to, and once Kate even reached out and held Dexter's hand. When she did that, Dexter felt a surge of emotion and even thought maybe things could be all right after all. The Fleetwood, which had been acting up on them recently, now seemed to be gliding along the highway like a big, smooth, green boat. No red lights on the dash in front of them suddenly went on, warning them of trouble. There were no funny smells or frightening sounds from the engine. Teenagers at the time, their sons were in the back seat of the Fleetwood as usual, a little unsure about the trip and, Dexter guessed, probably wanting to be with their own friends. They were so

quiet. But the unusual sights of miles of flat farmland and fields captured their attention. Kate had been working at the hospital for 10 years by that time and had been made supervisor of her shift. Dexter had changed jobs, working for the township and driving a school bus part time.

When they finally got to the hotel in Montreal, which Dexter had found for them — he had carefully made all the arrangements, so much wanting everything to go well — Kate liked it. A doorman opened the car on Kate's side when Dexter pulled it over to the curb in front of the hotel, and said, "*Bienvenue. Bienvenue, mes amis.* Please allow us to take this fine car and park it for you." Inside, in the grand lobby of the hotel, crowded with vacationers beginning their weekend, a lobby of large, gilded mirrors and marble pillars, the concierge couldn't have been nicer, and the bellboy who brought them to their suite took the time to comment on the family.

"What a handsome family! You do not mind my saying so?"

The bellboy had drawn back the windows of the suite onto the city below, which was beginning to light up for miles against the darkening sky, and had turned to show them the spectacle.

Dexter almost giggled with happiness. "No, no, you certainly can say we are a handsome family, sir. I mean, *monsieur*. We love it. Everyone takes after their mother."

In the morning, they drove the Fleetwood to the outskirts of the city, to the famous municipal park that Kate wanted to see. A friend of hers at the hospital where she worked had told her all about it.

"They have 1,000 different kinds of roses there," Kate told her sons and Dexter. "I promised my friend I would make sure I saw them."

"And see them, you will," Dexter said, proudly negotiating his huge, American car through traffic.

In the afternoon, they drove to the opposite end of the city, to see its Olympic stadium, the choice of the boys as soon as they had been told about it. Next, they drove back to the hotel, turned the Fleetwood once again over to one of the hotel's parking attendants, and walked to the famed waterfront district of Montreal to wander the indeed narrow, winding streets of shops there and to watch the street performers — jugglers, comics, singers. Dexter, himself, was fascinated by a man and woman who had painted themselves completely white, and who stood like statues for an hour at a time.

"You don't see that back home, do you?" he asked his family.

In the evening, they had dinner at the most expensive restaurant that Dexter could afford, at the very edge of the waterfront, looking down upon the river that bordered the city, and gazed fondly out at the large ships passing by as the family ate. Afterward, Dexter treated the family to a carriage ride through the cobblestone streets of the ancient district, a circular delight of old churches, historic buildings, and monuments. The boys were fascinated by the powerful horse that pulled their carriage along and by how they could look down upon people in the streets, and Kate seemed content, even becoming excited when they passed the shops of high fashion that were also a highlight of these streets. If someone had asked Dexter if this were the sweetest moment in his life, he might have agreed.

The next morning, after brunch and after checking out of the hotel, they drove home. Again, their big, green Fleetwood glided along the highway. Again, no emergency lights came on, no scary oil smells, no sudden, frightening sounds from the engine.

"Thank God," Kate said, when they were home, at last, the boys running off to be with their friends. Dexter patted the aging car on its fender.

"Performed like old faithful," he told Kate, and somehow was encouraged to reach out to take her in his arms. Unfortunately, though, she had turned, without seeing his gesture, and already was carrying pieces of their luggage to the house.

In the years that passed, the Fleetwood continued its service to the family. Sometimes Dexter, sometimes Kate, ferried their sons to baseball and football practices, doctors' appointments, first dates. Once, the Fleetwood needed a new transmission; once, even another engine, which they bought somehow, second hand, a rebuilt.

But, slowly, inexorably, the Fleetwood rusted out. When Dale was 16, he started to drive it to school and around town with his friends, who loved the old car. Kate had her own car by then, a small, second-hand car. The next year, when Kenny was 16, he wanted to drive the Fleetwood, too.

That summer, they made one last trip in the Fleetwood, a last-ditch trip southward. Along with everything else on his mind and everything going wrong between him and Kate, Dexter had to worry about the car completely breaking down on the road, hundreds of miles from home. His worries were not without reason. The first night of the trip, only halfway to their destination, Dexter, desperate, had to find a garage that had not closed. Suddenly, the Fleetwood could not be driven over 10 miles per hour. And then it just quit. Sadly, or so it seemed, Dexter was never quite sure, the owner of the garage told him the bitter, inevitable news.

"You've blown the engine, mister. This car is dead."

"Was it my fault?" was the first question Dexter thought to ask.

"Nah. I don't think so," the man said.

"These things happen."

"But what am I going to do? I'm hundreds of miles from home." The words tumbled out of Dexter. "My family and I are on our way to our vacation, a very important vacation."

Kate and the boys were sitting in the garage office. Dexter and the mechanic — a big, sloppy-looking man — were in the shop itself, standing next to the Fleetwood.

Dexter was always to believe that the mechanic thought too quickly; he was hard to trust. ...

"I'll tell you what, mister. I'll buy the car off you. For 50 bucks. And take it off your hands. You can sleep in the motel across the street for the night, and tomorrow I'll drive you to a rent-a-car place. Then you can go on from there."

Stunned, and grieved, Dexter didn't know what to do.

"That's about it," the mechanic said, pushing his point. "That's the only thing I can think of. You just ran into a bit of hard luck, that's all." The mechanic seemed patronizing. "I wouldn't blame myself."

"Yeah," Dexter said, turning, to go and tell Kate and the boys the news.

On the way home, of course, Kate scarcely talked to him. In the morning, in the motel before driving home, he asked her if they could just keep going ahead with their plans, without the Fleetwood. With a car rented, they could still have fun, go swimming, eat out, see sights. But she shook her head, and only said, "So he's taking the car from us for only \$50. Is that so, Dexter?"

"... Yes," Dexter said, weakly. "What else can I do? The car is no good now."

"That's what this man said? This stranger, who looked to me like he couldn't wait to get his hands on the car? He said the car couldn't be fixed?"

Dexter tried to appeal to her, almost frantically. "Kate, I'm not a mechanic. I'm not much more than a clerk, but I think

he's right. It's cost us so much money recently. You know that. It's garbage now, as best I can tell."

"Don't you feel humiliated?" she asked him, wanting to be cruel.

On the highway, Dexter did admit to Kate that he should have seen the signs of the collapse of the Fleetwood coming. He gave her that.

"It wasn't really the Fleetwood's fault. I know, Kate. I should have seen the little, tell-tale signs," he explained to her, as he drove the rental car onto the highway near their home. It was all he could think of saying. The boys, in the back seat, were silent.

"Yes, Dexter," Kate said. "You should have seen the little, tell-tale signs."

It wasn't long after that trip that Dexter came home from work one evening and found a note to him from Kate on the kitchen table. It was in one of her personal envelopes.

"I won't be home tonight, Dexter," the note said. "Actually, I won't be home anymore. I have fallen in love with someone else. A doctor at the hospital where I work. It didn't happen overnight. It took a long time, and I guess I fought it. I would have thought you'd have seen the signs, but I guess you didn't. Anyway, there's some supper in the fridge. You just have to heat it up. My best to you. I sincerely mean that. P.S. Please don't try to oppose this. It really is over between us. I won't be changing my mind."

In his last gesture of love toward his wife, at least it was love as he saw it, Dexter did not oppose anything, not the separation, nor the divorce that followed quickly afterward. He occupied himself with seeing his sons as often as he could, as often as Kate and the divorce settlement allowed. In a few years, both boys were off to college, Dexter bought himself a compact car, which got good mileage, and changed jobs again, this time working in City Hall, a job from which he hoped to retire.

Once, his younger son, Kenny, at his graduation from college, asked Dexter if he still loved Kate. Dexter wondered if the boy had had a few celebratory drinks. "Do you love Mother, even after all that happened, Dad?"

"I do," Dexter told him, not lying.

"And is that why you never married again?"

Dexter did not answer that one.

"Come to think of it, I don't think you even date," his son further said.

— — —

When Dexter got back to his house after seeing the Fleetwood in the street, he opened the front door with his key and stepped inside. It was a cozy townhouse, maybe not the biggest and most impressive on the block, but he was sort of proud of it. Distracted, he went through his mail, which was bills and advertisements, and then went into his living room at the back of the house, where he sat down on his couch, a piece of furniture he had bought for himself the previous year. He thought of what he would do. This time was always an awkward part of the day for him. He knew other people felt that way, too.

"The hour or so after work is always difficult for me," a fellow office worker once observed, holding reports he had to read. "It's transitional."

But Dexter thought it might really be worse for him. It certainly wasn't an idle observation.

He thought of leafing through a magazine, or even reading the newspaper, but he didn't do either. In his mood, magazines were just more advertisements. Newspapers were just gossip. Sometimes, he thought, as he turned the television on and then turned it off, it could be a good idea if he drank. But he never did that — he had no ability for drinking. Of course, there was the tiny garden area, behind the house, and he liked gardening. That was for sure. People were right about

what they said about gardening. It was relaxing and it made you feel good. But, strangely, Dexter had no interest in gardening, either. Maybe it was all a matter of energy. Maybe a little later in the evening, after he had fixed himself some supper, he'd have the energy. What else was there?

About an hour later, he called up his son, Kenny. Dale had become a lawyer and had moved away to the West Coast, but Kenny was nearby. He owned his own little construction company and was doing well, too, for a young guy. For a moment, Dexter wondered if Kenny remembered that day at the beach when he had wandered off.

The woman who did the office work for Kenny answered the phone. Dexter hoped she remembered him, and, luckily, she did.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Grey, I remember."

"Alice, isn't it?" Dexter said to her.

She was pleased. "Yes, that's right, Alice. Nice of you to remember."

Dexter tried to make a little joke. "I try," he pointed out.

"Yes." Her voice became a bit more professional, but still pleasant enough to have fun with the fact that he and Kenny had the same name. "I'll tell the other Mr. Grey that you're on the line."

"Thank you, ma'am," Dexter said.

Dexter thought it took Kenny quite a time to answer the phone, but after some noises on his end, he did. Kenny seemed a little worried, the way people usually are when they get a phone call they were not expecting, especially from family.

"Dad? Hi ... everything all right?"

Dexter was quick. "Yes. Sure. Absolutely. I just thought I'd call you. And say 'hello.'"

"Oh? Oh ... hi."

Dexter tried to be as offhand as he could. "It's OK for a father to call his son, isn't it? Even if it is at work, right? You have a few minutes, don't you?"

Kenny still wasn't completely off his guard. "Sure, Dad. Of course. You're certain everything is all right?"

"Certain."

Kenny sounded like he was letting himself be convinced. "Well, what's up? What can I do for you, boss?"

"Well ... I don't know. I was sitting here thinking, 'Maybe it would be a good idea to call my son, Kenny, and ask him if we could have lunch soon or something.' You know? Get together? Maybe even for dinner. So we can have more time."

Kenny did seem to like the idea. "Sure. Sounds great, Dad. When would you like to do that?"

"I don't know. Tonight maybe?"

Dexter laughed, nervously. "Is tonight too soon?"

There was a pause at Kenny's end, not too long, but a pause, nonetheless.

"Umm, gee, Dad. Tonight could be tough. It might be too short notice. I've got some stuff. You know what I mean? I've got a little work here left, and I did talk about possibly doing something later after work with friends. You know, maybe bowling or something like that? How about next week? The beginning of next week? No later. What do you think of that?"

"Sure, Kenny," Dexter said, almost desperate not to reveal any disappointment. "Sure. That'll be just great. Perfect. I'll be looking forward to it."

There was one last thing. "Hey, Kenny, you know I keep forgetting to say. Hope the business is going well. Hope the social life is good."

"Sure, Dad, everything is great. Business is fine. Social life's fine."

"Got a young lady in the picture? Somebody nice to do things with?"

"Uh ... that could be better, I guess. But I'm pretty happy the way I am." Kenny seemed to be thinking for a moment. "Who knows? I may be the bachelor type. Know what I mean?"

Dexter didn't know if he did.

"You shouldn't mean that, Kenny," he replied to his son.

"OK, Dad. Anything you say. See you early next week. Bye, now."

"Bye, Kenny."

After his phone conversation with Kenny, Dexter looked around for something more to do. Finally, he went outside and walked down the street to where he had seen the Fleetwood Cadillac. It wasn't there anymore.

Serving Our Students

Kate Dermody, Plattsburgh

Kate Dermody delivered the following remarks during the collegewide panel conversation, "Leading the Way: Values and Practices of Mentoring, 50 Years In," on January 29, 2021.

Introduction

My name is Kate Dermody. I am a part-time Historical Studies faculty-mentor living in Plattsburgh, New York. I have been a faculty-mentor at SUNY Empire State College for the past eight years. Prior to joining SUNY Empire, I was a public school teacher for 10 years. In my summers, I teach part time for Upward Bound, a program of the U.S. Department of Education that supports high school students' preparation for college entrance. When I became aware of the position at SUNY Empire, I was immediately drawn to the opportunity to serve adult learners. Today, I serve our North Country, which covers about 600 square miles. I mentor many students in our local hospital, working directly to preserve our University of Vermont Health Network partnership with their nationally accredited radiology school.

What does mentoring mean to me?

A faculty-mentor is an educational guide who embraces and upholds the duty of SUNY Empire's mission to support the individual needs of students. Mentoring requires us to be agile, innovative, and solutions-minded to help our students succeed, to help them discover that what appears to be impossible is, in fact, possible with dedication and support.

Our students often have complicated life situations, multiple transcripts, life changes, job loss. This past term, I had students, each of whom was a mother with a child in the ICU. When considering how to support my students, I have to remind myself that

as a mentor I have the power to help, to think out of the box about how to navigate stressful situations. Mentoring is a responsibility — one that must be at the center of our educational practice.

How do I practice mentoring?

I practice mentoring by always striving to understand the individual needs of the student, being empathetic, and positive.

1. **Connecting and Listening:** Making a connection with students is important to the way I practice mentoring and teaching. We serve students from many different backgrounds and forging that human connection is imperative to the process.
2. **Goal Setting:** What are the student's goals, long term and short term? Short-term goals are important so students can actually see their accomplishments along the way. Long-term goals help the student see that light at the end of the tunnel. It is important to help the student visualize themselves with their diploma.
3. **Being an Advocate:** Being a mentor means you must also be an advocate for the students. We help students create their degree plans, their road maps for the future. These plans help students envision how they can get from point A to point B. Our students need someone rooting for them. I tell them that I am their number one supporter and I want them to succeed, and lastly, I tell them I believe in them.

I tell my students that I am thankful that I am here with them on their educational journey. I ask them to never lose sight of their goals and dreams. I



Kate Dermody

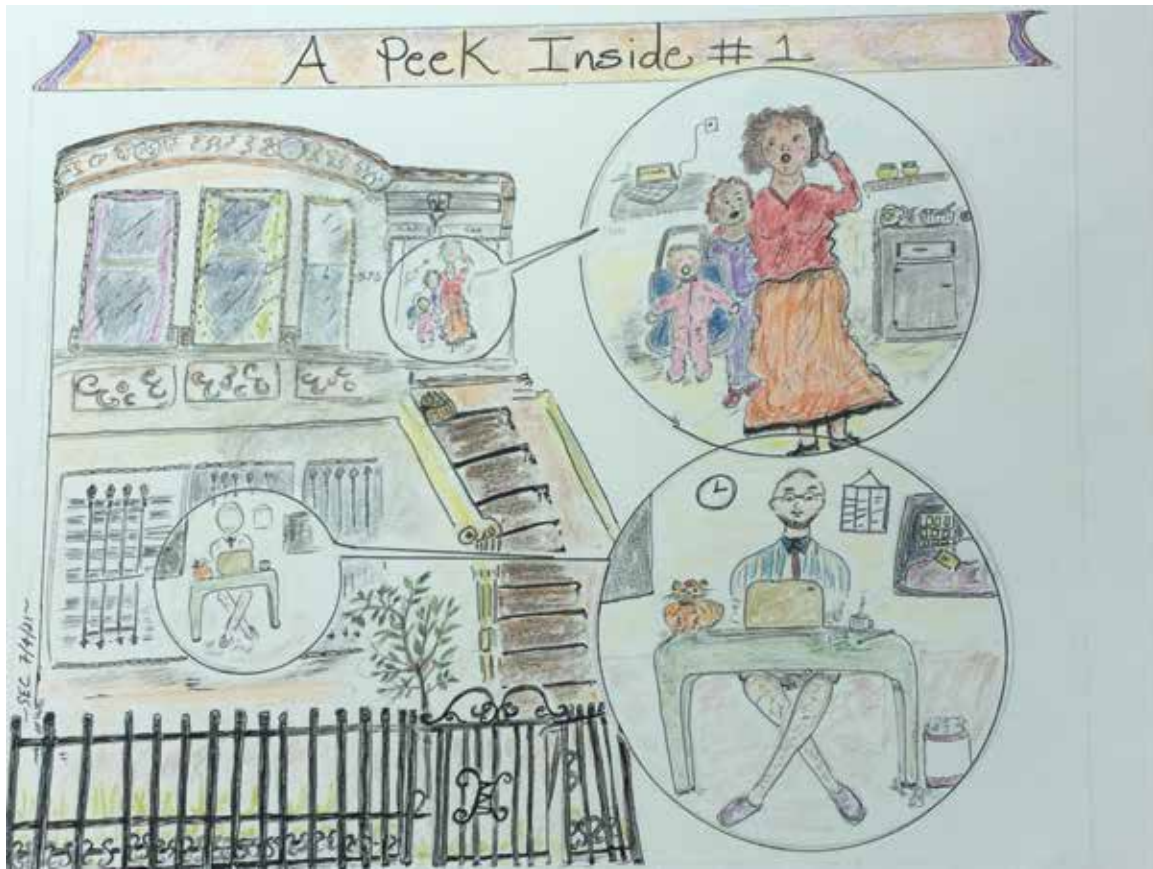
continually assure them with constant announcements and emails that education is something that will never be taken from you. It is theirs. Education is a process, and if it is one course or one term at a time, I am with them every step of the way. I end most phone calls telling students that I am proud of them — for starting, for finishing a term, and for asking for help when they need it. The first step is always the hardest.

Where do I see SUNY Empire in the next 50 years?

The future holds endless opportunities for SUNY Empire as long as we keep doing what we do best: thinking out of the box, being creative and flexible, and most importantly, offering the human connection. We will succeed because of collaborations, community building, PLAs [prior learning assessments], partnership programs, and dedicated faculty and staff. We can build bridges to increase accessibility and streamline processes for students. I believe we will harness our innovative spirit, and put forth the energy that is created when we all rise together and face the challenges that have been set before us.

In Closing

I think it is important to ask ourselves, whom do we serve? We serve the adult learner. We serve the survivors, the underdogs, the fighters, mothers, and fathers. We serve a unique population that is far different than any other SUNY institution. As mentors, we provide something special. We provide hope for our students. Being a mentor at SUNY Empire is a privilege and an honor and a way to make a difference in this world.



A Peek Inside #1
Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

My Personal 2020 Profit and Loss Statement — Net Gain

Deborah Falco '11

Deborah Falco '11 earned her bachelor's degree in Community and Human Services through the college's Long Island location. She went on to earn her Master of Social Work degree at Stony Brook University (SUNY). As a prior learning assessment evaluator for SUNY Empire, she works with CHS students, as well as students seeking credit for college-level learning in insurance (she is a licensed New York state broker). She wrote this piece in December 2020 while reflecting on the year.

As we near the end of 2020, businesses everywhere are tallying up profits and losses and drafting forecasts for 2021. Individuals rely on this information to make investment choices, plan for the future, and calculate some measure of success. The results of these tabulations can be sobering — for both positive and negative outcomes, especially for a year like 2020. It sure has been a tough one.

I thought that it might be time for me to dig deep and review my personal losses and profits. At first glance, anyone would say that my life in 2020 has been one of immeasurable loss. Yes, at my age (60), I should have been prepared for the deaths of my parents. They were elderly, not in the best health, and had lived long and for the most part happy and fulfilling lives. My husband and I often discussed how I would handle their deaths and even had the temerity to speculate on who would be easier to deal with when one predeceased the other. Of course, when I thought too long about it, I would let it drop as is my habit, choosing to deal with things when the time came.

That time came and came again all too soon this year. When both of my parents died within 30 days of one another I was forced to deal with things immediately and not when it would be convenient.

The magnitude of these two losses lies not just in their physical deaths. The losses are much greater than not being able to see them, hug them, or talk to them again. I have lost the two best friends I will ever have. Even though our relationships were strained at times, I no longer have my ride-or-die advocates, my staunchest supporters, and greatest critics. There is no one left to lie to me when I need that or to tell me the harshest truths when that is the best course of action. I am no longer the princess of someone's home, the most talented, the prettiest, smartest person in the house. My parents did all those things and let me occupy all those roles.

I am an orphan, no longer part of a family, but a solitary person. Because I am an only child there is no one left who can bear witness to my upbringing — warts and all. I have no familial partner to reminisce, argue, or laugh with overall that has passed during the years. There is no one to remind me of my parents; no one who has my mom's eyes or my dad's smile. There is only me. I am in this alone.

Those are the true extent of my losses. They are incalculable and their impact will continue to mark me for the rest of my life.

But this exercise also includes acknowledging my profits. What have I gained in 2020? What positive things have I come away with? Believe it or not, there are some.

To begin with, I have reached a new level of respect for my parents. Their simple, hardworking lives somehow led the way for building up a nest egg. I remember ridiculing their frugality and complacency with their material lives. Well, I am the one to be ridiculed. All those years pretty much killing myself to get ahead financially only to spend my

money on things I could do without — what a fool I was. Learning to be content with what I have is a profound lesson taken from their passing. No more squandering; I will now appreciate it. Simplicity, it seems, is fairly complicated. It takes time to develop an appreciation for small things, plain things, run-of-the-mill things.

I have also learned to be proud of myself. I am not as weak as I thought and now know that I can bend without breaking. I understand that although a person will not die from a broken heart, they will undoubtedly wish they had.

I have also learned that true friends do last a lifetime and that I probably do not have as many as I thought I did, but my gratitude for the ones I have grows more deeply every day. Friends, it seems, can come from the craziest, most unexpected places. There *are* genuinely nice, decent people out there who want to help.

One of the biggest positives I uncovered was the true value of a good employer. Sure, everyone is replaceable at work and there is always a limit to a company's leniency. But apparently, there is no limit to compassion at the company I work for. The patience, generosity of spirit, and understanding I received continue to bowl me over.

Another profit has been a clear realization that one never stops learning. Of course, I do understand that as we go through life it is natural to glean some new skills, develop new interests, and by social osmosis learn to operate novel gadgetry and devices and to speak emerging jargon and slang with some proficiency. But these are short-lived and easily acquired accomplishments. I am referring to deep-rooted, hard-wired, practical knowledge. This learning can be brought

from the most random interactions with the most unlikely people. People who, at first, you believe are not as intelligent as you or as urbane as you, are very often the ones you learn the most from. Their ways of thinking, their perceptions have informed me. I have gained some very profound insights into my psyche and the world around me by speaking to them. I have vowed to be more open-minded and patient because of this. Even the small fact of realizing I am deficient in these traits is an enormous gain for me.

Most importantly, I have gained a new respect and admiration for my husband. As you might imagine, I have been a horrible person to be around for much of 2020. Yet he was unwavering in his support of me. He helped me reach decisions and uncover solutions that I never would have been able to see on my own. He listened when I needed hearing, gave me space when I needed solitude, and knew when the only thing that could possibly help me was a vanilla shake! He is my hero, champion, and best friend.

It is true what they say: The future belongs to the young. I have a more profound understanding of love and motherhood when I watch the beautiful young woman, who by some mistake of nature, is my daughter. I do not deserve her but thank the heavens I have her. She is gentle and strong, wise beyond

her years, and has the most forgiving and compassionate soul I have ever encountered. She and her husband have given me the greatest gifts — my two grandchildren. Because of them, I pick myself up and dust myself off each day. I want them to have the most magical childhood I can help to provide. Every waking moment, I have learned to give thanks for their lives. Their innocence and palpable love for me and my husband are healing tonics.

Patience is a virtue that I have learned to embrace. It seems that almost every day there is something else to wait for, be it a delivery, a test result, a phone call from a friend, a visit with a friend, or some positive news for our national psyche. Normalcy — what is that again? I want some of that but know that I must wait. The waiting will make the results so much sweeter when they arrive.

“Normalcy — what is that again? I want some of that but know that I must wait. The waiting will make the results so much sweeter when they arrive.”

Grief, I have come to know, is a tricky, unexpected visitor. There are days when I think that I am “doing good,” but in an instant, that thought can turn into a foul, dark whirlwind of emotion. However, I am learning to handle my grief. I do not think it will ever be completely wiped away, but I am learning to compartmentalize it so that I can deal with it later.

I have gained a deep insight into my soul. Maybe I am not the nasty woman I think I am. For so long I have felt that my life was one of uselessness; I was no good for anything. But now I know that we all have our parts. We all have our ups, downs, and in-betweens. I can recognize my weaknesses, adjust my expectations, and conform to current situations as needed. I have learned to ask (and accept) help. In short, I have learned to like myself again. Sometimes I do “rock.”

So, when I calculate my losses and profits, I am realizing that I DO have a net gain for 2020. The biggest earner and largest contributor to this result has been learning to be present. Appreciate each minute, each experience, or conversation as they are happening. Truly, there is no going back. Carpe diem, everyone. Here's to 2021!

Adult Education and Migration: Reflections on Some Recent Research

Maria N. Gravani, Open University of Cyprus

The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the process, knowledge, understandings, and experiences of some recent research upon which I have embarked regarding migration and the role of adult education programs in migrants' integration, empowerment, and social change in Europe and beyond. By focusing on two completed research projects on migration and adult education, I hope to identify some ideas that have emerged and their implications and relevance to the field of adult education and learning, our work as adult educators, and to the world as it is today.

Over the last five years, I have been involved in two main research projects on adult education and migration: "Learner-Centred Education (LCE) as a Tool for Social Change in Adult Education Programmes for Migrants: A European Comparative Study" (which is described in this paper) and "Life Experiences and Transitions of Adult Migrant Learners Through a Biographical Learning Perspective." The latter, which is still under development, is being conducted with one of my Ph.D. students and aims at exploring adult migrants' learning in the light of their life experiences and transitions, using a biographical learning approach. As part of the two projects, two minor, subprojects were developed collaboratively: "Exploring Adult Migrants' Learning Needs Using an Empowerment-Critical Approach: A Biographical Research" (which is also presented in this paper) and the "Adult Migrant Education as a Mediator of Democratic Citizenship in Postcolonial Contexts: Inferences from Adult Migrant

Language Programmes in Malta and Cyprus." The latter project examines adult migrant education in Malta and Cyprus — two micro member-states of the European Union and former colonies of the British Empire — and problematizes democratic citizenship outcomes of adult education for immigrants in postcolonial contexts. The final short project that has just been completed is titled: "Reception or Deception? Formal and Nonformal Education Provision for Refugees in Greece and Malta." It explores how forced mobility and the reception of refugees inform the geopolitics of refugee adult education provision in the two countries, using a framework of mobility theories. It concludes with a critical reflection on adult education provision for refugees in the region, foregrounding integration, social cohesion, and access to "powerful" knowledge.

As mentioned, this essay will focus on two of the above four projects on migration. Their selection was made for two reasons: first, because they are both completed and their findings have been critically discussed with peer academics, presented in conferences, and published in books and journal papers; and second, because some common themes were raised by the analysis of the data in both cases that I believe are worth discussing and highlighting. These include diversity, inclusivity, respect, learner-centeredness, democratic relationships, collegiality, authentic dialogue, and empowerment, all of which are related to the education and integration of adult migrants and the role of adult education.



Maria N. Gravani

Project One: Learner-Centered Education (LCE) as a Tool for Social Change in Adult Education Programmes for Migrants: A European Comparative Study¹

The idea for this project was generated in one of the frequent International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC)² consortium-partners' gatherings in Tallinn (Estonia). Along with Professor Bonnie Slade, my colleague from the University of Glasgow, we conceived the idea of starting a comparative research project exploring the micro-pedagogical context of adult education language learning programs for migrants in four European cities: Larnaca (Cyprus), Glasgow (Scotland), Valletta (Malta), Tallinn (Estonia). We aimed to explore how, and in what ways, LCE was enacted and implemented in these contexts as a tool for social change. Our inspirations to investigate the above were: first, our discussions about the

rapidly increasing rate at which people migrate in Europe and its implications for their learning and adult learning, in particular; and second, the book by Michele Schweisfurth (2013), another colleague from Glasgow, on LCE as a “traveling policy and practice,” which can improve processes and outcomes and can be used as a foundation for the building of democratic citizens and societies. As will be described, Schweisfurth’s conceptualization and framework of LCE incorporates varying theoretical insights that link to the work of Paulo Freire (1972), Malcolm Knowles (1980), Jack Mezirow (1985), and others, and has been influential in an international comparative education context mostly related to K-12 schooling. Extending her framework into the field of adult education would be something challenging and, we thought, vital.

In this project, we decided to involve all the IMAESC consortium partners and the four European countries, as all of them have histories of mass migration and become places of hosting migrants. I applied for research funding at the competitive internal funding program of my institution, the Open University of Cyprus (OUC), and, after receiving high grades from external evaluators, I was awarded a research grant of 40000 euros (about \$47,000), as principal investigator, to implement the research between 2016-2018. It was a great opportunity to expand the collaboration of the four universities, and complement, as well as build upon previous research conducted by the OUC research team on LCE, adult education, social change, and migration. It attempted to address the relative lack of recent comparative research on whether and how LCE is used in adult education for migrants as a tool for social change across different national contexts. Additionally, by focusing on migration as a social process and migrants as active citizens, the research attempted to evaluate whether LCE practices can become a catalyst for empowering migrant

adult learners. Part of the research sought to describe the historical, geographical, cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts, and to construct cartographies of adult education for migrants in the four countries. This has been very informative. It has allowed us to obtain important knowledge about the European contexts within which language learning programs for migrants have been explored, and, through the experiences and perceptions of the adult migrant learners, to compare the work of educators and policymakers involved in their design.

As a working definition of LCE, the study adopted Schweisfurth’s (2013) conceptualization “as a pedagogical approach which gives learners, and demands from them, a relatively high level of active control over the contents and processes of learning. What is learnt, and how, are therefore shaped by learners’ needs, capacities and interests” (p. 20). Schweisfurth saw this educational practice as existing along a continuum from less learner-centered to more learner-centered, with LCE at one end of the continuum. At that end, learners have control over the content, process, and outcome of learning based on their necessities. Following this, Schweisfurth recognized three justificatory narratives that endorse LCE: cognitive, emancipation, and preparation. The *cognitive* narrative suggests that the learner has control over the content and process of learning. According to the *emancipation* narrative, learners not only have control over what they learn and the process of learning but are encouraged to question critically the canons of received knowledge. This resonates with Freire’s (1972) work on adult education in which dialogue is promoted to encourage learners’ reflection and questioning of their own realities as a central aspect of the learning process. The third narrative is *preparation*, which highlights inquiry and critical thinking as the cornerstones of an effective knowledge economy.

In this continuum, she identified four elements that comprise LCE practice, namely: *techniques*, i.e., the activities that teachers use in the classroom with adult learners; *relationships* between educators and learners; and *motivation and epistemology*, which have to do with the nature of knowledge and curriculum and distinguish between “fixed knowledge” versus “fluid knowledge” that changes and is negotiable.

In our study, these four elements were used as a guiding heuristic for the collection and analysis of the data, which consisted of interview and observation notes with 12 adult migrant learners, four adult educators, and four policymakers. Interviews and classroom observations were conducted in all four contexts using the same protocols, developed by the OUC team. For the research, we collaborated with experienced and early-stage career researchers who were employed in the project. It was a demanding task to coordinate, as qualitative comparative research conducted in four different languages is not easy to manage. However, it was a rewarding and enlightening project for all of us in many ways, as we learned so much from exchanging our experiences on the research process, as well as from reading each other’s findings. The outputs of this challenging study revealed significant divergences among

“According to the emancipation narrative, learners not only have control over what they learn and the process of learning but are encouraged to question critically the canons of received knowledge.”

the four language learning programs across the four countries in terms of adult migrant learners' motivations for participation in adult education; the relevance of the curriculum; the extent to which the courses build on migrant learners' knowledge and skills; the utilization of teaching techniques and methods in the wider framework of fostering dialogic teaching; and the degree of control that migrant learners do or do not have over their learning (Gravani & Slade, 2021).

The four cases also reported varying degrees of onsite, learner-centered measures being catalysts for social change through the empowerment of adult migrant learners. For instance, in Glasgow, experimental policies were initiated to support migrants' motivation to engage with learning by setting up its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program as an integral part of a wide range of services that address basic needs and enhance prospects for social integration. Among other services were: childcare, a particularly important service for the participation of migrant women; provision of family support services, such as health services, housing, social benefits, and children's education; and free meals offered after classes, allowing migrants to socialize and practice conversational English. In contrast, in the Greek language programs for "foreigners" in Cyprus delivered by the State Education Center, a governmental agency, the difficulties of migrants' lives constituted a deterrent to their engagement in the program, e.g., migrant women were unable to attend weekly due to family commitments and childcare. The above divergence can also be explained through the lens of the different types of adult education providers. Where nongovernmental organizations assumed that role (such as the Housing Association), in the case of Glasgow, the curriculum of the language learning programs was experienced by migrants as tailored to meet their perceived needs and interests. On the contrary,

in the case of Cyprus, where the state was the program provider, the language learning programs were characterized by a largely fixed body of knowledge and curriculum; that is, there was little engagement of the educational activities with migrants' current knowledge, experiences, and present and future lives. This can also be explained due to the lack of concrete policies on adult education for migrants in Cyprus, in contrast with Glasgow. The research stressed the importance of fostering democratic relationships as an integral part of enhancing learner-centered educational practices. For instance, in the case of the Estonian program, which sought to foster a friendly atmosphere of trust that supported a positive dialogue among all participants, migrant learners felt safe and respected, as issues and topics that could lead to conflicts were avoided (Gravani & Slade, 2021).

Despite the different degrees of onsite learner-centered measures, a question that emerged from the research was: Are these measures adequate to achieve the level of empowerment needed for participants to become active members of the community rather than peripheral survivors? Our answer was no, as the language programs primarily addressed the need of the state to integrate and assimilate migrants. Still, other questions have emerged such as: What kind of integration for adult migrants do we need? How can this be achieved? What role can adult education play in this crucial process?

Project Two: Exploring Adult Migrants' Learning Needs Using an Empowerment-Critical Approach: A Biographical Research³

This is a recent project, partly funded by a small research grant of the OUC. For its completion, I worked with a young OUC researcher, Georgia Barkoglou. The study was initiated after we were invited to join the Learning and Migration Consortium led by professors Chad Hoggan (North Carolina State University)

and Tetyana Hoggan-Kloubert (University of Augsburg [Germany]), along with a number of other professors in adult education from across Europe. The purpose of the consortium was, at its first stage, for researchers to work on a piece of research related to adult migrants' learning needs and education, and to submit a paper for discussion in a symposium. The subsequent discussion lasted two full days and took place online in March 2020 due to the pandemic, although initially it was planned to be face-to-face in Germany. Hence, we had submitted a research paper, discussed it in the symposium, and, in light of the feedback we received on it, revised the paper and submitted it to the edited volume that is in press.

The research report sought to obtain a comprehensive account of the processes under which adult migrants' learning needs are formed and transformed over the course of their migratory experience. The extent to which and the way with which migrants transform their way of "being" in the new social space is an important topic for adult educators, academics, researchers, and policymakers when planning educational interventions that might be effective in the case of adult migrants. This is especially true if the aim of our work is social integration and equal opportunities for all.

The study adopted a biographical approach based on the narratives of the life stories of four adult migrant learners who have been attending a language learning program in Greece and have been in the country for more than 20 years. Life stories are central, as they furnish participants with the space to construct personal meaning regarding their own needs and their struggles to accommodate these, along with their expectations for the future. As researchers in adult education, we believe that we should create spaces for stories to be told and listened to. Hence, in the study, biographical interviews were conducted, during which adult migrants talked

about their lives and some of their experiences that have shaped their identities and learning needs. Data were analyzed and interpreted in the context of an empowerment-critical approach to learning needs, which reveals heterogeneity and nonlinearity in transformation. The idea was to avoid a simple account of migrants' learning needs without considering their "emergent" needs.

The thematic discourse analysis of the data revealed different categories of learning needs in all four cases that seemed to be shifting across time, depending on the dynamics of adult migrant learners in the new sociocultural place. Thus, upon arriving in the host country, the need for language learning to secure their survival and the need to access accurate information were prevalent. At a later stage, the need for language learning for professional growth, improvement of social status, social interaction, and personal development emerged. Hence a transformation from basic needs for survival to needs related to self-realization and well-being was evident in all the participants. Findings highlighted the heterogeneity and diversity among the four cases explored, as well as the complexity in the ways in which their learning needs (past and present) and future aspirations are shaped.

The above research poses some interesting questions for us, as adult educators, such as: What kinds of educational interventions are essential to address the constant changes in adult migrants' learning needs? Is mainstream adult education, which aims to adapt migrants to a given society and equip them with necessary survival skills, sufficient?

Personal Reflections

This part of the essay attempts to shed light on some of the questions posed earlier on. These are:

- What kind of integration for adult migrants do we need?

- What kinds of educational interventions are essential to address the constant changes in adult migrants' learning needs?
- How can integration be achieved and what is the role that adult education can play?
- Is mainstream adult education, which aims to adapt migrants to a given society and equip them with necessary survival skills, sufficient?

A first idea evolving from the LCE project is that, despite the different degrees of onsite LCE measures taken in all four contexts, the language learning programs explored address the need to assimilate — to integrate migrants into the dominant society. With one exception, the programs are designed with clear instructions from the state providers defining the basic skills and knowledge needed to survive in the hosting country. In such a context, LCE becomes only a practical response to cohort situations; these are marked by diversity, heterogeneity in terms of migrants' cultural, social and economic capital, self and social location, and years of experience in mobility outside the migrants' home country (Borg, 2021). Therefore, given the short-term nature of the programs, what can be attained beyond the first response is limited and partial. This is confirmed by two adult migrant interviewees from Cyprus who argued that the program they joined was not enough for them to improve their opportunities for further integration.

The above takes us to the second idea regarding the policies adopted among the EU member states addressing the integration of migrants, including the countries that were part of this research. These vary, ranging from those assuming a monocultural approach, like in the case of Cyprus and Estonia, and those implementing a more intercultural approach, such as in the case of Scotland. Policies adopting a monocultural approach display assimilation tendencies, aiming

at migrant learners' adjustment to the host country's local culture and standards. This implies a "deficit model" in which "migrants require intervention to be included or integrated, while the institutions and broader society remain largely unchanged" (Morrice et al., 2017, p. 129). When providing integration courses that are unilateral and monocultural, differences between individual citizens and differences with and between migrant learners are ignored (Jenks et al., 2013, as cited in Brown et al., 2020). Besides, migrants, as diverse, active participants in the educational process, do *not* fit into a single category of learners and have complex and diverse educational needs or desires. The intercultural approach understands integration "to be a two-way process involving mutual accommodation and change on the part of both the migrant and host society" (Morrice et al., 2017, p. 130). Based on this understanding, collective identities emerge; at the same time, individual differences are valued through discursive spaces, authentic dialogue dedicated to emancipation, quality adult educators disposed toward diversity, internationalization, and interculturality (Borg, 2021).

In some cases, research findings identified discursive monoculturalism and generalizing or homogenizing approaches. These approaches reflect a lack of sensitivity toward differentiated adult migrants. However, the analysis illuminated stakeholders' critical acknowledgment of the need for differentiated teaching. Findings also illuminated instances when policy gaps that lead to traces of monoculturalism were overridden by the educator (Brown et al., 2021) (e.g., in the case of the Malta program).

A third idea that has emerged links to the second project, which is based on the life stories of four adult migrant learners. Its findings are indicative of the great heterogeneity among migrants and the complexity in the ways in which their learning needs and aspirations

get transformed while living in the host country. Migrants' initial need to learn the language for survival evolves across the migratory experience; hence, once again, mainstream adult education that aims at helping individuals to adapt to a given society and equip them with survival skills proved to be deficient.

Concluding Remarks

This discussion leads to three conclusions and policy directions:

- a) An integration model for the education of adult migrants that involves a two-way process in which migrants and the host community adapt to each other.** Only in this way can adult education play an important role by supporting and empowering migrants and local communities. Adult education should be seen "as an open, dynamic system, which is open to transformations from the two-sided process of integration that is driven by interactions amongst migrants and native learners" (Gravani et al., 2019, p. 30).
- b) A liberating, emancipatory, change-oriented adult education for migrants** that enhances critical awareness, self-efficacy, personal development, and active engagement in the new social space. Manninen et. al. (2020) introduced the phrase "change-oriented adult education" and argued that it ... encompasses an approach, philosophy and set of teaching and learning methods that seek to create individual and/or social change. Learners can also move beyond individual transformation to a collective empowerment based on critical awareness, new ways of thinking, and active participation. This model facilitates a process of conscious realization for learners as they work together taking action, including potential acts

of resistance, towards a more democratic, equal and ethical world. (p. 5)

- c) An "emancipatory learner-centered education" (ELCE) for migrants.** This is a phrase introduced by Professor Carmel Borg (2021) that responds to the need for transforming top-down, educator-learner (migrant) relationships into opportunities for genuine collaboration. The ELCE initiative is rooted in participatory democracy and evolves around the pedagogy of authentic dialogue. It also challenges the perceptions of migrants and migration, problematizes assumptions about learning in the context of migration, and challenges the perception of the experts as the only source of knowledge, and in so doing, generates empathy with all migrants. According to Borg, "ELCE is an educational process that welds the collective reading of the world with ongoing communal action for personal and social change. ELCE's vision is overt and clear, it foregrounds the notion that migrants and educators act in communion and are both protagonists in a process of mutual and reciprocal transformation" (p. 181).

Finally, yet importantly, these discussions emphasize the value of **diversity**. Migrants in our society bring diversity, and diversity is a learning opportunity: It is a strength. We, as adult educators, should be open to hearing the voices of adults around the world, no matter their backgrounds. A diverse society is a learning society, and a culturally diverse society is an open society. Adult education should have a role in valuing and fostering diversity, plurality, heterogeneity, living with the difference, perceiving this as an educative process, and trying to create spaces to accommodate differences. M. Scott Peck's quote:

"Share our similarities, celebrate our differences" (Brainy Quote, n.d.) should be our motto.

As adult educators, we could reflect on the above, empower ourselves, and take action for forms of adult education that support solidarity, inclusivity, learner-centeredness, respect, authentic and democratic dialogue, acceptance, collegiality, empathy, and optimism. As Bainbridge et al. (2021), colleagues from the European Society for the Research in the Education of Adults (ESREA), recently identified: "We, as researchers, teachers, and citizens, are embedded in a liquid, runaway, fractious, anxiety ridden world but have responsibilities to struggle toward something better, grounded in social justice" (p. 2). Even if there is much work for us to do and the journey is long, we should demonstrate critical reflection, commitment, perseverance, resilience, and turn our anger and frustration raised by right-wing populism into communal action informed by a love for each other, gratitude for what the journey has given us, and hope for a better world that fosters equity.

To close with my favorite Greek poet C.P. Cavafy (1911):

When you set out on your journey
to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
...
And if you find her poor, Ithaca has
not deceived you.
Wise as you have become, with so
much experience,
you must already have understood
what Ithaca means. (lines 1-3;
34-36)

Notes

- ¹ This part is based on the recently published book by Gravani and Slade (2021).
- ² IMAESC is an Erasmus Mundus program funded by the EU and delivered since 2016 by the University of Glasgow (Scotland);

leader), the Open University of Cyprus (Cyprus), the University of Tallinn (Estonia), the University of Malta (Malta), and the University of Maynooth (Ireland; since 2019). IMAESC is a unique program that brings together European and international universities, VET (vocational education and training) institutions, and community-based organizations and policy units, which recognize that adult education is a powerful tool in producing competent, critical citizens and for developing equitable and democratic societies. It has had 74 graduates from over 35 countries and has received about seven million euros in funding. SUNY Empire State College is an educational associate partner of IMAESC.

³ This part is based on the book chapter by Barkoglou and Gravani (in press) that is to be published in 2022.

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SUNY Empire State College: An Invitation to the Institution of Knowledge Seekers

Patricia Isaac, Syracuse

As SUNY Empire celebrates its 50th anniversary as an innovating higher education teaching college, let's reflect on our past and proudly focus on our future.

I'm always moved when I read these words written by Britain's poet laureate, John Masefield (1878-1967):

There are few earthly things more beautiful than a University. It is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see. ...

These words still ring true for me irrespective of what we know of the traditional university as the keeper of knowledge found in ivy-covered buildings. I honor "those" who seek the truth and abhor ignorance. I honor those knowledge seekers who came before me, who persevered and endured to break down the hidden and not so hidden barriers. These honored ones did not retreat nor break at the onslaught of adversity. The knowledge seekers understood their birthright and fought for acceptance. Their dreams were weathered but not broken; their every hope held firm and did not diminish. They sought affirmation and value and recognition because, as Masefield reminded us 75 years ago, the university must "uphold ever the dignity of thought and learning":

... where seekers and learners alike, banded together in the search for knowledge, will honour thought in all its finer ways, will welcome thinkers in distress or in exile, will uphold ever the dignity of thought and learning. ...

The university is not just a structure; rather, it is made up of individuals who individually and collectively seek knowledge; and for many, the love of learning is unquenchable because knowledge is free and a human right that should be accessible to all who desire to know and learn.

SUNY Empire's founder and champion, Ernest Boyer, questioned the purpose of the traditional university in 1970. As Richard Bonnabeau (1996) wrote in his history of the college's first 25 years:

... Empire State College sought to bring about meaningful change, to make higher education relevant and accessible. It was this search, courageously undertaken by the founders, administrators, faculty, and staff of Empire State College, that put it, from its inception, on the cutting edge of innovation in American higher education. (p. 16)

And here is Masefield again:

There are few things more enduring than a University. Religions may split into sect or heresy; dynasties may perish or be supplanted, but for century after century the University will continue, and the stream of life will pass through it, and the thinker and the seeker will be bound together in the undying cause of bringing thought into the world.

Twenty-one years into the 21st century and we still see the tension in higher education between idealism and reality, between exclusion and acceptance, and between elitism and equality. As thinkers and knowledge seekers, have we kept our promise to ourselves and our students? What are the most pivotal



Patricia Isaac

questions and answers that must be explored? Masefield's speech challenges us to consider all possibilities and engage in a shared journey of dialogue. In the spirit of Masefield's speech, I ask all of us to think about how we see ourselves as knowledge seekers and how we express it.

John Masefield's Speech

Reply to the Toast of the Honorary Graduates [at the University of Sheffield], 1946

There are few earthly honours more to be prized than this which you are now giving to us. There are few earthly things more splendid than a University. In these days of broken frontiers and collapsing values, when the dams are down and the floods are making misery, when every future looks somewhat grim and every ancient foothold has become something of a quagmire, wherever a University stands, it stands and shines; wherever it

exists, the free minds of men, urged on to full and fair enquiry, may still bring wisdom into human affairs.

There are few earthly things more beautiful than a University. It is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see; where seekers and learners alike, banded together in the search for knowledge, will honour thought in all its finer ways, will welcome thinkers in distress or in exile, will uphold ever the dignity of thought and learning and will exact standards in these things. They give to the young in their impressionable years, the bond of a lofty purpose shared, of a great corporate life whose links will not be loosed until they die. They give young people that close companionship for which youth longs, and that chance of the endless discussion of the themes which are endless, without which youth would seem a waste of time.

There are few things more enduring than a University. Religions may split into sect or heresy; dynasties may perish or be supplanted, but for century after century the University will continue, and the stream of life will pass through it, and the thinker and the seeker will be bound together in the undying cause of bringing thought into the world.

To be a member of one of these great Societies must ever be a glad distinction.

In conferring it upon us you declare, or let it be presumed, that we are qualified to teach in those ways of life which we have followed. It has been a mark of the Humanist since he began among us that "he wol gladly lerne and gladly teche"; and although all of us would more gladly learn than teach, to be counted fit to teach is something of a crown to all men.

On behalf of my fellows in this glory, on behalf of the very learned, valiant, wise and gifted men beside me here, who stand for the Law by which we live, the Air by which we breathe, the Free Enquiry by which we hope to endure, and the Art by which we shall be remembered, I thank you for this great distinction, which links us with you while we last. (P. Errington, personal communication, November 18, 2020)

Note

Special thanks to The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of John Masefield, Phil Errington, and Sarah Baxter for the permission to include Masefield's speech in *All About Mentoring*.

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Caring With Technology

Carolina Kim, Manhattan

Why Typing?

Back in the '90s in Brazil, before my family had a personal computer, my dad made me a hand-drawn paper keyboard where I was to practice my typing lessons. He somehow convinced a director of a professional development center for adults where I grew up in Brasília to enroll his two tween daughters and create a children's section of a typing class just for us. In this newly formed class of two students, I was the second-best typist, just straggling behind my sister.

At that time, I couldn't rationalize why he was making me memorize and repeatedly press "asdfg" and "hjklç" — one key, one letter, one finger at a time, over and over again. "What was my dad thinking dropping me off here?! Unee is so much faster than I am. We don't even have a machine at home!" My weekly internal complaints and bratty attitude at our poor college-age instructor were not fully unfounded. After all, we didn't have a typewriter or a computer at home. We rarely saw computers in school or ever thought about the need to typewrite anything. Cursive writing was serving me just fine, thank you. In my young mind, the fact that we didn't have a computer automatically disqualified me to learn anything about it — let alone get typing lessons only to go home and be expected to perfect those skills on a flat piece of paper.

But by the time we moved to the United States at the turn of the century, personal computers were more readily available and attainable for American homes. When we finally got our first computer, a cream-colored Gateway with a real clickity-clackity keyboard, my sister and I were already typing very close to the average professional speed (50 to 80 words per minute) and,

oddly, were already very comfortable around computers. These newly-minted immigrants who struggled to speak English in their high school classes were getting opportunities to excel in advanced computer stuff such as, in my sister's case, learning C++ and CAD in an engineering class, and, in my case, using music notation software to create music sheets with the legendary and my most influential guitar teacher, Mr. Doug Burris (yes, the Miami Beach Senior High School Rock Ensemble director who very sadly died of complications from multiple sclerosis in 2016).

Technology as a Collection of Art and Skill

My mind recalls these memories often in my educational technology work today. I meet, teach, and support students and educators whose view of technology can be as one-dimensional as that paper keyboard; utilitarian, inanimate, and draining. My observations are that most, if not all of them, were thrust into the dry world of *click this to do that*, and have developed a disconnect between the technical requirements and the greater purpose for using technology.

So, what *is* the greater purpose for using a platform, tool, or system? And how does this address caring with technology? Before addressing these questions, allow me to share a few important points. First, technology is only a means to a purposeful, useful, and transferrable end. It alone is never the end goal (more on this in the next section). Second, technology requires and encourages a growth mindset. Change is a constant and errors are guaranteed. It is so important to accept, be nimble about, and work within these parameters. Last and most important,



Carolina Kim

technology is not just about computers. Let us look at the origins of the root word *tekhnnologia*.

Technology has not always been synonymous with glowing screens or "techy" stuff. *Tech* comes from the same Greek word from which "technique" comes from, *tekhne*, which means **skill or art**. *Logy* is from the Greek *logos* and derived from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *leg* that means **to collect or gather**. When put together, the rough etymological meaning of technology is "the collection of skills." Or, as Alex Gorischek (2017) explained, "technology [is] **a physical manifestation of a skill**" (para. 6). So, whatever the industry, technology is the manifestation and practical application of human ingenuity, creativity, and problem-solving that were built upon other collections of skills. Therefore, the greater purpose is just that: to build, collect, and transfer skills.

A Greater Purpose in Transferrable Skills

If there's one word to encapsulate the end goal, it is "transfer." Yes, we use today's technology to work faster and

more efficiently, but the end goal should be to build, collect, and transfer skills and knowledge. That means focusing away from the emphasis on the name-specific technology (e.g., Moodle, MS Teams, Zoom) and spotlighting the transferrable skills that we and our students develop through them.

Take videoconferencing technology, for example. This may be “old tech” now that the entire world has relied on it through the COVID-19 crisis, but we may not have stopped to count the skills that we have collected through the endless video calls we’ve made. Here are a few skills we have developed: how to communicate in a remote environment absent of nonverbal cues, how to utilize video call etiquette in various platforms, the basic knowledge of the workings of a broadband internet connection, and basic technical troubleshooting, among others.

From this point, there are myriad ways our students could transfer these skills and knowledge. If they’re in education, they may understand more deeply how remote, synchronous teaching via a video platform is an entirely

different modality than face-to-face teaching and get inspired to develop pedagogical strategies specific to their schools. They may develop an interest in policymaking after seeing the inequalities of broadband services in their communities. Others may even get a spark on a research question, on a completely innovative solution, or realize that they are great troubleshooters and seek a completely different career path. Had COVID-19 not forced us to build these videoconferencing skills and knowledge, how many of our students would have been given the opportunity to collect these skills under normal circumstances? If they do not build these skills here, then where?

Caring With Technology

Despite not knowing much about computers at that time, my dad realized that the computer keyboard was an entryway for us. Typing well was not his end goal but it surely was an opportunity. His gut feeling was that it would remove barriers and allow me to more easily navigate computers, while potentially opening educational and

professional opportunities. Sure enough, that one act opened possibilities for me to utilize technology in multiple contexts and applications that not even he could have foreseen. I am forever grateful for his perseverance. It was just one of the many loving, caring decisions he and my mom have made in my life.

In this same sentiment, how can we use technology with our students as some entryway and not as the end result? What opportunities do we give students to build skills as we use technology with them? Do we give them the opportunity to transfer those skills and experiences to other areas? How can we implement and use technology that is mindful of those transferrable skills? By considering the skill sets of the students first, we are truly caring with technology.

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From “Before the Beginning” to Emeritus: 50 Years at SUNY Empire State College

Al Lawrence, Mentor Emeritus, Saratoga Springs

“I’ve been involved with Empire State College since before the beginning,” I’ve often told my colleagues. In 1970, I was a young newspaper reporter with an associate degree in journalism, covering campus news, which consisted primarily of anti-war demonstrations and student takeovers of university administration buildings in protest to the presence of Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) programs.

But one day I was assigned to interview SUNY Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer, who was traveling the state promoting an initiative for a new kind of university program that he called, at the time, “University College.” It was designed to appeal to those disaffected with conventional college education, give them an opportunity to design their own learning programs, and acknowledge that there are many different ways of acquiring knowledge.

A few years later, I met a young literature professor at the Albany location of what, by then, was called Empire State College. Bob Congemi, who is still mentoring and teaching at the college 50 years later, urged me to enroll, assemble the credits from my associate degree and miscellaneous others I had picked up at various colleges, and seek credit for what I had learned covering government, courts, and education at four newspapers around the state.

Credits were then measured in months (a month equating to four credit hours), rather than credit hours, and I did a six-month thesis project to complete my degree on the controversial subject of plea bargaining in the criminal courts. Under the direction of my mentor, Dr. Robert E. Morrison, I assembled the

bibliography that I would undertake to read and proposed the lawyers, judges, and legislators I would interview. Mentor Bob Morrison and I wrote an extensive learning contract in longhand, which was typed on a manual typewriter by his secretary, and I came back in six months with the finished project, a version of which was ultimately published in a magazine on state government.

Six years later, I had a master’s degree in criminal justice and a law degree and was working in state government when Bob Congemi again prevailed upon me, this time to tutor one of his students in Business Law. That was more than 39 years ago. In the meantime, I have worked with hundreds of students as an adjunct, a part-time mentor, a full-time nontenure-track lecturer, and an assistant, associate, and full professor. I have taught individual studies and study groups in a regional center of the college, a unit, two of the former FORUM Management programs, graduate studies, the Center for Distance Learning (CDL), and, for the past few years, what is now called the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

I’ve worked in eight different locations in Albany and Saratoga under five presidents, six interim presidents, seven deans, and too many provosts to count or remember. To my great good fortune, two of those provosts were Joyce Elliott and Meg Benke, who also number among the deans and interim presidents. I’ve labored in cramped cubicles that I had to share with other faculty and in an office in which I had to hang an umbrella over the computer to protect it from a leaky roof, as well as in a beautiful modern building overlooking a stand of pine trees. Somewhat of a bibliophile, I surreptitiously filled the last



Photo credit: Zoey McAllister

Al Lawrence

office with books after borrowing more than the requisite number of shelves that I was permitted!

In my early days, I often met with students after hours in my government office at Empire State Plaza in Albany and sometimes at my home. I typed my own learning contracts, narrative evaluations, and prior learning evaluations on typewriters. I found my own books and other resources in libraries and wrote to publishers for review copies. We did not give students grades at the time, and they were often expected to come up with the themes for papers, rather than fulfill specific assignments. Students enrolled for studies on any Monday of the year, except during the faculty reading period, so one often had students working at different points in the same or a similar learning contract. I had many Business Law students and would meet monthly with them to have them analyze hypothetical problems from the text that I used for 10 editions. I might be doing contract law one day, corporations the next, and property law on another day.

Over time, I developed about 30 different learning contracts in legal subjects, criminal justice, and journalism. I taught dispute mediation in FORUM and New York state government to interns in a SUNY-wide program at Empire State Plaza. One of my most rewarding experiences was the collaboration with Joyce Elliott, mentor Dick Gotti, and other colleagues on a weekend residency on family issues that we presented first in Albany, then in Syracuse. In my session on legal policy, we debated such “dull” topics as abortion, gay marriage, and surrogate parenting.

Teaching one-on-one has its disadvantages. If a student is unprepared or not understanding the material, this Socratic method (which I favor) does not work well. You can't simply go to another student for enlightenment; you can only analyze the problem yourself. And too many students have a bad habit of “cutting class” by simply failing to show up — apparently not recognizing that their instructor is sitting alone in the office waiting to see whether they appear. But it has its rewards, as well. I remember clearly a student whose face would light up with recognition as he saw the reasoning behind many of the rules of contracts to which he had been exposed in the construction industry but had never fully understood.

Study groups gave greater opportunities for intellectual interaction and sometimes frivolity. During the health reform initiatives of the Clinton administration, I was teaching a group in Health and the Law when there was a knock at the door. A secretary stuck her head in and announced, “Al, there is someone here to see you, and it's important.” I went to the door and opened it to find a life-size cardboard cutout of Hillary Clinton standing on the threshold. “She” joined us for the remainder of the session. With the cooperation of the secretary, the students had “invited” her as a surprise to their instructor.

When I began mentoring in 1998, I inherited a number of students who had been ill-served by an ailing mentor who had retired. The records of what they had enrolled in, studied, and been evaluated for were contradictory, and the students themselves could offer little information about what they had studied, learned, and written. Dean Joyce Elliott and I eventually concluded that they could not be given the credit that they had paid for, which, of course, left many unhappy campers. I was plagued by this problem for 10 years as students who had once studied with this mentor returned, hoping to resume their studies and complete their degrees.

Educational planning was then an open book. Every student wanted to know, “What courses do I need to take? Where are the courses listed?” There were, of course, no required courses, and the only list was of CDL courses, which, at the time, were far, far fewer in number than the online courses offered today. And they were not online; they were by paper and mail correspondence with instructors. Because they ran on term schedules and many students enrolled in regional centers on one of the 48 other weeks, the CDL courses were not available to them anyway. This required extensive discussions with students about what they wanted to learn, why they wanted degrees, and where they wanted to go. We still do this, of course, but it's much easier when they have a catalog of possible studies for a framework and even easier if they have a registered program to follow. On the other hand, I think it was somewhat easier to mentor creatively in the days when one didn't need to be as mindful of the strict educational and professional requirements that exist today in many fields. We didn't need to be so concerned about the prerequisites and credentials needed to get students where they wanted to be, which made “generalist” mentoring in fields other than your own much less fraught with

the danger of turning out students who were unprepared for the career or the graduate education they desired.

But have we become too unwilling today to be creative and to urge students to explore knowledge in innovative and unconventional ways? Are we too rigid in thinking that a program “must” contain

“But have we become too unwilling today to be creative and to urge students to explore knowledge in innovative and unconventional ways?”

certain elements or that only certain concentration titles will pass muster with the college's assessment committees? This is certainly not what Chancellor Boyer had in mind 50 years ago.

There was no DP Planner when I began mentoring. Students typed their degree plans, and alterations required constant arithmetic recalculations. There were no SUNY General Education requirements. Rules about “shaving” credits in order to meet what was then a 128-credit degree requirement changed constantly.

The journalism and criminal justice students that I taught developed programs that did not easily align with existing area of study (AOS) guidelines. Furthermore, faculty on assessment committees often interpreted Community and Human Services (CHS) guidelines narrowly as though the word “community” did not appear and every student was headed toward a career in social work. Criminal justice students were often required to include courses in human services, and police officers with 20 years of experience were

mandated to do internships in social service agencies in order to meet a guideline that required “application” of their knowledge — something no other college required of criminal justice students.

Joyce Elliott was provost when I became a full-time, tenure-track professor, and I suggested a new area of study, to be called Public Affairs, in order to better accommodate many students in public service. She gave me a partial reassignment to discuss the idea throughout the college and to draft and shepherd guidelines through the long process of college governance, SUNY, and state education review. I worked with Tai Arnold in academic affairs, as well as faculty colleagues including Ed Warzala, Duncan RyanMann, and Frank Vander Valk. Tai was initially hesitant. “We haven’t had a new AOS in 30 years,” she told me, I remember. “But, on the other hand, maybe that’s a good reason to do it,” she said. In the process, we discovered that an old “rule” that each regional center must have a full-time faculty member in each area of study was an “urban myth,” not a requirement for accreditation. We met with some resistance. It surprised me that some faculty at an innovative, nontraditional college would balk at change, and there were those who thought “Public Affairs” referred to the likes of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, even though there were many colleges and programs across the country using that nomenclature.

The strangest objection, to my mind, was that, by providing students with a new option for a registered program, we would somehow be “taking away” something from the CHS area of study and the faculty who identified with it. This I never understood; at the time, we had no schools and departments and were administratively organized by regional centers.

The new AOS was ultimately approved, of course, and students have now been registering programs under the title Public Affairs for nearly 15 years.

I had often been confounded by the language in AOS guidelines for disciplines outside my own learning. I remember that, when I began mentoring, even psychology professors could not explain to me what courses aligned with “domains and dimensions of thought,” language in the Human Development guidelines at the time. We attempted to draft the Public Affairs guidelines in language that students and faculty from other disciplines could understand, and we used examples of course titles that might be used to meet them in the different concentrations common to the AOS, such as criminal justice, public administration, or emergency management.

I moved to the Center for Distance Learning as it was expanding in the early 2000s and converting its print-based courses to an online format that then presented on a platform called the SUNY Learning Network. It was shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and emergency management and homeland security were becoming burgeoning new fields. CDL had a one-year government grant to create 10 new courses in emergency management, and I was assigned as the area coordinator in criminal justice to lead the project. There were few such programs, few resources, and little definition in academic circles as to what such an academic study should encompass. For years, I attended conferences at which the primary topic of discussion was, “What is Emergency Management as an Academic Field?” But such vagaries don’t make me uncomfortable; I saw it as an opportunity to create a definition and a curriculum. Criminal justice and public administration also lend themselves to multiple interpretations of knowledge and content, and academics have also struggled since the 1960s to define the precise content of such degrees.

In a year, we had 10 new courses, many of which still form the basis of our offerings in emergency management, and a program that emphasizes the planning, policy, and management of natural, technological, and human-made disasters.

I also extensively revised the six, then-existing CDL courses in criminal justice and proposed some additional ones as we moved them from print to online. In addition, I was responsible for seven fire administration courses that we had long offered as part of a consortium of colleges sponsored by the National Fire Academy (NFA). The NFA had produced textbooks for the courses, paying experts in the field substantial sums to write them. But when it was subsumed into the new U.S. Department of Homeland Security, that funding dried up, and the NFA proposed placing course content online. After only one meeting with representatives of the other consortium colleges, I realized that SUNY Empire was the only institution with expertise in online education, and I urged Meg Benke, then my dean, to take on the project. We became the lead college, but each of the consortium schools was assigned to develop two courses. Unfortunately, several of them were not equal to the task of doing so in a timely way with quality content. The program would never have been completed without the extraordinary support and perseverance of Nicola Allain, who was then the director of curriculum and instructional design, and members of her team, most notably Instructional Designer Sonja Thomson.

CDL grew by leaps and bounds during my first 10 years on its faculty. We were constantly searching for new faculty and reviewing them for reappointment and tenure. Hundreds of new courses were created, and students came in droves. New protocols for teaching and mentoring them needed to be created, and new methods for reviewing their degree plans were developed. I served as faculty chair for two years, and we created several of what we called

“pre-approved programs,” which the faculty agreed would pass muster in an assessment committee without question if followed by students. The need for this process was obviated when the college decided to move toward registered programs.

I never felt the difficulty in moving from teaching onsite to teaching online that some of my colleagues have expressed. Perhaps it is because online discussions lend themselves well to the Socratic method that I favor. I did learn early on, though, that careful monitoring of those discussions is imperative, particularly if the subject is controversial. In the first online course that I taught, I had not realized that students were posting before the discussion period began, and, when I joined, they were already calling one another names and belittling responses with which they disagreed. One student’s remarks were so egregious that he was ultimately disciplined.

When I joined the CDL faculty, there was no standing Academic Review Committee. I suggested that we needed one and became its first chair. The wealth of online resources has been a boon for access to academic sources. Unfortunately, it has also provided a wealth of information for students to

plagiarize. Over the years, I endeavored to design courses with assignments so specific that it would eliminate the ability of students to plagiarize. I also think that it is part of our obligation as professors to teach students the value of academic honesty and respect for the intellectual property of other scholars. Sometimes that teaching requires consequences for the deliberate copying of the work of others. The integrity of the institution and the degrees we award require that we uphold these standards.

When I cleaned out my office shortly before my retirement, I realized that I have had a parallel career in student conduct. I had amassed nearly a full drawer of files of academic appeals, and discipline and student conduct proceedings. Plagiarism wasn’t the only disciplinary issue. I conducted a number of formal hearings in which students were accused of such things as forging a transcript for prior credit, falsely obtaining financial aid, and verbal harassment of college personnel.

We occasionally get praise or thanks from our students, but often we do not recognize the impact that we have on their lives or their thinking. A few of my students have become lifelong friends. For years until she got her degree, I encouraged, nurtured, cajoled, and

ran interference for a bright woman from an abusive background who was working as an over-the-road truck driver. After a number of false starts, she rewarded this effort by completing two advanced degrees, remarrying, and becoming a counselor. Even incidental contacts can have a lasting impression. I once received a gratifying email from a student with whom I had had only two sessions before she dropped out. Years later, she wrote to tell me that she had obtained a bachelor’s and a law degree from another school but that, by asking her to critique the rationale in a court case, I had taught her “that I could criticize the thinking of a Supreme Court justice.”

The years between writing about a “dream,” nontraditional college to teaching in today’s robust institution with hundreds of faculty and staff, thousands of students, and many thousands of graduates have led me through three degrees, three careers, hundreds of students, and dozens of treasured colleagues, as well as marriage, children and grandchildren. I now look forward to returning to a career in writing as a professor emeritus, and I look forward to watching the continuing evolution of our dynamic college.

Poetry

Yvonne Murphy, Syracuse

Three Deer, an Elegy

<p>I.</p> <p>Every daughter, a remnant —</p> <p>deferred and shape-shifted through moon</p> <p>to a grey deer browsing in lichened thickets.</p> <p><i>What more is there to say?</i></p> <p>Silvered in light, swelled expectations mirror</p> <p>and fade —</p> <p>her tired breath.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>II.</p> <p>Her eyes fix upon impact,</p> <p>the pregnant doe — her fawn spilling out.</p> <p>My headlamps splatter with blood and shit and night.</p> <p><i>What was she trying to say?</i></p> <p>I have forsaken her, here on the highway's gravel.</p> <p>More mute than mute, hot air of breath leaking</p> <p>through my hands.</p>	<p>III.</p> <p>At the funeral, my daughter stays outside.</p> <p>Lacquered apples flash from trees —</p> <p>most already fallen.</p> <p><i>This becomes impossible to say.</i></p> <p>Autumn bears its usual gifts, mums stutter like babies' tongues,</p> <p>geese gawk overhead and a doe leaps</p> <p>acrobatic through mountains.</p>
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Petroglyphs

<p>I.</p> <p>Horses run through mariposa lilies, rice grass — etched in low cave walls of basalt, obsidian.</p> <p>Feminine scratches of plants, avian species, hunting camps and feathers, panels of ladders</p> <p>and circles, an archive of pecked-in marks. <i>Did they draw to record, embellish, or cover?</i></p> <p>Previous glyphs tagged, and extended — <i>For love? Against erasure? Baskets and babies</i></p> <p>superimposed over fauna, cattails and water. Burials, rattles, monoliths, deer.</p> <p>Some cross hatches devoid of design — banded in zig-zags, Numic patterns on blankets,</p> <p>carved expressions of supplication, open notices to recall: another year of ordinary devastations.</p>	<p>II.</p> <p>Having turned completely to stone, the wife asks: <i>what's next?</i></p> <p>Carbon, chromium — faculties replaced</p> <p>by rock. <i>Do I sleep?</i> <i>Do I burn?</i></p> <p>petrified underground, kitchen dishes, clothes mounds</p> <p>boulder and crack to dust</p> <p>before the mineral flash</p> <p>of iron, manganese filters through.</p> <p>Tomorrow she will decompose completely</p> <p>without oxygen, without demands.</p>
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Translating a Blended Cyprus Residency Study in the Digital Arts to Online

Thomas P. Mackey, Saratoga Springs



Thomas P. Mackey (lower left) with Cyprus Residency students.

The summer 2019 Cyprus Residency, part of SUNY Empire State College's International Education program, inspired the development of a new online course in the digital arts titled Ethics of Digital Art & Design. As a result of this translation, from one mode to another, the online version was offered to students for the first time in the spring of 2021. In the blended Cyprus Residency, this particular study met the specific needs of our International Education students attending from Lebanon who were seeking a course related to art, fashion, and/or design. As a part of the digital arts curriculum, it now meets the needs of an even wider audience; it aligns with the college's area of study guidelines for The Arts and meets the SUNY General Education Requirement for The Arts. The development of this course was realized through the flexibility of SUNY Empire's

independent study model to create individualized learning experiences based on the interests of students. It also benefits from collaboration with colleagues in International Education to better understand the needs of our students in Lebanon and to design it as part of the digital arts course offerings. The engagement with learners at the Cyprus Residency, including the enthusiasm they expressed for the topic and this collaborative mode of inquiry, motivated the development of this course as an ongoing part of the curriculum in the digital arts. Although not all residency or special topics courses need to become a permanent part of the catalog, this one study, in particular, delves into areas of digital ethics in The Arts that contribute to and complement related courses that benefit student degree planning.

Teaching with Metaliteracy

Developing Ethics of Digital Art & Design for the Cyprus Residency involved the integration of metaliteracy in the course design through readings, resources, and learning activities. Metaliteracy is a holistic pedagogical framework that supports metacognitive reflection and the collaborative production of new knowledge. As first introduced:

Metaliteracy promotes critical thinking and collaboration in a digital age, providing a comprehensive framework to effectively participate in social media and online communities. It is a unified construct that supports the acquisition, production, and sharing of knowledge in collaborative online communities. (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011, p. 62)

Rather than rely entirely on discrete skills, metaliteracy supports the development of a critical and reflective mindset for analyzing information as well as producing and sharing it in collaborative social settings. This involves an awareness of metacognition within four domains of learning that intersect with the affective, behavioral, and cognitive areas. As the metaliteracy model shows (Figure 1: The Metaliteracy Model), the metaliterate learner is at the center of these four domains (Mackey & Jacobson, 2014; [2022] in press). This framework considers the whole person and how learners think, feel, reflect, and act as part of their learning in a variety of information settings and situations. An interactive version of this model is available at the Metaliteracy.org (n.d.-a) blog as an open educational resource (OER) that is transferrable to different learning scenarios.

The metaliteracy model includes another ring beyond the four domains to identify the characteristics that learners strive toward as part of this process, including being adaptable, open, productive, informed, collaborative, participatory, reflective, and civic-minded (Mackey, 2019, pp. 16-23). The characteristics or qualities are practiced through active metaliterate learner roles. The outer ring of this diagram includes the primary roles that focus especially on the evaluation, production, and sharing of content in social information environments (Mackey & Jacobson, 2014, p. 91-94).

All of these components work together to empower learners to reflect on their own learning while taking charge of their educational experiences. This approach is informed by Flavell (1979), who described a metacognitive process in which individuals have “opportunities for thoughts and feelings about [their] own thinking to arise and, in many cases, call for the kind of quality control that metacognitive experiences can help supply” (p. 908). This meditative approach encourages learners to assess their existing strengths while identifying and working toward areas for continued growth. From a metaliteracy perspective, this is both an individualized and collaborative process as individuals reflect on their own needs and open up to the potential for both teaching and learning in collaborative communities.

Metaliteracy Goals and Learning Objectives

Teaching with metaliteracy is supported by four learning goals and related objectives. The four main goals include:

1. Actively evaluate content while also evaluating one’s own biases.
2. Engage with all intellectual property ethically and responsibly.
3. Produce and share information in collaborative and participatory environments.

4. Develop learning strategies to meet lifelong personal and professional goals. (Jacobson et al., 2018, paras. 4-7)

Each of these primary aspirations is supported with learning objectives that are identified as affective, behavioral, cognitive, and/or metacognitive, which unify the framework in a comprehensive way. For instance, the first goal, which focuses on the effective evaluation of information, is reinforced with the affective and metacognitive objective to “Examine how you feel about the information presented and how this impacts your response” (para. 4). Here, learners are encouraged to investigate their emotional response to information to identify potential preconceptions that may impact their understanding of content. The second metaliteracy goal involves ethical and responsible engagement with information. One of the related objectives is both behavioral and cognitive because it asks students to “Differentiate between copyright, Creative Commons, and open licenses in both the creation and licensing of original and repurposed content” (para. 5). This objective supports learners in developing as responsible information producers who understand copyright and how to identify openly-licensed materials.

The third metaliteracy goal is one of the most important because it supports the role of the learner as a producer of information as individuals and in collaboration with other participants. This key goal is reinforced by the affective and metacognitive objective to “See oneself as a producer as well as consumer of information” (para. 6). While some students may have the latest technological devices, they may not always see themselves as contributing producers of content. This objective is intended to encourage reflection about this role and to think beyond the technologies as only devices for consumption. For students who may have limited access or lack confidence in applying technology, this same

objective encourages production in a variety of settings from makerspaces to connected communities with openly available resources. According to Sarah Nagle (2020), “Rooted in the ideals of the maker movement, the shift from consumer to creator fundamentally changes students’ outlook and connects closely with the theme of empowerment” (para. 4). The fourth goal of metaliteracy emphasizes the ongoing development of lifelong learning strategies in personal and professional contexts. In one of the reinforcing objectives that is both cognitive and metacognitive, learners are encouraged to “Assess learning to determine both the knowledge gained and the gaps in understanding” (Jacobson et al., 2018, para. 7). Through this analysis of their own knowledge, learners gain a better understanding of where they are and where they want to go on their own educational journey. Overall, the metaliteracy goals and learning objectives underpin the conceptual model with the metaliterate learner at the center of the roles, domains, and characteristics. To further reinforce the transferability of these ideas, the metaliteracy goals and learning objectives have been translated into seven different languages and are adaptable to different pedagogical settings (Metaliteracy.org, n.d.-b).



Figure 1: The Metaliteracy Model (Mackey & Jacobson, in press)

The Cyprus Residency

The original development of Ethics of Digital Art & Design as a blended residency study involved a new course description and three learning outcomes. The subsequent online version of the same study has the same title, description, and learning outcomes. The course description states:

This course examines the ethical considerations of digital art and design. For centuries, artists have contributed innovative perspectives about how to see and understand the world through creative expression. Digital media allows contemporary artists and designers to make bold artistic statements of their own with virtual technologies and social media. In the digital world, it is easy to manipulate representations of reality while instantaneously disseminating information that has been digitally altered. The proliferation of digital tools has also allowed for greater access to these resources, providing everyone with the creative potential to produce and share their own digital artwork. What are the ethical considerations for doing so? What role do the digital artist and designer play in revealing the truth about the human experience? What are the responsibilities of the digital artist and designer to speak the truth about society, culture, and politics through digital art? How do we differentiate between creative artistic expression and misrepresentations of reality in our everyday experience with digital media? (SUNY Empire State College, 2020-2021, DIGA 3036 section, para. 1)

This course explores the ethical issues related to digital art and design within the context of creative artistic expression such as the self-portrait and representation of identity. This framing of key art historical developments sets the stage for an examination of ethical

issues related to the digital arts. One of the key themes that emerges in the course relates to digital manipulation and the production and sharing of content in a connected world. For instance, students compare and contrast altered images in digital art and photojournalism to discuss the ethical considerations in both contexts.

Learning Outcomes

This study defines three specific learning outcomes to reinforce the examination of issues related to ethics in the digital arts:

1. Assess the ethical issues associated with digital art and design, and describe the responsibilities associated with creating and sharing digital artworks.
2. Analyze the social, cultural and political issues related to art and ethics.
3. Produce individual and collaborative digital art projects. (SUNY Empire State College, 2021a, Learning Outcomes section, para. 1)

The learning outcomes for the course are informed by the metaliteracy goals and learning objectives as seen in the emphasis on the evaluation of content and the production of information as individuals and in collaboration with peers. The course description and learning outcomes work together to define the learning activities so that students examine the ethical dimensions of digital art and design. All of the course readings are openly available to guarantee access to the materials at the residency and online. Students engage in discussions in the Moodle learning management system related to each topic and are informed by the readings before and after the residency itself.

Weekly Modules

The nine-week course was divided into as many distinct units:

- Week 1: Self-Portraits and Selfies.
- Week 2: Digital Photography and Identity.
- Week 3: Cyprus Residency.
- Week 4: Frida Kahlo's Personal and Political Art.
- Week 5: Post-Truth and Altered Images.
- Week 6: Post-Truth and Deepfakes.
- Week 7: Code of Ethics.
- Week 8: Augmented and Virtual Realities.
- Week 9: Closing Thoughts and Questions. (SUNY Empire State College, 2021b)

Throughout this study, students were asked to reflect on their own learning and to analyze the ethical concerns presented in the weekly topics. They examined such issues as the prevalence of selfies in social media compared to self-portraits in art, digital image manipulation in the arts and photojournalism, the challenges of a post-truth society (where "personal and political beliefs have often diminished the meaning and impact of truth and objective reasoning" [Mackey, 2020, p. 346]), the emergence of deepfake (manipulated/fabricated) videos that alter the perception of reality, as well as the creative potential and ethical questions related to augmented and virtual reality.

The overall structure of the blended course encouraged the students to engage with each other and with the instructor before and after the residency. They introduced themselves to the class virtually through a selfie-video assignment that was influenced by the college's online Digital Storytelling course, allowing students to engage with digital tools as producers of content. This assignment put theory into practice as students created their selfie-videos and then compared this form of expression with the self-portraits of artists such as Cindy Sherman and Frida Kahlo.

During the residency, the students worked in teams to explore and present on the course topics and to prepare for a culminating collaborative digital media project. In the first learning activity at the residency, students were asked to analyze the metaliteracy model and discuss the metaliterate learner roles with which they identified the most and the least. This reflective analysis led to an engaging conversation about their roles as metaliterate learners that provided a chance to discuss and define metaliteracy and the ways they identify with this part of the model. In many ways, this first interactive assignment helped build trust with the students as an open dialogue and exchange of ideas that informed the entire residency and overall course experience.

Metaliterate Producers

As the course moved forward, students developed as metaliterate producers, both individually and in teams. They learned to analyze and assess the ethical issues presented in the course while gaining proficiency in applying digital tools to their own productions. Most importantly, they saw themselves as active and informed producers of information and gained confidence in their abilities. As the students conducted research and developed their ideas in digital media presentations, they constructed meaning about the topics while learning to be digital producers. Throughout this learning experience, it was evident that while working in groups they shared knowledge about the issues examined as well as the digital resources for presenting their ideas. As part of the teamwork during the residency and then online, they took on the active metaliterate role of teacher. This responsibility emerged as they shared their research and produced content together with their peers. The students continued to work in teams beyond the residency, through their own modes of communication and in a group space available in Moodle.

The Lebanon students who attended the Cyprus Residency blended their in-person experience with the online dialogue that continued in Moodle. The collaborative digital media projects the teams worked on during the residency were completed when they returned to Lebanon and then posted in Moodle through an online discussion forum. As metaliterate learners, they created a final selfie-video that provided individual reflections on their work and described what they learned during the study. Overall, the positive student feedback about this blended course, and the opportunity to engage with such relevant and timely topics, provided an incentive for expanding this study further as an online course offering in the digital arts.

Translating a Blended Residency Study to Online

Developing the Ethics of Digital Art & Design study as a fully online course required a major revision to rethink how to replace the residency component that was so key to the blended study. It also required an analysis of how this course fits into the digital arts curriculum within The Arts area of study. Ethical considerations are explored in several digital arts courses such as Digital Storytelling, Information Design, and History & Theory of New Media, but this class, in particular, is focused entirely on ethics in the digital arts. This course supports the area of study guidelines in The Arts related to the history, theory, and practice of artistic expression, while also reinforcing research and the ability to analyze and critique. Expanding this course offering to reach more learners, beyond the original residency, opened up the possibility to further emphasize social responsibility and information and digital media literacy as defined in the College Learning Goals Policy (SUNY Empire State College, 2012).

In translating this course to a fully online experience, the weekly topics were fine-tuned to reflect a six-module format rather than a weekly schedule. This

allows for more time in the first module for the students to review the course materials, engage in online discussions at the start, and explore the technology requirements. The three-week closing module provides students with time to work on a collaborative digital media project, similar to the first version of the course. The revised course schedule is organized in the following way:

- Module 1: Ethics in the Digital Arts (Weeks 1-3).
- Module 2: Digital Photography and Digital Identity (Weeks 4 and 5).
- Module 3: Ethics of Selfies and Self-Portraits (Weeks 6 and 7).
- Module 4: Altered Images in a Post-Truth World (Weeks 8 and 9).
- Module 5: Deepfake Video in a Post-Truth World (Weeks 10 and 11).
- Module 6: Augmented and Virtual Realities (Weeks 12 to 15). (SUNY Empire State College, 2021b)

Thematically, the fully online course follows a similar trajectory in terms of the overarching themes and related learning activities. The first module is expanded to provide some of the contexts that were included in the residency and to introduce broader art history themes that are reinforced by an open textbook, *Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning* by Sachant et al. (2016). Additional readings and resources contextualize these conversations about ethics in the digital arts with an art history perspective that explores appropriation in the arts, censorship, and how artworks are defined as *controversial* based on ethical considerations.

Metaliteracy is embedded throughout this course, building on the way it informed the original course. Rather than having students develop a selfie-video at the start and end of the class to explore their producer roles, they are required to develop and maintain an academic profile and several multimedia publications in a learning

environment external to Moodle called Linkr Education (n.d.). This resource provides a dedicated class space outside of Moodle for students to develop a professional profile and write several publications that include text as well as images or videos. Linkr is used internationally to link courses based on common themes, which is a feature that the ethics course may adopt eventually but does not currently utilize. Students have the option to publish their multimedia work to just the class, among classes that are linked in this system, or to a wider audience that is searchable on the web. As the course progresses, the student's Linkr profile develops as a digital portfolio of their work based on the collection of multimedia publications they produce throughout the term.



Figure 2: Tom Mackey's Linkr Profile

Although similar in some ways to a blog, Linkr Education intentionally avoids the nomenclature associated with blogging and does not call this kind of writing "posts," which seem trivial or transient, and instead highlights the student's work as "publications" in a multimedia format. This approach aligns with the producer and publisher roles described in the metaliteracy model. As part of this ethics course, students develop five multimedia publications based on course topics that include both text

and digital images or video. Each of these assignments requires students to address key ethical issues in the digital arts, such as the role of digital media in framing reality, digital photography and digital identity, self-portraits and selfies, building connected communities of trust (Mackey, 2020), and detecting and designing deepfake videos. All of the multimedia publications connect to the module themes and encourage learners to analyze the topics while producing and publishing their work in multimedia formats.

The individual student work in producing and publishing digital media content prepares them to engage with their classmates on a final collaborative project about a specific topic related to ethics in the digital arts. Similar to the residency

version of this course, students decide on a topic together, share knowledge about digital resources, and post their team publication in a shared space in Moodle. Unlike the residency experience, they are unable to establish their team dynamics or practice working collaboratively in a face-to-face environment. At the same time, however, the continuous engagement in the online discussions and sharing of multimedia publications in Moodle and the Linkr class space allows for asynchronous collaboration that is

valuable and ongoing throughout the term. As part of this collaborative work, the students engage as reflective metaliterate learners while playing multiple roles such as researcher, collaborator, producer, and publisher of content. They co-create and share knowledge as learners and teachers who participate in this online community as individuals and as part of a team. This is a mindful approach to learning that demonstrates the value of being adaptable to different pedagogical scenarios and to feeling confident in engaging with digital technologies.

Blurring Boundaries

The deceptive nature of digital media through the manipulation of words and images is a critical concern for both consumers and producers of information. Engaging learners with these issues through an exploration of ethics in the digital arts provides a frame for how we understand constructive engagement in a connected world. Metaliterate learners are reflective about the digital content they create while being mindful of their contribution to participatory systems. The seamless delivery of this particular course through a blended residency and fully online format shows that it is the blurring of boundaries that is always more interesting and rewarding than the binaries we construct. As this course shows, artists transcend divides to reveal what's true about life and art. The flexibility of this learning experience in the digital arts reinforces the transferability of these ideas to emerging degree programs and multiple disciplinary perspectives.

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Cents & Sensibility

Michael Nastacio, Staten Island

"It's not our disabilities, it's our abilities that count."

— Chris Burke (*Brainy Quote, n.d.*)

History and Introduction

In the fall of 2017, SUNY Empire State College formed a partnership with a local nonprofit program, Lifestyles for the Disabled. Lifestyles began operating on Staten Island more than 25 years ago through the collaboration of community organizations, local businesses, parents, and a group of developmentally disabled adults (the program participants). These groups recognized the need to develop programs that provide these participants with realistic work settings and experiences within the Staten Island community. The mission of Lifestyles is "to help adults with disabilities live a life as rich and fulfilling as they deserve" (Lifestyles for the Disabled, n.d., para. 1). Starting as an agency that served four adults and their families, Lifestyles now serves over 400 adults with developmental disabilities.

SUNY Empire State College is part of a cohort of Staten Island colleges (including Wagner College and St. John's University) that invites adults with developmental disabilities into campus classrooms. This partnership was further fostered by my colleague, Mary Zanfini, who structured a study group for matriculated SUNY Empire students who were interested in postsecondary education. Teaching Poetry to Developmentally Disabled Students became the buzz at our Staten Island location on Tuesday evenings. The passion, excitement, and electricity that permeated the classroom walls and halls from the Lifestyles students were equally matched by our SUNY Empire students who became both energized and eager to work with this new population of students.

With my office at arm's length of her classroom, I could not help but be intrigued by this liveliness. As a result, I approached Mary and asked if I could drop in for a visit on a Tuesday evening to meet with both our students and the participants from Lifestyles. Upon entering the classroom, I became both astounded and amazed by their enthusiasm. It was quite evident that the participants had a strong desire to learn. This was evidenced by their engagement with the subject matter and the connections and collaborations formed with SUNY Empire students who were working with Mary and earning their own credit for their contributions to this project.

Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Project

In an effort to continue this current partnership, I began to explore the possibility of developing a mathematics study for our SUNY Empire students who would work with this group of adults with developmental disabilities. Experiential learning has numerous benefits for the students involved and the people and organizations they serve. As a strong believer in this type of education, I was also driven by the desire to give back to the community. At a prior Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL) summer residency offered by the college's Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation, I outlined my plans to create a study group to assist Lifestyles learners in acquiring everyday math skills and obtaining the knowledge needed to address their personal financial challenges.

My proposal included my desire to teach mathematics to the Lifestyles group in conjunction with the SUNY Empire students. The summer residency



Michael Nastacio

carves out needed time for planning and the space to work on the project. The residency included three days of sessions, which included project work time and discussions with subject matter experts from the institute's planning group. In addition, to assist in moving my project forward, feedback sessions were available throughout if I needed to talk through a question or idea with members of the planning group. With the assistance and resources received by attending the IMTL, this study, *Methods of Teaching Math to Developmentally Disabled Adults*, was launched in the fall of 2017.

As the process continued, I then collaborated with Louise Vallario. Louise is a special education teacher who works with the Lifestyles students, teaching them valuable life skills. After numerous brainstorming sessions with Louise and her staff, we determined there were certain essential quantitative skills the group needed to refine. Many of the participants run their own households provided by supportive housing programs and receive monthly stipends from Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Receiving monthly benefits

creates tremendous challenges for them as they try to budget their allowance and live on their own.

Learning goals are educational objectives that were determined as a result of my discussions with Louise Vallario. The following learning goals were developed for this mathematics study:

- Identifying needs vs. wants.
- Organizing a monthly income.
- Creating a personal budget (including a pie chart for the monthly budget).
- Developing a food shopping list.
- Budgeting shared purchases.

In addition, the following learning targets and relevant topics were also discussed:

- Reasons to save.
- Ways to save.
- Saving without losing benefits.
- Where to save (understanding banks, debit cards, identity theft, and taxes on purchases).

Each SUNY Empire student was paired with a student from Lifestyles throughout the term as a partner, thus creating a mutual cooperative individual connection to integrate Lifestyles students into the college community. Our SUNY Empire students devised and learned how to teach about budgeting, saving, and borrowing money, and assisted Lifestyles students in using technology. Also, the SUNY Empire students demonstrated this knowledge by creating learning strategies that taught members of the Lifestyles group how to understand money management on their own. From the start, the Lifestyles students referred to this study as their “money management” group taking place on a college campus.

Several group activities were part of our weekly sessions, including the creation of individual monthly budget pie charts (done in collaboration with

our SUNY Empire students) written on large rip chart paper, after which the groups transferred the information into smaller pie charts drawn on pizza boxes.



SUNY Empire learners also taught the group to have a deeper understanding of needs vs. wants, and added their needs vs. wants lists to the covers of their pizza boxes. At times, SUNY Empire and Lifestyles learners debated the needs vs. wants theory when an item seemed important to a Lifestyles student but may not have been interpreted as a “true need.” Students from both Lifestyles and SUNY Empire



were encouraged to save receipts for one month. Then the Lifestyles students revised their budgets and shared their purchases with their SUNY Empire student partners since many Lifestyles learners expressed concern that they ran out of money by mid-month. As a result, a connection was made between the partners, as our SUNY Empire students showed an interest in this budgeting strategy for their own use.

Voices From the Lifestyle Participants

Many students in the Lifestyles group provided feedback about their experiences. Here is a sampling (my students granted their permission to share these quotes):

I like to learn new things like money management with Professor N. I enjoy going to college. I like Empire State College. I want my husband, Luis, to come to our class. — Elisa

I like to learn new things. I like to meet new students and to make new friends. I like to go to Empire State College. I enjoy having the privilege to learn new subjects. I enjoy going to money management. I am so proud of myself that I made my personal budget pie chart project with help from Louise. It is very interesting. — Mary

By me going to Empire College, it shows responsibility. Even though I have a learning disability it shows that I am capable of learning new stuff. I have fun getting an education and meeting new friends at college. We get to learn about all different topics like money management and how to make a pie chart. — Kathryn

I was amazed to realize how much of an impact the material in this course made on the participants from Lifestyles. They embraced the money management principle and incorporated it into their daily lifestyle.

To further educate our Lifestyles students as well as our SUNY Empire students and to help them understand



the history of the developmentally disabled population on Staten Island, a field trip was scheduled to the Lifestyles for the Disabled Willowbrook campus located on the grounds of the former Willowbrook State School, an institution for children with intellectual disabilities that was open from 1947 to 1987. Willowbrook closed following a 1972 exposé by Geraldo Rivera, then an ABC investigative reporter, and a class-action lawsuit filed by parents of Willowbrook residents. According to Rimmerman (2017), "The lawsuit alleged that the existing conditions violated the ... constitutional rights of the residents" (p. 68).

This class trip was a unique experience for our SUNY Empire students. They were emotionally moved by the guided tour of Willowbrook. When they signed up for this SUNY Empire study, they probably didn't imagine that they would also be learning about this deeply disturbing institutional history.

One of the highlights of the term was the Lifestyles' annual Halloween party. Both the SUNY Empire students and the Lifestyles students, staff, and families dressed in costumes and paraded around the grounds of the Lifestyles for the Disabled Willowbrook campus. Then everyone partied in the outdoor area near The Lifestyles Caffé, where lunch was prepared for all. Carnival-type games, activities, and music from the Lifestyles' music program entertained.

Our SUNY Empire students joined in the fun and activities, where even stronger bonds were developed between the Lifestyles students and their SUNY Empire partners.

This group culminated with a "MATH SLAM" on the Lifestyles campus as our students and their partners proudly made their budget presentations to family, friends, and staff. These presentations consisted of oral explanations accompanied by their colorful monthly budget pie charts, followed by an end-of-term pizza party celebration.

SUNY Empire Student Learning

This SUNY Empire study is one that can be understood as a study in applied learning, which integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen relationships between SUNY Empire and Lifestyles students. Here is a definition of "applied learning" that is relevant to the work of this study group. At SUNY Empire State College (n.d.), applied learning:

... refers to an educational approach whereby students learn by engaging in direct application of skills, theories and models. Students apply knowledge and skills gained from traditional classroom learning to hands-on experiences in real-world settings, and to

creative projects or independent or directed research and, in turn, they apply what is gained from the applied experience to academic learning. The applied learning activity can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience or be embedded as part of a course. (para. 3)

Most of our SUNY Empire students who were part of this study were developing a concentration in educational studies. As part of their learning activities, they were to compile weekly journals for reflection. The following comments were sample observations. (These students also granted their permission to share these quotes.)

At the completion of the course, I am walking away with useful lessons. I have learned that there are specific strategies that I will need to implement in teaching individuals with special needs. For instance, it is essential to break tasks into smaller steps, or they will be overwhelmed. Most importantly, allow these people to work as independently as possible, to promote self-esteem and confidence." — Joy

Overall, this class was definitely the best class I've taken at Empire. I highly recommend this class to anyone who wants to become a teacher and work with special needs children. This class taught me a lot about



Michael Nastacio (middle right) with SUNY Empire and Lifestyles students at the Halloween party.



how to work with [developmentally disabled] adults. ... Not only was this class educational for me, the adults actually taught us a few things. There were times I couldn't believe how they referred to certain things and were able to understand. — AnnMarie

People do not understand or know how to act around a person with a disability, so most of the time they ignore the person or act toward them in a mean way, but these individuals are just like us. They are humans, with hearts, and minds that will surprise you in more ways than you think. Throughout the course, I was blown away with joy at each Lifestyles student because of how smart and engaging they all were toward the lessons and discussions. This course has truly been an honor to be a part of and will have a lifetime effect on me. — Nicole

As educators, it is always rewarding to see the personal connections students make throughout their courses. When this study group ended, it was overly satisfying because of the academic and social aspects of the program. This study in applied learning integrated meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen our local community.

Lifestyles in the News

Many aspects of the partnership with Lifestyles have been documented in recent articles published by *The Staten Island Advance*, *The New York Times*, and by local newsletters circulated throughout Staten Island.¹ In addition, the connections and partnerships we have made with this community group were the subjects of a presentation made by Mary Zanfini and me at the college's 2019 Fall Academic Conference. Both of us were joined by Louise Vallario during another session at SUNY's Collaborating for Student Success 2019: Advising, Applied Learning, and Student Success Summit held in Tarrytown, New York. Our presentation there drew many visitors who were interested in participating in this type of learning experience.

COVID-19 impacted various elements of Lifestyles. While these negative and unforeseen developments of the pandemic were a shock to us all, we did the best we could to turn them into something positive for all involved. As educators, we understand the importance of still holding group meetings. Through Zoom, we are still able to stay connected. These meetings are meant to bring a sense of normalcy to all participants.

Mary Zanfini takes up other aspects of our work in her essay in this issue of *All About Mentoring*. It is Mary who deserves great credit for spearheading our partnership with the Lifestyles group. This work flourishes by the writing/literature/poetry studies that she offers to Lifestyles and SUNY Empire students.

The spirit of all of this is strong and clear throughout the efforts of all the faculty, staff, students, and community involved. As Robert M. Hensel (2016) so well put it: "There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more" (p. 23).

Note

- ¹ See "Lifestyles for the Disabled Partners with Staten Island Colleges to Foster Lifelong Learning" (https://www.silive.com/sponsor-content/?scid=128600&prx_t=-qQDAuFsgAshEPA&ntv_fr), "Lifestyles for the Disabled Continues to Serve Its Participants as it Adapts to COVID-19" (https://www.silive.com/sponsor-content/?scid=160871&prx_t=Qm4GAXNhJAshEPA&prx_ro=s&ntv_fr), and other articles noted by Mary Zanfini in this issue of *All About Mentoring*.

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Cross-Age Peer Mentoring in a Low-Income Rural Community: A 20-year Retrospective on a School-Community Partnership

Donna M. San Antonio, Jeff Martel, and Cindy Weisbart, Teen Mentor Project¹



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Introduction

The Teen Mentor Project was implemented 23 years ago in a working-class, rural community in northern New England. The project was designed to respond to community concerns that, compared to state averages, the youth of this community were falling behind in education and employment; were more likely to engage in high-risk behavior; and were more likely to experience poverty, social isolation, and mental health challenges. In this article, we provide practical information that other school and community programs can use to implement one-to-one and group mentoring. Specifically, we describe the relational, structural, logistical, and ethical components of a successful cross-age teen mentor project. While this article describes a project involving high school students as mentors to middle and upper elementary school students, we believe that there are

parallel protocols and habits of mind that support successful mentoring across the life span.

We are experiential educators, teachers, school counselors, researchers, and social justice activists who worked together in a regional, community-based, youth development nonprofit. Together with key partners in the community, we collaboratively designed and implemented program structures, monitoring and evaluation protocols, activities, and systems of communication with the community and school. To prepare this article, we conducted a thorough review of documents that spanned more than two decades of the Teen Mentor Project. These documents included grant proposals, evaluative program reports, project descriptions, enrollment and monitoring forms, mentor training outlines, meeting notes, and activity announcements.

Background and Context

The Teen Mentor Project is based in a small town in a rural area of New Hampshire. The town has a K-6 elementary school and a 7-12 middle-high school with a total student population of about 600 students. The 2020 town survey showed the town's population to be 4,154 people and predominantly white. According to recent census data, the poverty rate at 18.1% is consistently higher than the state average. An ongoing concern for this community has been low levels of high school diplomas awarded. New Hampshire State Department of Education data show that in 2020, the four-year graduation rate was 72% (the state average is 88.1%).² Parents, students, and educators have consistently raised urgent concerns for the youth of this community, including drinking and driving, carrying weapons, skipping school because of fear, being the victim of physical or verbal attacks,

attempting suicide, using drugs, and being sexually active with multiple partners.

People who know the challenges of this rural community also recognize its strengths. It is common for school staff to know students' families and the school is considered a hub of the community. The sense of connection around common concerns encourages a growing sense of pride, active involvement from a wide cross-section of citizens, and solid support for youth development efforts. There is a persistent hope that, together, "we can make things better here." Concerned community members, school staff, and students have worked collaboratively to identify systemic issues and to create new supports aimed at improving access and equity.

The Teen Mentor Project has played an active role in these efforts. In 1998, we received a three-year project development grant from the New Hampshire State Department of Justice and, in a partnership with the state university, we participated in community "listening sessions" and project development meetings. Among the concerns named at these well-attended and lively meetings were the lack of access to services, few recreational and youth development resources, and lack of role models for youth. The Teen Mentor Project was created out of this participatory assessment process. Ongoing funding has been provided through the school counseling budget, private donors, and the local Rotary Club. The Teen Mentor Project advisors are the school counselor and a program director from a community-based youth development program.

Youth Mentoring to Support Positive Development

Grossman and Rhodes (2002) examined the structure and implementation of mentoring programs and concluded that carefully designed, well-run programs can significantly improve a young

person's life, but poorly run programs that result in disappointing relationships can have adverse effects. Rhodes and Lowe (2008) brought more skepticism to the proclaimed success of youth mentoring and noted that "standards for identifying effective programs and policies are in short supply" (p. 12). These authors also found that the length and quality of the mentoring relationship affected outcomes, and they determined that longer relationships resulted in better outcomes. Weinberger (2005) had previously concluded that mentoring relationships should last at least a year. Along with relationship duration and mentoring skills, Rhodes and Lowe (2008) called for robust evidence to support specific program structures and research that would probe deeper into the "complexities of mentor relationships to determine the circumstances under which mentoring programs make a difference in the lives of youth" (p. 14). Very little is known about youth-to-youth mentoring in rural areas. Karcher and Berger (2017) emphasized the ongoing need for process and outcome research on school-based cross-age peer mentoring.

Mentoring is more effective when it is responsive to multiple, mutually reinforcing domains of adolescent development, specifically, social and emotional development, cognitive development, and identity development (Rhodes et al., 2006). These authors described several qualities that may lead to developmental gains: trustworthy companionship; stress-relieving fun; a sense of secure attachment; opportunities to practice relationship-building skills; identity exploration through a variety of activities and conversations with mentors; and opportunities to improve academic skills, exercise leadership, and demonstrate competence.

If mentoring is to succeed in bringing interpersonal and intrapersonal benefits, mentoring programs must establish careful protocols for recruitment, screening, training,

monitoring, and ongoing support, along with careful attention to the closure of the mentoring relationship when that time comes. From the start, we emphasized the need for ongoing training and advising for mentors, and structured activities to support meaningful contact between mentors and mentees, purposeful involvement of parents, and rigorous process and outcome evaluations.

Mentoring Principles, Roles, and Responsibilities

The Teen Mentor Project is built on strength-based, holistic, social justice-oriented youth development principles that inform program objectives, practices, and policies. The mentor relationships, and the activities that support them, emphasize four developmental assets outlined by Brendtro et al. (2009): a secure sense of connection and belonging, self-confidence and competence, compassion and generosity, and courage to act responsibly with oneself and others. Activities are purposefully planned and sequentially implemented to support these developmental assets for mentors and mentees. For example, experiential group activities nurture connection, rock climbing and canoeing emphasize technical and interpersonal competence, community and school service projects allow participants to show care and concern for others, and leadership opportunities ask participants to "step up" and invest in collective ownership of the project.

Meaningful mentoring relies on a well-developed, trustworthy, close bond between the mentor and mentee. This essential understanding is conveyed to mentors throughout the selection, training, and supervision process. Teen mentors commit to once-a-week, one-to-one mentoring sessions and monthly group activities. They also agree to be mentored by the school counselor and mentor advisor, to represent the project in the community through presentations, and to help develop the

project by taking a leadership role and contributing their ideas, energy, and critical feedback.

The ethics of connectedness and reciprocity are woven throughout the project and into the way mentors embody their roles. Practices that encourage reciprocity include mentors' efforts to encourage mentees to identify and receive the support they need and to discover for themselves who they are and the skills they have. In addition, mentor advising meetings, facilitated by the school counselor and mentor advisor, guide mentors toward an understanding of how they are moved and changed by the experience of being a mentor. The goal is for mentors and mentees to learn how to be both the *giver of support* as well as the *recipient of support*. Appendix A outlines the foundational ethical guidelines and principles.

Through careful partnering and reflection, teen mentors expect to adapt their roles in the relationship according to the needs, desires, and personality of each child. They may help their mentee with homework, attend sports games, encourage an art or music talent, tell stories from their own lives to motivate or teach, listen supportively as their mentee narrates difficult or happy experiences, and help solve interpersonal problems such as tension with a teacher or a difficult friendship issue. Teen mentors are only a few years older than their mentees, but they are in a different place developmentally; therefore, they are well-positioned to understand the urgency of issues that younger students face, and they have had some experience working through some of those issues in their own lives.

Strategies for Implementation

Enrolling mentees. In September, the school counselor for fifth through eighth grades discusses possible referrals with teachers and staff based on specific challenges such as disconnection from school; family hardship due to death,

illness, or incarceration of a parent; social isolation or peer rejection; and vulnerability due to low self-esteem, poor communication skills, anxiety, or sadness. The school counselor then contacts the parent(s) of each student referred; if the parent would like their child to be involved in the program, they complete a referral form with the school counselor. Students interested in participating attend a meeting with their parent(s) to discuss the program, ask questions, and meet the mentors. The mentors sit with families to go over the participant agreement, but parents are encouraged to go home and discuss their decision further before giving their consent.

Selecting mentors. The school counselor and mentor advisor coordinate all program activities including the recruitment and selection of mentors and mentees. Teachers receive the "teen mentor criteria" and application and they speak with students individually to explain the program and invite them to apply. The referring teacher and the student applicant are asked to demonstrate evidence of perspective-taking skills, empathy, stability, commitment, patience, and a desire to support others. Furthermore, the application asks students to consider their challenging life experiences and how those experiences may help them to understand the experiences and feelings of a younger person. Mentor candidates are also asked to submit a letter of recommendation. Individual interviews with mentor candidates are conducted first by a few of the current mentors and then by the school counselor and mentor advisor.

The Teen Mentor Project is intentionally inclusive with a balance of male and female mentors. There is a commitment to enrolling mentors who may have experienced difficult life events, physical challenges, and who come from low-income families. Sometimes, but not always, they are students with good grades and active participation in

school activities. After selecting new mentors, an information session is held for parents to familiarize them with the program, discuss expectations, and enlist their support for their child's involvement.

Mentor summer training experience.

Mentors are selected in May and attend a one-day orientation and training session in June. At the end of the summer, they participate in a two-day training session that focuses on leadership skills, understanding the mentoring roles, and cultivating strong interpersonal relationships within the group. A variety of teaching styles are used: discussion, role-play, initiative, and cooperative games, etc. (See Appendix B: Training Curriculum.)

Supervision for teen mentors. Mentor meetings take place every other week from September through June and are facilitated by the high school counselor and mentor advisor. These 1.5-hour after-school sessions give mentors a chance to check in with each other and with mentor advisors, raise common issues concerning their mentoring relationships, refine leadership and communication skills, and further the cohesiveness of the group. The school counselor is easily accessible to both mentors and mentees for one-to-one meetings. Mental health and academic concerns, referrals to outside services, disclosure of domestic violence, challenges with bullying, etc., are discussed confidentially and documented. The school counselor responds and acts if necessary, following school district and state practices.

Making mentoring matches. Gender, age, and life experience are all part of the match decision-making process. In general, matches are made between two people with the same gender identity. Decisions about mentor pairs are made, in part, based on which students are naturally drawn together during the first group adventure outing (see below). As pairing decisions are made, mentors are challenged to uncover hidden

biases that might interfere with the development of successful relationships. The mentors then write a letter to their mentee and the mentee's family introducing themselves in more detail, welcoming them to the program, and inviting parents to contact the mentor advisor at any time during their child's participation. Monthly activities require mentors to be in regular contact with parents to discuss the activity, set up transportation, and have permission forms signed.

Program innings and outings. Along with weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions, mentors and mentees participate in whole-group monthly adventure and service activities. "Innings" include activities such as helping out at the food bank or visiting a nursing home; "outings" include activities like rock climbing, canoeing, snowshoeing, and an end-of-year celebration attended by mentors, mentees, and their families. To maximize developmental gains, participants are engaged in these experiential activities that integrate these five components:

- Thoughtful framing of the purpose of the activity.
- Peer support in learning new skills (rock climbing, for example).
- Reflection and dialogue centering on individual and group processes.
- Articulation of how the activity has a personal meaning in one's broader life.
- Discussion of how applications of learning from the activity might shift consciousness, group dynamics, and individual thinking, feeling, and acting (Kolb, 1984).

The group activities give mentor pairs a chance to develop their relationships in a supportive "holding environment," and give mentees a safe space to develop friendships with each other — an important opportunity for mentees who are often struggling with difficult peer interactions. The school counselor

and mentor advisor enlist the skills of mentors to lead activities and, together, they co-facilitate group processes, giving them opportunities to further develop their communication and leadership skills. A significant benefit to the elementary school participants is that they get to know the school counselor at the high school before they arrive. This facilitates the transition to high school and gives vulnerable incoming students a ready source of support when they need it.

Partnering with the community. Ideally, outside agencies do not impose programs on communities but collaborate with the community with sensitivity to local values, culture, resources, and needs. To build a *successful* program, communities must have a voice in defining that success, right from the start. To build a *sustainable* program, communities must have the opportunity to invest in the program and assume some of the responsibility. A program that is truly developed from the will and the work of the community will reinvent and reinvest itself over and over again as it grows with the community.

In the early implementation of the Teen Mentor Project, a Community Advisory Council met five times a year and involved teen mentors, school personnel, parents, and people from businesses, churches, and other youth agencies. The purpose of the council was to generate community awareness; provide guidance and feedback regarding program development; support project implementation; and assist with logistical aspects of the project (i.e., disseminating information, locating community resources and funding). This advisory role has been taken up by the board members of a community-based youth development program.

The participants at various levels of this project — mentees, mentors, mentor advisors, community advisors, host institutions, and funders — can

be conceptualized in concentric circles. Using an "ecological" model (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), each layer of participation represents a level of support, or "holding environment," for the next. The mentees are supported, guided, and encouraged by the mentors, who are in turn supported by the mentor advisors, who are advised by school and community members, and all of this is overseen by the standards and expectations of the school district and public and private funders.

Documentation, monitoring, and evaluation. The Teen Mentor Project has used multiple tools for monitoring program implementation and evaluation of program outcomes. The project has used assessment and evaluation tools for both mentors and mentees to help us consider the quality of the mentoring bond, the sense of affiliation to the project, and to gather ideas for program development (see Nakkula & Harris, 2005; Saito, 2001). Qualitative and quantitative data help to document evidence of effectiveness from both an internal point of view (the subjective experiences of mentors and mentees) and an external point of view (observations from teachers and parents) (Selman et al., 1997). Documentation and evaluation include:

- Contact logs completed by mentors every other week, including date, time, place, purpose, and reflective comments on mentoring sessions.
- Attendance sheets for mentor training sessions, bi-weekly supervision, and trips.
- Mentee school discipline and attendance reports.
- Activity reports including information on social, emotional, and physical safety, reflections, and recommendations.
- Pre- and post-program self-assessments of participatory belonging.
- Individual exit interviews with mentors.

- Post-program evaluation completed by mentors, mentees, parents, and teachers.

Over the last 20 years, we have also collected detailed narratives from mentors and mentees on their experience in the project and how they understand and value the mentoring relationship.³ Mentees often struggled in difficult home and school contexts. One told us,

If I didn't have a mentor, I would have [gone] downhill. Without a mentor, I would not have the help getting through all the drama that goes on in my house. Now people look up to me and it makes me want to keep doing what I am doing to be looked up to.

A mentor in her senior year noted,

You can join as many resume-building committees and clubs as you want but there is nothing as meaningful and important as being a part of a group that truly works to positively change the lives of others.

Some mentors began to see in themselves the qualities of an effective future teacher, counselor, or social worker. For example, one past mentor is enrolled in a graduate program in social work and continues to be in touch with her former mentee 15 years later. She said,

She is one of the most amazing, resilient people I know and is one of the core inspirations for my career choice. ... It wasn't until recently I realized that the things I most enjoyed about mentoring — being a confidante, giving advice, being a support, an advocate, and a friend — were things I also wanted in my career.

Findings from interviews and evaluations are discussed in the article, "Perceptions of Mentors and Mentees in School-based Cross-age Peer Mentoring in a Low-income Rural Community" (San Antonio et al., 2020).

Lessons Learned

Multiple levels of support for mentors and mentees alike proved to be the key component in the success of this project. All program activities — one-to-one mentoring, group activities, family gatherings, and advising sessions — served to enhance this connection. Through the analysis of documents, reports, and evaluations, and by engaging in conversations with each other and with project participants, we suggest that the following core principles are essential in program design and implementation. Successful cross-age peer mentoring:

- Is asset- rather than deficit-oriented.
- Scaffolds social, emotional, physical, academic, and personal identity development.
- Is aware of injustice based on social class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.
- Recognizes external influences in the ecological milieu of development (family, home, and school).
- Incorporates multiple levels of support and connection.
- Is attuned to internal psychological well-being, such as the impact of trauma-related stress.
- Sees carefully facilitated group experience as a fundamental aspect of learning.
- Is place-based and community-minded.
- Supports future orientation and possibility development.
- Sees youths as leaders capable of making significant, transformative contributions.

Over the years, we have seen funding come and go. We have seen that "evidence-based practices," built on national evaluation research, often do not reflect the needs, resources, and imaginations of local communities. We have found that local realities are

complex and nuanced, and when they have a say, communities will support what they know is needed, useful, and effective. Based on our experience, we are convinced that cross-age peer mentoring can have beneficial results and can be especially helpful in communities with high levels of social and economic stress.

Closing

For mentoring programs to be beneficial, we believe that they must integrate the principles and components described in this article. Essential, mutually reinforcing qualities include the leadership of a skilled facilitator, strong community partnerships, careful selection and training of mentors, meaningful group activities, involvement of teachers and parents, careful documentation and evaluation, and ongoing mentor supervision by skilled advisors.

We have seen over and over again that young people who are well-mentored often strive to become good mentors themselves. We have seen mentors track toward professions like teaching, counseling, and social work as a way to continue the role they have found to be so gratifying and useful to others. A critical component in the success of mentoring is to hold space for a guided process of exploration and development. Our model stresses the importance of mentor-to-mentor peer support, as well as careful, regular mentoring by the mentor advisors. Each year, the mentor group develops a sense of importance and connection with one another. This brings purpose and focus to each mentor's role, not only with their mentee but also with the program and even with the school and community. When the structures described in this article operate in concert with one another, they sustain the qualities that are fundamental to mentoring across the life span: clarity of purpose, compassion without "heroism," creative exploration, consistency, and collaboration.

We feel passionate about this work and, over the years, we have learned a great deal from mentors, mentees, parents, and colleagues. We are happy to share program forms and documents with readers. Contact: Donna San Antonio at dsananto@lesley.edu.

Notes

- ¹ Donna San Antonio has worked as a community organizer, public school teacher, outdoor educator, and school and community counselor. She is now professor of counseling psychology at Lesley University in Massachusetts and is a frequent consultant to rural school and community programs addressing social, emotional, and economic barriers to success for children and youth. Jeff Martel is a middle-high school counselor and has been the program coordinator of the Teen Mentor Project for 23 years. He collaborates with a community youth development program as an outdoor educator where he teaches teenagers rock climbing, canoeing, and wilderness skills. Cindy Weisbart is a youth worker and a documentary photographer. Her dream job is to teach history with public high school students, which she has done (so far) for 18 years. All three authors worked together at the Appalachian Mountain Teen Project and collaborated on the development and implementation of teen mentoring and other youth empowerment projects.
- ² Citations not provided to protect anonymity.
- ³ Upon enrolling in the Teen Mentor Project, mentors and mentees agree to the research and evaluation process that enables us to use their direct quotes in reports and publications. However, we carefully maintain confidentiality protocols and have omitted all identifying information. We are mindful that, in a small community, people can

be easily identified and there can be negative implications when the urgent needs of students are known publicly.

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Appendix A Teen Mentor Ethical Guidelines and Principles

This list is intended to be used as a springboard for further discussion and development within the Teen Mentor Project group.

- Never make an important decision alone.
- Be clear about your own actions, comments, etc., by asking yourself, "Who am I doing this for, him/her or me?"
- Safety is the priority — the safety of mentees and your own.
- Speak about another only in ways that they would speak about themselves.
- Privacy is everyone's right, regardless of age. Do not speak about your mentee and mentee's family in nonconfidential places. Safety has the ultimate priority — even over privacy.
- Romantic involvement between mentees (or their friends) and high school mentors would end the mentoring influence in the relationship. There is

no room for compromise about this — it is a violation of the mentoring relationship.

- *Honesty* among mentors, and between mentors and mentees, is a critical component of the trust necessary for successful mentoring. While no one ever has to disclose personal information that makes them vulnerable, consider that you have the opportunity to make a safe space for mentees to honestly voice their concerns, whatever they may be.
- Being a teen mentor requires *commitment*: to your own process as a mentor, to your relationship with your mentee, to the activities, and to the program. The people who will notice your level of commitment the most are the people who are most likely to benefit (or not) in this relationship: the mentees.
- You are always encouraged to ask for help, and to redefine what is necessary to be a good mentor — there is support for you whenever you want it!
- Our standards for ourselves as mentors include showing respect to mentees, each other, teachers and guidance staff, families, community members. We might be challenged by differences — gender, ethnic origin, size, ability, religion, race — and we can see those challenges as opportunities to open up new perspectives.
- In the commitment to keeping ourselves safe, we don't need to:
 - Drive middle schoolers in our cars.
 - Meet in places where there aren't a lot of people around.
 - Keep information that scares or concerns us to ourselves.
 - Intervene alone in dangerous situations.

- Share more information about ourselves than we are comfortable with.
- Everything that works in teen mentoring does so because of *COMMUNICATION!* You can do your best job when you keep the lines of communication open with your mentees, and with your mentor advisor. *If something is preventing you from being able to communicate*, no matter what it is, you are supported in addressing that block. Whatever prevents you from communicating is a real problem for the Teen Mentor Project, and one we must all be committed to solving.
- Because you need to be dependable and alert at all times, there can be no alcohol or drug use when you are a teen mentor.

Appendix B Training Curriculum

We use role-plays, scenarios for discussion, and activities in all aspects of training.

Session 1: Clarify the Project Structure, Theory, and Roles of Teen Mentors

In this meeting, teen mentors will be able to:

- Understand the overall project.
- Understand the concept of mentoring.
- Understand and embrace the roles of mentor.
 - What it means to help or to be of service.
 - How a mentor can best help.
 - Hold a general understanding of youth development: 10-13 years old

Session 2: Cultural Issues

- Gender.
- Understand and appreciate class, race, religion, and sexual orientation differences and what that might mean in someone's life.

Session 3: Ethical Issues

- Confidentiality.
- When and how to take notes.
- Relationship boundaries (i.e., meeting outside of set times).
- Sharing personal information.

Sessions 4 & 5: Skills in the Field

- Individual, group, and public communication skills.
- Leadership skills within the community and schools.
- Personal style within the mentoring relationship.
- Activities with preteens.
- Crisis intervention.
- Where and how to get support.
- Building trust, losing and regaining it.
- What's important in the first meeting between mentors and mentees.
- Communication and expression (feelings, thoughts, actions).

Appendix C Guides and Resources

Mentoring Resources Center

- Building Effective Peer Mentoring Programs in Schools: An Introductory Guide
- <http://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/building-effective-peer-mentoring-programs-intro-guide.pdf>

National Mentoring Resource Center

- Peer Mentoring Overview

- <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resources/what-is-mentoring/>
- Peer Mentoring Handbook
- <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/?s=Peer+mentoring+handbook&submit=>
- Mentoring Immigrant and Refugee Youth: A Toolkit for Program Coordinators
- <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/?s=mentoring+immigrant+and+refugee+youth&submit=>
- Saving Lives and Inspiring Youth: A Cross-Age Peer Mentoring Program

- <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/blog/saving-lives-inspiring-youth-s-l-i-y-a-cross-age-peer-mentoring-program/>
- Webinar: Peer Mentoring: A Discussion with Experienced Practitioners
- <https://vimeo.com/125590745>

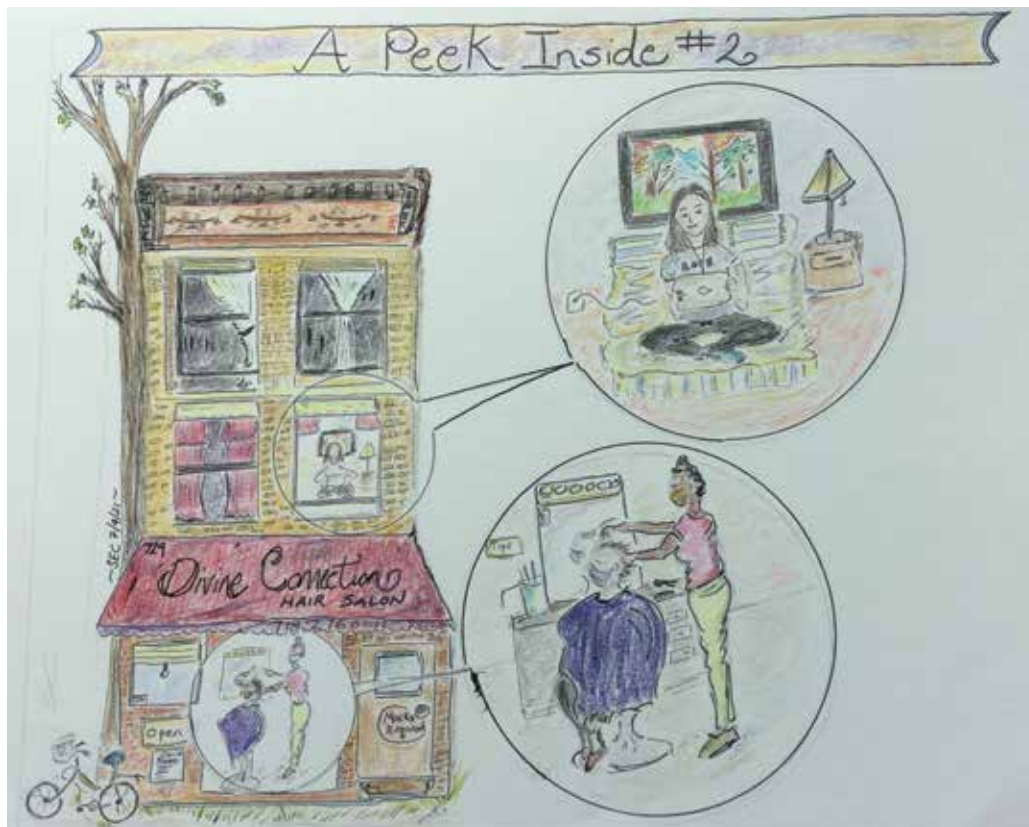
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A Peek Inside #2
Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

Fall 2020 Sabbatical Report

Deborah J. Smith, Saratoga Springs

This pandemic year, unable to travel overseas for a sabbatical project as originally planned, I volunteered at the Massive Food Drops sponsored by the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York¹ and Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany,² helping to distribute food of all sorts to people who needed it.

This report aims to illustrate what happens at a food drop: who is involved and why, who volunteers, what they do and how it gets done. If you want to step inside the inner workings of a Massive Food Drop or have ever thought of volunteering at one, read on.

About Me, the Apple Queen

Earlier in my career at SUNY Empire State College, I taught in the Middle East for the college's International Education residency program in Lebanon. I developed the course, *Stories of Food and Culture*, a very popular global look at literature, cooking, and foods across various cultures. I really do like food. My students loved introducing me to their country and its traditional cuisines.

Food is not a privilege. Everyone should be able to eat wholesome food. Our country produces quality food in huge quantities, so no one should go hungry in America. Yet a Massive Food Drop is a modern-day bread line; a story of food and culture happening as we speak, here in the richest country on earth.

I actually started volunteering in spring 2020, well before my sabbatical started, with a Massive Food Drop at the Pastoral Center on North Main Avenue in Albany, New York. Maybe it was a newspaper or television ad that got me there. Or maybe it was the monthly newsletter from Catholic Charities. Their CEO, Vince Colonna, was a former adjunct instructor in my online health

services area; we've always kept in touch. Sister Betsy Van Deusen, of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, coordinates the Massive Food Drops. Betsy was a chaperone on my son's service trip to Guatemala with The College of Saint Rose.

There I stood, staring at a pallet taller than I was. This pallet was *at least* a ton of apples, packed in plastic bags inside cardboard cartons. My challenge was to take the bags of apples out and fill food boxes and bags with them until I got to the bottom of the pallet. Later, the prepacked bags were loaded into the cars of guests who came to the food drop or given to guests who walked in, often with carts or rolling wagons.



The Larger View

A Massive Food Drop is a complex, volunteer-powered activity with a lot of moving parts. Unpacking food to put in distribution boxes and bags is mostly what I did, and while that task is essential, there's a lot more to the whole enterprise.

Let's back up a little. In Albany County, where I live, roughly 10% of the population in 2018 qualified as "food insecure" (Feeding America, 2019). That number has increased with the COVID-19 pandemic.³ "Food desert" is now an everyday term, describing areas across the country where quality food access is limited or entirely absent. There are more people who never required food assistance before in rural, suburban,



Deborah J. Smith

Photo credit: Philip McCallion

and city communities. This includes the elderly and those who are medically compromised and often rely on others to obtain enough food for their needs.

The Regional Food Bank is part of the Feeding America network,⁴ which includes 200 food banks and 60,000 food programs across the United States. Covering 23 counties from the northernmost part of New York to as far south as the NYC metro area, the Regional Food Bank assists churches and local food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and programs for the disabled, children, and seniors. A mammoth physical warehouse in Latham, New York, houses food donated to the bank and received from various food manufacturers, farmers, retail and wholesale food distributors. Much of the food comes from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Emergency Food Assistance Program.⁵ The Regional Food Bank determines what kinds of foods are loaded onto pallets and delivered by various trucks, including tractor-trailers, to each drop site.

Hey, here's a tip: Food is sold to feeding programs without markup, so the dollar you or I spend at the supermarket buys \$10 worth of actual food from the food bank. While donations to food pantries are still useful, especially to teach children generosity, the smart thing for adults to do is write a check to your local or regional food bank, as the money goes much, much further. The Regional Food Bank has been doing food drops for some time now, but as the need increased, they partnered with other agencies, including Catholic Charities' Mobile Vehicle Extension (CC MOVE).

CC MOVE coordinates food distribution and service linkages for clients in rural and underserved areas of the Diocese of Albany, covering 10,000 square miles of upstate New York. As the action arm of Massive Food Drops, CC MOVE employs an RV (recreational vehicle) to transport its five-person staff to clients in underserved areas. Massive Food Drops originated as a collaboration with Catholic Charities and the Regional Food Bank, monthly, in largely rural Montgomery and Fulton counties. In 2019, an average of 16% of Fulton and Montgomery counties' residents lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Social linkages and food services are sparse there although greatly needed by the population.



When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the need for food in all locales rose sharply due to sudden unemployment, quarantines, food shortages, government ineptitude, isolation, and closures of congregate programs for food and socialization, as well as other pandemic sequelae. Catholic Charities pledged to continue Massive Food Drops beyond these two counties. In December 2020 alone, 10 food drops

were conducted across a multicounty area, offering 500 to 900 food bags at each drop, receiving 12 to 24 pallets (140 to 280 cases of a particular food) per drop. Target figures for each drop are estimated from the data collected at prior food drops coupled with local population demographics.

CC MOVE staff publish the dates and times of Massive Food Drops on social media and in the news. Volunteers (that would be me) are welcome from all over, providing the human power to get those apples from the pallet on the ground to the box in a car. Anyone needing food can come to a Massive Food Drop; there are no restrictions of any sort. The data requested is demographically simple: zip code, number of households, and number of people within each household receiving food. And please wear a mask.

Where to Drop the Food

Like your own kitchen, you can't drop food anywhere and hope it will reach its destination. Food must get to people safely. Places for the Massive Food Drops, especially during the pandemic, require a location to be visited and approved by both the food bank and Catholic Charities. Sister Betsy — in addition to coordinating and working at the drops — scouts proposed locations.

A large, paved lot with two ways to get in is ideal. During the drop, these are entry and exit routes for traffic. There should be room for the truck from the Regional Food Bank to pull in and unload pallets, room for traffic flow around unpacking tables, a place to line up filled bags and boxes, areas to put fresh dairy foods and/or large fruit like melons alongside the prepacked bags so they can be easily loaded into cars or given to walk-in guests ... all this while maintaining social distancing among each volunteer.

It's a misperception that food drops are mostly canned soup and other nonperishable items (although a food drop can include these, as well). Close to

a dozen food items are selected by the Regional Food Bank for each drop. This includes several sources of protein (for example, pork, sausage patties, chicken, shrimp, split peas, fish fingers, cheese), fresh fruits (apples, plums, bananas, grapes, melon, berries), fresh vegetables (broccoli, potatoes, yams, carrots, cucumbers, squash, prebagged fresh salad, peppers — red and green), as well as canned or boxed goods (bottled orange juice, applesauce, spaghetti sauce, dried pasta, pound blocks of butter, macaroni salad). Often the bank includes "fun stuff" most kids love, too (packaged brownies, chocolate milk, Girl Scout Cookies, pumpkin mini muffins). Because the Nourish New York6 legislation allows New York state to buy surplus dairy products generally sold to the then-paused restaurant industry, fresh milk, fresh and frozen eggs, fresh butter, varieties of cheese and Greek yogurts in several flavors are available to distribute to guests along with their food boxes or bags.

When I saw bags of shrimp at one food drop, I instantly thought, "Can lobsters be far behind?" While I never did see lobsters, the shrimp were Gulf shrimp. This purchase by the USDA provided direct support to the fishermen affected by devastating storms in the Gulf Region, allowing them to keep and maintain their livelihoods; similar in focus to the Nourish New York scheme.



Deborah Smith sorting strawberries.

On the Ground, It's Us

Anyone can volunteer at a Massive Food Drop, no matter your age or any other distinguishing characteristic. There's work for people who can haul and lift, unpack, count, and repack, or those who

can direct traffic and record data. Mind you, it is *physical outdoor work*. Often local groups volunteer, from parishes to social agencies. Massive Food Drop volunteers report to the designated site around 8:15 a.m. for instructions, a short prayer for cooperative weather conditions, and success in getting food to people. Sanitizer and masks, if needed, are available at the sign-in table of the CC MOVE RV. Volunteers social distance as the unpacking/repacking process begins. In December, an evening food drop was held in Schenectady, New York, with the food distributed successfully, shortly before two feet of snow blanketed the region — proof that miracles still happen.

Drive your car in for the Massive Food Drop, and you'll see these volunteer roles:



Deborah Smith (left, in purple coat) and other volunteers loading food bags into a waiting car.

Traffic control: Local police assist where streets to the lot become congested with waiting vehicles. But inside the drop lot, volunteers in special vests direct you, the “guest,” to one of four loading stations where food is put into your car. The car for Station One receives a blue bag on the driver-side mirror; the next three cars then move sequentially into the remaining stations and drive out. It makes directing traffic simple.

Station registrar: The registrar greets you as a guest and collects data. (That blue bag on the Station One car? It's taken by the Station One registrar.) People obtaining food at the drop are greeted as “guests” as a display of dignity and respect. Keep in mind

that many in the food line never thought they would ever find themselves in need of food. Registrars ask for and record the relevant demographic data in each household (families of six-plus get an extra bag). *That's all*. From this data, numerical tallies indicate areas of greatest need, as well as provide funding data for the CARES Act,⁷ the USDA,⁸ and Nourish New York programs.

Car loaders: In the hours before the food drop opens, car loaders lift boxes from the pallets onto nearby tables so they can be sorted for packing. Registrars take this function, also. Once “showtime” arrives, the loaders will put the prebagged food and dairy items in your car trunk or back seat. As a guest, you put the car in park, put on your mask to talk to the registrar, and open the trunk. Simple as that.

Pallet monitor: Remember me and that pallet of apples? On either side of the pallet are two long folding tables. Once cartons of apples began to come off the pallet and onto the tables, as monitor, my job was to have both tables supplied with apple cartons. Toward the bottom of the pallet, food may be consolidated at only one table, but until then, the monitor gets cartons off the pallet and onto both tables, either by their own muscle or with assistance from other volunteers.



Packers: That was me, too. I got cartons of food and opened them up. Then I piled enough on the table to drop into many bags or stacked the cartons so I could open and offload the food directly from the carton to the bagger's box or bag. Sometimes foods are grouped in

predetermined numbers on the table (which can change as certain foods run out). Filling a bag usually happens from either end of the table, so in hot weather, I tried to rotate refrigerated items in the middle out to the ends.

Baggers: Involving nearly everyone who can lift a heavy box or carry a full bag, baggers circulate past each table to receive from the packers the allotted number of food items. (Cardboard boxes from the pallets are recycled for this purpose, also.) The number of food items per bag is determined before the pallets are unloaded, then divided by the anticipated number of bags or boxes. Sister Betsy writes that number in chalk in front of the table, so everyone knows if a bag gets four cheese blocks or one chicken, a bag of cucumbers or four boxes of cookies, for example. Through experience, a good packer can work with two or three food pallets and keep putting them into waiting bags. With several volunteers at a table, each usually works with their own food item. Cartons of vegetables (carrots, zucchini, and cucumbers are good examples) arrive loosely packed within their cartons, to be divided up by volunteers into separate plastic bags.

It's fun to try and develop a system with packing, but when it's flat-out busy and the line of baggers is long, the whole thing goes to blast anyway. As daunting as it can be to look at hundreds of carrots, or zucchini, or dried peas ... it's great when they're packed and sitting in the line of ready-to-distribute boxes snaking down the length of the lot. Arriving at the bottom of a pallet by unpacking all that food brings an amazing sense of accomplishment.

Showtime!

Once 9:30 a.m. arrives, lined-up cars proceed to the four loading stations. Packers and baggers keep working, while registrars and car loaders take their positions. Traffic folks guide cars into and out of the lot safely. Anyone who “walks in” to a Massive Food Drop

registers (as do all of the volunteers) near the CC MOVE RV at a continually-staffed table where sanitizer, masks, and registration lists are kept. A supply of prepacked food bags is here for walk-in guest distribution.

While there is a feeling of satisfaction in having all the food packed and ready, the depth of sadness at seeing the sheer number of cars lined up at a Massive Food Drop is huge. Hours in, the traffic still doesn't slow ... and when it does, there's often a smaller number of cars that show up slightly later, as guests go home, tell their friends about the drop, and the friends arrive. Massive Food Drops run until almost lunchtime or when all the food is gone — and the food goes quickly.

Now and then, the line does stop and some leftover food remains (even the apples.) Most volunteers have a connection to a local food pantry or know people who need food but, for their own reasons, may not come to the Massive Food Drop. These items are then delivered by volunteers to those who need food. Sometimes it is the elderly or a church food bank; sometimes essential workers or caregivers. Many times, the people who get leftover food take some to their neighbors who also need food, expanding the delivery cycle.

It has been a strange year, to say the least, but one where the Massive Food Drops have helped others, in a

time when the larger forces in society conspired to leave unaided many who had fallen through the cracks. As a nurse, I know the importance of good quality food to health. I am delighted to play a part in making sure nutritious food gets to those who need it. I would like to thank SUNY Empire State College for this sabbatical opportunity to help so many in whatever way I could.

Special Thanks

My thanks to Sister Betsy Van Deusen, CSJ, who generously spent time with me to describe the specifics of how a Massive Food Drop occurs and why. It was her energy and enthusiasm that kept us moving.

My thanks also to Mina Murray Davis, who crunches the numbers for the food drives so we can continue to do what we do; and Jim Hoon, who directs traffic and “coordinates volunteers,” much akin to herding cats. You all are the best.

Notes

- ¹ Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York: <https://regionalfoodbank.net>.
- ² Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany: https://www.ccrda.org/about_us/.
- ³ See projections for local food insecurity by Feeding America (2021).

- ⁴ Feeding America: <https://www.feedingamerica.org> and <https://www.feedingamerica.org/our-work/food-bank-network>.
- ⁵ USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/emergency-food-assistance-program>.
- ⁶ Nourish New York: <https://agriculture.ny.gov/NourishNY>.
- ⁷ CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act: <https://oig.treasury.gov/cares-act>.
- ⁸ USDA Food and Nutrition: <https://www.usda.gov/topics/food-and-nutrition>.

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Prospects and Perils for Workers and their Organizations After the Pandemic

Jason Russell, Buffalo

Jason Russell is an associate professor and coordinator of the Master of Arts in Work and Labor Policy program in the School for Graduate Studies, and the 2020 recipient of the Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship. The following is an edited version of his Turben Faculty Lecture delivered at the Fall Academic Conference on October 30, 2020.

Plagues, Work, and the Past

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is without question a landmark event in modern history. It has been over a hundred years since humanity faced a virus that spread so quickly and with such impact. It has understandably shaken people's lives as there is an expectation that modern science can overcome any medical adversity, yet a basic face mask is the most effective available defense against COVID until effective vaccines and treatments are devised. There is currently a lot of prognosticating going on in the popular media about the possible enduring meaning and impact of COVID — it is now being accompanied by an avalanche of scholarly analyses of the virus — yet many of the available mainstream narratives on the consequences of COVID for work and labor are so far somewhat superficial. This discussion will hopefully help address that deficiency in the discourse on the pandemic by further historicizing it as an event that impacts work and labor. It will describe the trends associated with COVID that are actually new and others that, to paraphrase Mark Twain, rhyme with what transpired in the past.¹

COVID-19 is the latest in a long line of major pandemics that seriously impacted work and labor from the

earliest recorded history to the end of the 20th century. For instance, the Roman Empire was routinely beset by plagues. Tens of thousands of people are believed to have perished in the third century CE [Common Era] in Constantinople and the Eastern Mediterranean because of the Justinian plague, which appears to have been a strain of the bubonic plague. A devastating plague also ravaged Jerusalem in the sixth century. We regrettably know less about the history of plagues in Africa and Asia 2,000 years ago, and the origins of early plagues are not entirely clear to historians.

The first plague for which we have something approximating an extensive historical record occurred from 1321 to 1353 when the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, which is carried by rodents, made its way from Asia to Europe and led to the Black Plague [the Black Death]. That pandemic killed between 75 and 200 million people and had a profound effect on the development of the societies that it infected. It also led to the introduction of a law in England that governed work. The fact that tens of millions of people had died because of the plague led craft workers to conclude that the new scarcity of labor should enable them to raise their wage rates. England's monarch and aristocrats responded by regulating labor rates.

The 1351 Ordinance of Laborers is considered the starting point for labor law within the English common law tradition. That tradition also forms the basis for American constitutional law. The ordinance set a maximum wage for laborers, which was the rate paid in 1346 before the plague raged across England. People who were able to work could be imprisoned for refusing to do



Jason Russell

so, and the ordinance placed limits on people moving around to find work. This ordinance was not formally repealed until the Statute Law Revision Act was passed in Britain in 1863 (Yale Law School, 2008).

The Ordinance of Laborers was succeeded in 1563 by the Statute of Artificers. That second law was passed in response to labor shortages brought on by plague and other social issues. It also set maximum wages, restricted workers' freedom of movement, could force both men and women to toil as agricultural laborers, and even mandated the clothing that people could wear based on their social class. Like the 1351 ordinance, the 1563 statute revealed a simple fact: a shortage of labor did not give workers more power. The state, in those cases monarchs and aristocrats, could use coercion against anyone who tried to bargain a better wage rate for themselves (Digital Text International, n.d.).

The problem of regulating labor was not confined to Europe when settlers began crossing the Atlantic Ocean to what became the Americas. The labor markets from the time of European arrival to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 changed but they usually revolved around the scarcity of workers. Epidemics and pandemics were common in colonial-era America. For instance, there were six smallpox epidemics in Boston between 1636 and 1698. Smallpox vaccination was eventually introduced in Massachusetts by Cotton Mather and Zabdiel Boylston in 1721 (Niederhuber, 2014).

The lethal nature of European diseases was most clearly seen in the impact that they had on Indigenous people. Up to 20 million Indigenous people — 95% of the overall population of the Americas — died from diseases such as smallpox, with many of them perishing without actually coming into direct contact with a settler. Europeans, notably the Spanish, attempted to enslave Indigenous people to address colonial labor shortages but the practice was not successful. European countries identified another solution: enslave Africans.

Up to 2 million enslaved people perished crossing the Atlantic, but they were not as susceptible to European diseases as Indigenous people had been. African slavery solved labor shortages that were linked to disease, although climate placed limits on its use. A second source of labor was thus introduced: indentured servitude. Indentured servants were bound to a master — the terms “master” and “servant” were used into the first decades of the 19th century — and they came from poor families in Britain, Ireland, and some from what is now Germany. An indentured worker had to work several years to pay off the cost of his or her passage to the American colonies before being freed from a legal obligation to his or her master. A

servant who tried to break the indenture could find his or her obligation extended and face imprisonment.

Indentured servants were common in the northeastern colonies because the change of seasons imposed restrictions on agricultural work. The cost of the indenture relationship was really borne by workers rather than employers. In contrast, the horrid economics of slavery meant that enslaved people had to be made to toil all year, and the more moderate southern climate made that possible. Around one-half to two-thirds of the Europeans who came to the thirteen colonies between the 1630s and the American Revolution were indentured servants, or between 500,000 and 550,000 people (Galenson, 1978). Approximately 350,000 enslaved Africans were transported to the colonies during that same period (Miller & Smith, 1988). The obvious difference between the two groups was that indentured servants could hope to be eventually freed from their indentures, while enslaved workers faced a lifetime of bondage.

Although the United States came into being following the Revolutionary War, American labor and employment law continued to be influenced by developments in Britain. Britain colonized what is now Australia in 1788 to establish a penal colony, and workers who violated labor and employment law found themselves transported to the South Pacific Ocean. The British government began passing master and servant laws in 1823. Those laws governed relations between employers and workers, and the weight of the state was firmly on the side of the former at the expense of the latter. Approximately 10,000 workers per year were prosecuted in Britain between 1858 and 1875 for violating master and servant laws. American legislators took approving note of the master and servant laws.

The circumstances and consequences of the 1351 Ordinance of Laborers, the 1563 Statute of Artificers, the use of enslaved and indentured labor, and the passage of labor laws that overwhelmingly favored employers and other coercive measures confirm a basic fact about the interplay between work and pandemic illnesses: the state set early precedents indicating that exerting control over workers would happen rather than negotiating with them. It was also fairly easy to use force against workers considering public health conditions in the 19th century. Personal hygiene was poor, it was common for human waste and sewage to run through city streets, water was often undrinkable, and overall mortality was much higher than it would be by the early 20th century.

The next major global pandemic occurred in 1918 with the emergence of the so-called Spanish flu. It did not, in fact, originate in Spain and it was instead given that name because Spanish newspapers were the first media outlets to report influenza infection. It is now thought to have begun in the American Midwest. There has much popular media discussion of the 1918 flu pandemic since its COVID-19 successor began in late 2019. Journalists have looked back to 1918 to look for clues on how COVID-19 may yet unfold, and some of what has been reported has revealed important new details of what was transpiring in the United States and abroad from 1918 to 1919, while other important historical events have been largely ignored in the mainstream media.

One of the more important facts about the Versailles talks [that concluded with a treaty signing in June 1919] was that President Woodrow Wilson suffered from influenza while participating in negotiations that led to a flawed end of the First World War and established conditions that led to the next war that started in 1939. Wilson’s legacy is undergoing reconsideration due to the racist attitudes that he expressed

and discriminatory policies that he implemented, but historians speculate about how events at Versailles may have transpired had Wilson been healthy and focused during negotiations with the other countries at the peace conference. Similar speculation could be made about the outcome of the first 2020 presidential election debate and the possibility that President Donald Trump may have been suffering from undetected COVID-19 while he was on stage with former Vice President Joe Biden.²

The fact that 1918 marked the end of the First World War has been discussed in the popular press, but key events that began at the time have been largely ignored in popular media. The years from 1918 to 1920 are referred to as the Workers' Revolt period. There were strikes and political unrest across the wartime allied countries, and in the central powers that were allied with Germany. The 1917 Russian Revolution inspired revolutionary movements, and governments and business were aghast at what was starting to happen after the armistice was declared in 1918. The British government feared that they would face a revolution, and demobilized soldiers demonstrated in Germany. There were conflicts across the United States including a strike by Boston police and a general strike in Seattle in 1919.

Some of the strike activity predated American entry into World War I, and there were over 3,000 strikes per year in the United States from 1916 to 1920. Much of the worker militancy was inspired by militant unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World. Historians have yet to form many clear links between the 1918 influenza pandemic and post-World War I labor militancy, but that pandemic significantly contributed to the social unrest of the postwar years. The heavy hand of the state again appeared, most notably fomenting the First Red Scare from 1919 to 1920. The so-called Palmer Raids led by the eponymous U.S. Attorney General

A. Mitchell Palmer targeted people suspected of anarchist and communist political sympathies, and over 10,000 people were arrested. Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge used his breaking of the Boston Police Strike as a platform upon which to build his campaign for president.³

The American working class emerged from the immediate postwar and post-influenza pandemic years with diminished militancy and weakened unions. The United States severely restricted immigration during the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act and became economically isolationist after the introduction of the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act. In 1925, the stunning decision in *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, otherwise known as the Scopes Monkey Trial, was one of the few events to halt the rightward movement of American society and politics at that time. In that case, schoolteacher John Scopes was charged with violating a Tennessee state law that prohibited the teaching of evolution in schools. Scopes was ultimately vindicated in 1926, and science partially prevailed over creationism.⁴

Professional workers and managers were one group that became stronger during the 1920s. For example, the pre-World War I federal civil service was rife with cronyism, and action was taken in the 1920s to make merit the main staffing consideration. The federal government passed a Classification Act in 1923 that was the first attempt to establish comparative salary scales for civil servants. Management practice began to be altered by the end of the 1920s. The infamous behavioral studies conducted at Western Electric's factory in Hawthorne, Illinois, helped give rise to the human relations school of management. The war had elevated the importance of science and technology in public policymaking. Firms such as the Radio Corporation of America (RCA)

and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) were formed to exploit new technologies and forms of media.

A massive new pandemic did not follow the 1918 influenza, but people were still threatened by possible exposure to other public health risks. Americans living during the interwar period could contract scarlet fever, measles, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, hepatitis, and polio among other bacterium and viruses. Avoidance was the only protection against many diseases, and parents carefully ensured that their children were not in densely populated social settings with their peers. Treatment for tuberculosis

“Americans living during the interwar period could contract scarlet fever, measles, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, hepatitis, and polio among other bacterium and viruses. Avoidance was the only protection against many diseases, and parents carefully ensured that their children were not in densely populated social settings with their peers.”

often involved sequestering in one of the nation's many sanatoriums. There were over 60 sanatoriums in the United States, and they included facilities in Saranac Lake and Astoria, New York. Sanatoriums were also major employers in the communities where

they were located and working at one of them meant dealing with the threat of contracting a potentially deadly disease.

The Second World War led to further advances in public health. Penicillin was first widely used during the war years and provided a strategic advantage to the allied countries. The first influenza vaccine was developed with U.S. military cooperation. There was vast pharmaceutical infrastructure in place by the end of the war to foster the expansion of public vaccination programs. The polio vaccine was introduced in 1955, with an oral version implemented in 1962. The measles vaccine was put into use in 1963. There was a flu pandemic from 1957 to 1958 but it was not nearly as fatal as what occurred in 1918.

People became accustomed to the idea that diseases could be combatted with medications of different types in the postwar decades, and bacterium and viruses no longer impacted American workers as they had in prior years. There was a swine flu pandemic in the mid-1970s that was quickly countered by the rushed rollout of a vaccine. The emergence of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) in the late 1970s marked another major public health milestone. The American public did not initially know that the earliest cases of HIV/AIDS originated in 1959, and the seemingly unstoppable nature of the disease led to hysterical discrimination against gay Americans at work and in their daily lives. HIV/AIDS became a plague, but the fact that it is transmitted mainly through sexual contact meant that it would not spread as prolifically as a respiratory virus. There is no available cure for HIV/AIDS but there is a medication that will block its transmission and there is a therapeutic medication to control in the event of contraction.

COVID-19 and the Future of Work

There are some significant similarities between the many plagues, pandemics, and epidemics that humans have faced in the past and the current COVID-19 pandemic that go well beyond a person's choice to wear a mask or protest against wearing one. There are some key common themes found in past pandemics that are reappearing in 2020. The pandemic has again shown bifurcation between social classes. In the medieval period, wealthy people sought to escape the effects of the bubonic plague by escaping crowded cities for less densely populated areas. There has been some physical flight from cities in 2020, but the departure is more virtual than actual.

Writers such as Thomas Friedman (2020) have asserted that in a world in which the workplace of the future will be virtual, the commercial real estate market will suffer, and higher education will be transformed because of COVID-19. Those predictions primarily pertain to workers who are part of that same minority who can work remotely and the organizations that are structured to permit remote work. The notion that a company like Facebook would permit its workers to work anywhere in the United States they wished ignores simple facts of how many people are employed by knowledge industry firms like it. Microsoft, Google, Amazon, Apple, and Facebook collectively employ 1.3 million people (Lerman & Greene, 2020). That is an impressive number, and most of those people can do their jobs remotely. In contrast, McDonald's has around 205,000 employees in nearly 14,000 restaurants (Microtrends, n.d.) and Amazon (n.d.) has 125,000 employees and operates 75 fulfillment centers — another term for warehouses — across North America. There are more than 3.5 million truck drivers in the United States (Day & Hait, 2019). Fast-food workers, warehouse workers, and truck drivers do not get to work from home.

A second similarity involves the role of the state and how employment is regulated. We live in a socioeconomic system that requires people to sell their labor. A person enters into an employment contract when she or he is hired and agrees to sell his or her labor for an agreed rate and for a fixed or open time period. The labor and employment system in the United States was already overwhelmingly oriented toward the interests of employers before the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the imbalance between workers and bosses is now even more acute.

All 50 states operate under the so-called "fire-at-will" doctrine that permits employers to rid themselves of unwanted workers at any time. There are some exceptions to that doctrine, but they are legally difficult to prove. Unemployment insurance, which is administered by the individual states, is intended to provide meager benefits, and otherwise encourage people to immediately start looking for work after losing a job. There is no longer a need for legal sanctions to explicitly force people to work, as was done in the 15th century, because capitalism forces people into the job market.

Many states chose to reactivate their local economies in early summer 2020 before the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic had weakened and many of those same states have weak unemployment systems and social welfare programs, so their citizens had little recourse but to return to work and possibly contract COVID. The federal government provided one-time payments to displaced workers and some assistance to business owners, but one of the two main political parties expressed grave concerns about giving money to citizens and possibly encouraging slothful behavior.

American workers have responded to COVID-19 in a manner similar to their 1918 predecessors. Walkouts and strikes have increased since the pandemic began. Some labor councils and unions

are advocating for a general strike if Donald Trump refused to leave office after losing the 2020 election. Interest in unionization has also increased since early 2020. The United States is not yet into a new Workers' Revolt period, but it could progress into one depending on how 2020 ends and 2021 begins in political and economic terms. Health care workers, teachers, and others working in the broad service sector are fully aware that they are expected to jeopardize their health on the job to ensure that the national economy is at least partially functioning.

Responses by government and business to worker militancy over the past several months share similarities with earlier pandemics and plagues. The most important similarity involves the role of the judiciary. The 1920s fell in the middle of the 1897 to 1937 *Lochner* era on the United States Supreme Court. Indeed, the term “*Lochner*” came from a 1905 case called *Lochner v. New York*.⁵ In that case, the Supreme Court struck down a New York state law that placed limits on working hours. It was one of many instances of the court striking down Progressive era laws meant to protect workers, consumers, women, and children. Another *Lochner* era decision, *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, struck down a law that mandated a minimum wage for women and children working in the District of Columbia.⁶ The *Lochner* era eventually came to an end with Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932 and a confrontation with the court over its responses to New Deal legislation.

The current United States Supreme Court is not yet an ideological match for its *Lochner* predecessor, but it is certainly moving in that direction. For instance, the court ruled in the 2018 *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees* case that public sector union members may not be compelled to pay union dues.⁷ The majority decision ignored the problem of free-riding when workers are not obliged to pay dues. In the 2018

Epic Systems Corp. v. Lewis decision, a 5-4 majority on the court ruled the employers could force employees to accept individual arbitration to resolve unfair labor practice issues rather than permit them to seek class-action remedies.⁸ Justice Neil Gorsuch, when he was a lower court judge, once ruled against a truck driver who had been fired for leaving his vehicle in a snowstorm because he feared that he would freeze to death. The truck driver had first attempted to find help to get the truck moving.

Labor and employment law cases that come before the Supreme Court do not usually receive the same media, but the court has now become more pro-employer and it will inevitably deal with cases on how workers have been treated during and after the pandemic. There has been a long dispute between gig economy employers like Uber and Lyft over whether or not their drivers are contractors or actual employees. It seems inevitable that such issues will be decided before the Supreme Court, and not in a manner that benefits workers.

Management techniques and organizational practices were already continuing to alter before the COVID pandemic because of changes in technology. Workplaces are now seeing the rise of Big Data and algorithm management whereas, as noted earlier, the 1920s saw the rise of the human relations school. The emergence of Big Data, which means large volumes of data, is made possible by the size and complexity of computer systems that now span the globe. An algorithm is a defined sequence of instructions that a computer can implement. The two are being used to try to transform workplaces. For instance, there is a long history of using behavioral testing and interviewing to screen job applicants. Programs like Wasabi Waiter that use algorithms can screen potential employees much more quickly than a paper-based or online multiple-choice test. Such programs can quickly

generate reams of data that can be used to inform future job searches (Knack, n.d.).

The consequences of the gig economy were already proving dire for workers before COVID-19 appeared, and their impacts may worsen after the pandemic ends. For instance, Amazon does not just sell merchandise and ship packages. It also runs a site called Amazon Mechanical Turk (n.d.). Organizations that have short-duration tasks that they would like completed can post them on Mechanical Turk and people who want to complete such tasks can also register on the site and start working. A site such as Mechanical Turk takes the concept of short-term gig work to a new and insidious level. It is seemingly benign, but it offers a model of employment that could be widely replicated.

The use of ultra-short-term employment platforms is linked to the ever-expanding role of the job placement and recruiting industry. That industry, which includes firms like Adecco and Kelly, is now globally worth about \$1.3 trillion per year. Many first-time job seekers obtain their first jobs through job placement firms, and workers who lost full and part-time jobs secure new employment through them, as well. The employment firm is now an integral component of the job market that exemplifies precarious work (Cision, 2020).

The contours of the gig economy had taken shape well before COVID made the jump from animal to human, but its features are hardly new despite how short-term employment is described in popular media. Working at short-duration jobs that provided no lasting security was the normal experience for most workers prior to the New Deal era and the introduction of laws like the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act gave workers a chance to gain some job security and a voice at work. Indeed, as historian Jefferson Cowie (2017) has

persuasively argued, the New Deal years and the three decades that followed them now look more like an exception in American history than a permanent change in direction.

Which Direction Post-COVID?

The foregoing discussion may suggest that the post-COVID future looks bleak for people who work for wages. There are parallels between 2020 and 1920 that are disturbingly similar. The imposition of a labor and employment framework that essentially compels people to work under terms that confer enormous advantages on their employers exists today as much as it did a hundred years ago, although some of its features have become more sophisticated. It is easy to conclude that American workers will face a dire labor market as the country eventually moves on from COVID-19. People could increasingly live in Airbnb units, cram themselves into Uber cars, and find daily employment through placement agencies and supplement it with hourly gigs found on Mechanical Turk. The right to unionization could be gradually lost, minimum wage laws may be struck down, health and safety protections eliminated, managers may be replaced by algorithms, and the power of corporations immeasurably strengthened. Short-term work assignments and piecework, which is what is offered by employment agencies and Mechanical Turk, are a turn back to the 19th century. Piecework was once called sweated labor. There are ample signs that the United States is already headed in that direction, but it is not the only possible future for the country.

2020 is very similar to 1920, but Americans can choose if they want 2021 to rhyme with 1921 or 1932. The end of the 1920s brought the worst economic downturn in modern history. The years before the 1929 stock market crash had been economically prosperous for many people but not average workers, people of color, or women. The Great Depression that began after 1929 ended

the hegemony of the Republican Party and ushered in decades of Democratic Party power. Civil rights were not improved during the 1930s and 1940s but crucial programs that were part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, like Social Security, were created and important labor and employment legislation was passed.

The choice for workers of all types is quite clear: the years following 2020 can be a step backward or forward. The labor and employment trends currently evident in the United States did not appear by accident, and they are instead the result of deliberate policy decisions by business and government. The pandemic brought consequences that are already reversing gains that disadvantaged workers struggled for years to achieve. For example, the current recession is accurately being described as a "she-cession" as its effects are more adversely impacting women than men. Over 860,000 women left the workforce between August and September 2020, while only 216,000 men did. Labor historians have long recognized the crucial role that unpaid domestic work plays in the American economy and the need for most families to have two income earners. The pandemic has increased the amount of work that women are doing at home while at the same time driving many out of the paid workforce (Vesoulis, 2020).

Workers of color have been disproportionately harmed by COVID-19. The labor force participation rate for Black workers declined in 2020 after maintaining a consistent rate from 1970 onward, and the unemployment rate for Black workers is currently twice the rate for white workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a). Workers of color, especially women, are more likely to be employed in the broad service sector than white or Asian workers and service subsectors like hospitality, tourism, and retail have been grievously impacted by the pandemic (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). As Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) argued years ago,

women also bear a disproportionate burden of emotional labor and that load has been made heavier during the pandemic. No single group of workers has benefited from the pandemic, but the virus has taken away decades of progress from many demographic groups.

"... [W]omen also bear a disproportionate burden of emotional labor and that load has been made heavier during the pandemic."

Public policymakers can choose to implement higher minimum wages and strengthen unemployment insurance systems. The first \$15 per hour minimum wage was introduced in Seattle in 2014. The business community predicted that a higher minimum wage would lead to business failures and ultimately higher unemployment. Two studies completed at the University of Washington in 2019 showed that, while a higher minimum wage required adjustments by business, it did not increase unemployment or cause price inflation in the Seattle area. Indeed, there is no compelling evidence that a higher minimum wage does anything other than raise the standard of living of low-income earners (Holtz, 2019).

Arguments against labor and employment law reform are as weak as those marshaled in opposition to a \$15 per hour minimum wage. The American labor movement is now principally a public sector movement as private sector unions, meaning those that organize workers employed by companies of different sizes, have declined. Overall membership numbers in the labor movement have not markedly declined, but the percentage of workers represented by unions has

declined relative to overall growth in the country's population and workforce. The business community and the Republican Party go into raged hysterics whenever labor and employment law reform bills begin moving through Congress as they fear the impact of facing a workforce that has some collective bargaining rights and other workplace protections. Their fears are unfounded. The American economy grew spectacularly during the three decades following the Second World War, and unions were strong worker advocates during that period. Industrial workers were able to earn middle-class wages, and that made it possible for them to send their children to one of the many new colleges and universities founded after 1945.

Labor and employment law, even in its most progressive forms, still confers more workplace power on employers than workers. To use a sports analogy, labor relations is like a baseball game. Unionized workers bring their skills to play the game, their gloves and bats, and they have a say in how the rules of the game are written and enforced. Government appears as the umpire through organizations like the National Labor Relations Board. Employers also come with their ability to play the game along with their gloves and bats but they also own the field, the bases, the dugouts, the bleachers, the concession stand, everything else in and around the stadium, and they control the league in which the teams play.

Technology has always relentlessly altered work by gradually eliminating older jobs and creating new roles. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics does not count how many coopers (barrel makers) and cordwainers (shoemakers) there are in America but it does count the number of computer programmers and web designers employed across the country. There are limits to how much technological change can be anticipated in a short period of time. Comparatively few Americans may have heard of Zoom or Microsoft Teams but have not

had ample contact with both systems. Predictions that innumerable jobs will be done remotely after the pandemic are not accurate despite the ubiquity of video conferencing systems. A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020b) study recently found that 37 percent of jobs can be done entirely from home but that 63 percent require some degree of worksite presence. There has indeed been an increase in the percentage of people working from home due to the pandemic, from 10 percent to 25 percent, but the country is far from a future where even half of the people are spending their days in home offices.

The nature of post-pandemic work and labor in the United States is not certain. Much of what happens next in the United States links to individual identity. People identify themselves based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other variables. They also answer the query "What do you do?" by stating their occupation but identifying as a worker often comes after factors that shape identity. As Karl Marx (1963) argued, people "make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 15) Americans did not choose the circumstances caused by COVID-19 but they do get to decide how they will move forward from the pandemic. Indeed, the recent presidential election suggests that people have chosen to make a future that rhymes with better times in the nation's past. The choice is ultimately about the kind of country in which Americans want to live and work.

Notes

- ¹ For two of the better new analyses of COVID-19 as it relates to labor history, see Finkel (2020) and Winslow (2020).

- ² On Woodrow Wilson's role at the Versailles Peace Conference during the 1918 pandemic, see Barry (2018).
- ³ On the Palmer Raids, see Finan (2007).
- ⁴ *John Thomas Scopes v. The State*, Nashville, December Term (1926).
- ⁵ *Lochner v. New York*, 198 U.S. 45 (1905).
- ⁶ *Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, 261 U.S. 525 (1923).
- ⁷ *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Council 31*, No. 16-1466, 585 U.S. ___ (2018).
- ⁸ *Epic Systems Corp. v. Lewis*, 584 U.S. ___ (2018).

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The Color of Sound

Betty Wilde-Biasiny, Hudson Valley



The Swimmer, 2020, Oil on canvas, 18" H x 24" W
Photo credit: Steven P. Harris

Art offers a time and place where quiet contemplation is still possible. This collection of oil paintings on canvas, made during a period of heightened isolation and focus due to the pandemic (2020-2021), is my way of recording sound vibrations in color, representing gentle waves of thought through undulating forms and passages. The visual language of color evokes my memory of sounds of the Mediterranean, which I experienced on two different creative residencies in Cassis, France. Sounds give way to form, created by the pulsing waves after the thrust of a passing ship, the splashing of a swimmer launching from the dock, or the ripple of a cool evening breeze. Hikes through the nearby lavender fields offer a cool respite to the pulsing heat of the beach and mark the shifting light of the coming sunset.



Studio view of earlier work.



*Far from home, finding
comfort in the sea*

*Connecting us all, like the
roots of a tree*

*Pressure is gone, my body
floats*

*Triggering thoughts by the
splash of the boats*

*The fish swim by, ignoring
my thrall*

*Happy snails making
paths despite it all*



(top) *Sirens*, 2021, 16" H x 20" W

(bottom) *E-Minor*, 2020, 18" H x 24" W

Oil on canvas

Photo credits: Steven P. Harris



(top) *High Sea*, 2021, 18" H x 24" W
(middle) *Heat*, 2020, 16" H x 20" W
(bottom) *Lavender*, 2021, 18" H x 24" W
Oil on canvas
Photo credits: Steven P. Harris



Low Tide, 2020, Oil on canvas, 18" H x 24" W
Photo credit: Steven P. Harris



Betty Wilde-Biasiny, 2020
Photo credit: Amelia F. Biasiny

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Volunteering for Resilience in the Age of COVID-19

Roxana Toma, Saratoga Springs

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The COVID-19 pandemic recession has knocked millions of the most economically vulnerable Americans out of work and it has exacerbated longstanding racial and income divides in America. Workers who were college educated, relatively affluent, and primarily white were able to continue working from home and minimize outdoor excursions, thus reducing the risk of contracting the virus. Those who were lower paid, less educated, and employed in jobs where teleworking was not an option faced a bleak choice in places where restrictions were lifted early and employers ordered them back to work — whether to prioritize their financial lifeline over their health.

That disempowered group was heavily Black and Latino, though it included lower-income white workers, as well. For example, Americans who earned \$50,000 a year or less were more than twice as likely to say they or a family member had lost jobs amid the crisis than those who earned more than \$150,000 (Tankersley, 2020). At the same time, higher earners and whites were far more likely to say they could work from home during the pandemic than lower earners and Black and Latino Americans. Moreover, Black and Latino Americans already had less ability to withstand a prolonged job loss than whites because they had entered the crisis with lower incomes and with less wealth. In 2018, the typical Hispanic household earned

three-quarters of what a typical white household earned, according to census data. The typical Black household earned three-fifths of what the typical white household earned, and their household income had yet to return to pre-financial-crisis highs (Tankersley, 2020). Calculations by the Center for Economic and Policy Research also found that Black and Latino Americans were overrepresented in many "essential" jobs of the pandemic, like grocery store clerks and delivery drivers (Rho et al., 2020). The virus had only exacerbated these inequalities, with minorities suffering both higher death rates and more financial harm.

The pandemic has also exposed the plight of seniors, who ran by far the highest risk of succumbing to the pathogen. Governments across the world urged people over the age of 70 to cut off all social contact to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. Confined to their homes, many of these seniors had no idea how they were supposed to get food or other supplies. Lacking broadband connections, some had no face-to-face contact with friends or family members for many months.

You probably heard this slogan throughout the pandemic: "We're in this together." Although COVID-19 has been our common enemy, is it true that we have had the same experiences as the poor and the elderly? How do we help the people who are hit the worst? Moreover, how do we help ourselves when we are experiencing an extraordinary level of stress and isolation like we have been facing since the beginning of the pandemic? There is much disaster literature that links volunteerism, social capital, and resilience. It boils down to this: during a crisis, the people who cope best are those who help others. In the next



Roxana Toma

sections, I will talk about volunteering, social capital, and resilience and offer some personal reflections from my ongoing work throughout the pandemic as a volunteer.

Volunteering

As a form of prosocial discretionary behavior, volunteering represents "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause" (Wilson, 2000, p. 215). Volunteering, however, is different from spontaneous helping that arises in situations in which an individual encounters "an unexpected need for help, calling for an immediate decision to act" (Clary et al., 1998, p. 1516). It is also different from the extra-role helping behavior displayed at work such as helping colleagues or supporting one's boss (Bateman & Organ, 1983; George & Brief, 1992) in that it is not oriented toward members of one's work organization. What distinguishes unpaid volunteerism from other helping behaviors is that it represents purposeful helping, which requires actively seeking opportunities to help others with whom someone is not immediately connected (e.g.,



family members, work colleagues) and the planning and commitment of time and energy (Clary et al., 1998; Rodell et al., 2016; Wilson, 2000). Scholars see volunteering as serving the purposes of well-being, community spirit, and inclusiveness (Smith & Holmes, 2012; Steffen & Fothergill, 2009; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001), individual and collective empowerment (Gooch, 2004; Nichols & Ralston, 2011), and the public good (Mangan, 2009).

Finally, time-based approaches to volunteering consider issues of timespan and continuity. Rather than long-term, constant volunteering, people can also engage in spontaneous, short-term, episodic volunteering activities, including micro-volunteering to help with smaller tasks of a larger project. Some scholars argue that disasters bring out the best in human beings. As Rebecca Solnit's (2009) *A Paradise Built in Hell* book suggested, perhaps it is a paradox of the human condition that its moments of unity and love appear only at the moments of greatest suffering and sacrifice. However, Steffen and Fothergill (2009) found that while "disaster volunteering" was initially spontaneous or episodic (related to 9/11), it eventually led to a more continuous engagement in volunteering activities.

A Personal Account

I was already volunteering at the soup kitchen in my neighborhood when the pandemic hit. Before the pandemic, we

used to provide a sit-down meal every Monday for around 65 to 75 people, part of the Open Door Soup Kitchen and St. Bridget's Food Pantry Ministry at the Holy Resurrection Orthodox Church in Allston, Massachusetts. We receive donations from Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, among others, which we then sort ourselves and bag. We also do the cooking on-site. When state-ordered restrictions took effect, we had to resort to hot meals in "to-go" boxes, along with the usual bags of groceries. At the peak of the pandemic in 2020, we were serving around 170 to 180 meals per day — an almost threefold increase that happened in a matter of a few months. To add to the challenge, we were also short staffed; student volunteers had transitioned to online classes and left town, while older volunteers were not able to come anymore because they were in the high-risk category of contracting the virus. The few remaining volunteers had to extend shifts to meet the demand. We have been doing that since, although the numbers now are not nearly as high as at the peak of the pandemic; we continue to serve around 100 people per day.

I am also a trained and certified volunteer with the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), a national network of volunteers organized locally to improve the health and safety of their communities. This program has a 20-year history and suggests one way in which the spontaneous efforts of ordinary citizens to help out can be institutionalized. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there was an overwhelming desire of ordinary citizens



to help in some way with the response efforts. Medical, public health, and laypeople rushed to volunteer their services; however, there was no way to integrate volunteers into coordinated response efforts, and individuals could not be verified and credentialed on-site. As a result, then-President George W. Bush — like his father, a conservative Republican keen on encouraging volunteerism in place of big government — established the Citizen Corps, the parent organization for MRC. Since then, MRC has become a way to recruit, train, and activate volunteers to respond to community health needs, including disasters and other emergencies. MRC volunteers include medical and public health professionals, as well as community members without health care backgrounds — like me. MRC units engage these volunteers to strengthen public health, improve emergency response capabilities, and build community resiliency. They prepare for and respond to natural disasters, such as wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, and floods, as well as other emergencies affecting public health, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the pandemic, the MRC network comprised approximately 200,000 volunteers in roughly 800 community-based units located throughout the U.S. (Public Health Emergency, n.d.). That number has since changed dramatically, as the pandemic has seen an unprecedented flood of people wanting to get credentialed and trained to become part of MRC. In an official letter to MRC volunteers dated November 24, 2020, Esmeralda Pereira, director

of the MRC program, stated that more than 400 MRC units nationwide had responded to fight COVID-19 across the country, dedicating over 500,000 service hours up to that point, and counting (Metro East MRC Newsletter, personal communication, December 2020).

As an MRC volunteer, I was activated in March 2020 for grocery deliveries to senior housing, low-income housing, and other immunocompromised people who were not able to go outside. During March, April, June, and July of 2020, I volunteered with MRC three times a week — driving to a food pantry where another team of volunteers was bagging groceries and labeling them with names, phone numbers, and addresses; receiving my assignment; loading up my car; driving along my “route”; and delivering about 30 bags stuffed with the groceries that were requested individually. The delivery process was contactless; I took the bags to the recipients’ doors, I left, then I called the recipients to let them know that it was safe to come out and get their deliveries.

During this time, I was touched by the experience in too many ways to count. I remember, for example, an old man who was always waiting for me every Tuesday outside of his apartment, even though he was told not to. We were at a safe distance, but he wanted to see me and thank me in person — he gave me the military salute more than once. Others, who did not pick up their phones when I called and I had to leave a message, would call me later in the day and give me heartfelt thanks. It was the most basic form of



human interaction that I have ever experienced; these were strangers who were expressing their gratitude in a way that gave me meaning and purpose. We also received emails from our MRC coordinator with quotes from the people we delivered groceries to, and I am including a couple here:

So happy. God bless you and everyone for what you are doing. If there is a way to pay it forward, I'll gladly do it.

Just got it. Trying not to cry, but I have a smile. May the Lord bless you and those that do the needful.

Since July 2020, I've been deactivated from that delivery program. But MRC continues its COVID-19-fighting efforts and volunteers have been activated to assist local health departments and hospitals to speed up vaccine distribution efforts.

Social Capital and Resilience

Much of the scientific research on resilience — which is our ability to withstand adversity and bounce back — has shown that having a sense of purpose and giving support to others have a powerful impact on our physical health and psychological well-being (Parker-Pope, 2020). Resilient people can better manage negative emotions

and experience more positive emotions; they experience increased emotion regulation and that, in turn, creates an increased sense of control. Research suggests that the people who have higher levels of “felt obligation” — which is a motivational state directed toward enhancing others’ welfare — cope better with their own life challenges. An orientation to helping others acts as a protective factor — against losses in psychological well-being — something especially important throughout this pandemic. Supporting others gives us a sense of purpose and helps buffer our bodies against the detrimental effects of stress.

In March 2020, just days after Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed the first lockdown on Britain to curb the spread of the coronavirus, the government appealed for 250,000 people to help the National Health Service (Landler, 2020a). The recruiting drive, which drew nearly twice its goal in less than 24 hours, had amassed an army of volunteers to help elderly people quarantined in their homes, as well as the beleaguered public health system, so much so that it was forced to temporarily stop taking applicants so it could process the flood. In barely a week, the recruiting drive ended up with more than 750,000 people pitching in to help older and more vulnerable Britons by delivering food and medicine (Landler, 2020b). Also, in addition to the national program, hundreds of community-based aid groups have sprung up around the country, enrolling tens of thousands of volunteers, in a stirring display of British national solidarity. This brought solace to Britons, and a sense of unity after three and a half years of bitter divisions over Brexit. For some older Britons, the volunteer army felt like a return to the 1950s and a time when there was more interaction. During the lockdowns, they were not allowed to be with each other, but they said they did not feel alone (Landler, 2020b). They hoped this display of social capital would continue beyond the pandemic.



While I don't believe that volunteer organizations can ever take the place of a strong government that is needed to tackle entrenched inequities and injustices, I, too, hope that we can learn the lessons of mutual aid. This way, in conjunction with the kinds of economic relief the government has been offering people, we can become more neighborly and play a small part in healing our suffering communities.

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SUNY Empire State College at 50: Connections to The Open University

Alan Tait, Emeritus Professor of Distance Education and Development, The Open University, U.K.

At the All College Conference on April 6, 2021, Alan Tait, emeritus professor of distance education and development at The Open University, U.K., gave the annual Ernest L. Boyer Sr. Family Lecture. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of SUNY Empire State College, Alan Tait was also awarded the Doctor of Letters, honoris causa. We thank Dr. Tait for this talk and his help in the preparation of this text.

1. Ernest Boyer

I want to begin by acknowledging Ernest Boyer, in whose name this lecture is given. He was clearly a remarkable man who quickly in his life saw how he could achieve the most through educational administration, and he did so with access and inclusion high on his list of priorities. I've used Boyer's (1990) report on scholarship on a number of occasions in working out how to construct a research, or better put, a research *and scholarship* agenda for universities that are teaching-focused like The Open University, U.K. [OUUK], and perhaps SUNY Empire State College, a comparison of which is my topic for today. Boyer's clear thinking made it possible to disembed so many of the false statements about how universities must or should position research at the expense of teaching, and much more productively, how agendas for scholarship should be constructed on a multidimensional framework that is so much more than just discipline-based. That agenda for scholarship is an area where SUNY Empire State College and The Open University have similar concerns and priorities, but not what I want to talk about today.

2. How well do radicals age?

My theme for today could be summarized as: How well do radicals age? This is a matter of personal as well as scholarly interest, as it may be for some of you, too. Is radicalism a youthful phase for SUNY Empire State College and The Open University — essential as you push your way into an institutional landscape, but once success has been achieved, to be left behind? Or can radical challenges to established social and institutional assumptions on behalf of new audiences that challenge what a university is, what it does, and who it teaches — in other words, radical challenges to the purposes of a university — remain active in the DNA of a university even 50 years after its establishment? And if we examine the challenges of today in terms of social justice and equality, does it need to be?

I am not the first to reflect on this. I have a volume by James Hall, your first and long-serving president and a close associate of Ernest Boyer when he was in leadership positions in the SUNY [State University of New York] system. In his volume *Access Through Innovation: New Colleges for New Students*, Hall (1991) reviewed a range of innovative colleges and universities primarily in the USA but including the OUUK, which he visited more than once — finding time to inscribe my own copy of his book with a kind word of support to a very junior colleague. I am indebted to the work of James Hall — I always called him "Jim" but now I look back with some embarrassment at the overfamiliarity of youth. If he is listening today, greetings to you, Dr. Hall.



Alan Tait

Now we have in this talk a very noninteractive approach to learning and teaching. While I know the OUUK, I hope I can say well, despite my relative familiarity with SUNY Empire State College over some 35 years, I cannot ever know the SUNY system or American society as well as you. So, I want to try to create a form of interaction by creating an internal conversation for you, as I move back and forth from the OUUK to SUNY Empire State College, and you test my ideas against your understanding of your own radical university. So close your eyes, perhaps, while I talk from 3,500 miles away in Cambridge, England, and reflect on whether what I say corresponds to your own understanding.

So, what do the two universities have in common, and at least as interesting, what divides them?

3. Innovation at the OU

There are a number of historical developments that help set out the context for the establishment of The Open University, U.K., in 1969. The first is that in 1960, the continuation rate from school to university in the U.K. lay at approximately 5% only, ending that decade doubling to some 10% following major expansion with around 23 new universities. Almost all the places in the newly expanded higher education sector were, however, taken up by school leavers, with the adult part-time learner served almost entirely in evening classes by Birkbeck College in London, and the University of London itself with external degrees freely available more widely throughout the U.K. and indeed the world. Higher education was primarily an opportunity for the elite and middle classes, dominated by children from private and selective schools, and more by men than women. Both the historical backlog and the continuing injustice in life opportunity constrained by social class, gender, and ethnic heritage provided one stream in Labour Party Prime Minister Harold Wilson's first proposal in 1963 that an additional new university but of a new kind should be established to address such inequities.

The primary driver for a new university like The Open University was about who could be a student, and it is fair to say that for U.K. society, The Open University has changed that. The idea that adults, in general, were worthy entrants to and participants in higher education, as against high school leavers, met considerable skepticism, with unkind remarks of an ageist and snobbish nature about how worthwhile this was. Secondly, the OU brought new entrants into university study from the socioeconomic perspective, and from the dimension of gender, including women in greater numbers than other universities then, and including people with disabilities in ways that had never been done before.

The implications of how a university should function if it is to serve adult learners, however, took us on different paths. But I will come back to that.

The second stream of the prime minister's concern was that the possibilities of broadcasting had not been optimally deployed for formal educational purposes, and he thus placed the use of technology for education at the heart of what was to become The Open University institutional model, which he named "The University of the Air." Wilson entrusted the still embryonic idea to his Minister for the Arts Jenny Lee, who is widely given the credit for making a reality of it, and in doing so adapting the original vision in some very important ways.

Jenny Lee worked with The Open University Planning Committee, which examined the available range of options on a global basis that might provide concrete help in inventing the organizational form for a radically new university. None of these provided a blueprint, but all contributed elements of innovation that made up the new whole.

A number of key characteristics of how universities were understood to function, and for whom, were disrupted, not to say upended, by The Open University, U.K. They have had an impact worldwide. The first of these is that The Open University, U.K., as the latest of the 1960s new universities designed to move the U.K. from an elite to a mass higher education system, decided to have no entry qualifications for undergraduate admissions. At a stroke, this changed something hitherto fundamental to the functioning and character of higher education, that the university chose its students, as happened through competitive entry and selective interview at all other universities. However, at the OUUK, the students chose the university. There were, for the first 20 years, more applications to The Open University

than there were places, and as there were for the more selective universities, but The Open University used a first-come, first-served queuing system to manage its admissions, not selection. The Open University, U.K., has stuck to this fundamental reversal of the power relationship between student and institution for more than 50 years.

It is this radical approach to student admission that has changed the understanding of who could go to university, from the stereotypical but not misleading picture of an 18- or 19-year-old middle-class young person, more often a boy than a girl, almost always white, to a university of adults in all sorts of occupations, and with a more or less equal proportion of women to men. The predominant characteristics of the OU student were not of someone who had had no postschool education but of someone who had had some but wanted more. The picture is one of individuals already in a process of social mobility, not so much those for whom this was the first step. However, we should not overlook the large numbers of women homeworkers, for whom The Open University provided a route for study flexible enough to accommodate the demands of parenting and home management; and the smaller but until the recent period important number of people who had retired and were studying more or less exclusively for reasons of personal fulfillment rather than vocational advancement. Finally, there were a number of student audiences who had never been served adequately by the university sector. First and foremost were students with disabilities, and to this day, The Open University, U.K., supports more students with disabilities than all the other universities in the U.K. put together, and can fairly be said to have pioneered the recognition that students with a range of functional disabilities could and should be supported to study, and how this can be done. Other groups have had their study facilitated by the flexible and student-centered nature of The

Open University operations and systems, including students in prison and the military.

The foundation of The Open University as laid out here was driven by an educational and social mission built primarily on ideas of social justice, sharing the goods in society more widely, and remediating past exclusive practices. I believe the OUUK has had a great deal in common with SUNY Empire State College in its changing of society's understanding of who could go to university.

The Open University put in place a range of approaches to learning, teaching, and student support to make that openness a reality and not just a revolving door. These included learning materials that for the first year, at last, created a ramp into higher education that supported those with minimal or less than minimal high school leaving qualifications; highly developed tutorial support on an individual basis focused on student work for continuous assessment; and a modular course structure that allows students to plan degrees.

4. Innovation at SUNY Empire

SUNY Empire State College, founded almost contemporaneously with the OUUK, took the same central imperative as its sister university, that is to say, that there were significant populations who could and should enjoy higher education and who had had no opportunity to do so. To serve them most effectively and appropriately you needed to look to radical innovation in learning and teaching. It was primarily a lifelong learning mission for the adult learner who had had a break from the familiar trajectory of high school to college and who had worked or cared for a family or both. They were in many cases fractured trajectories, that is, individual students whose path on that high school to college trajectory had never been imagined or permitted by family, or had

been interrupted by lack of resources, health crises, caring duties, etc. We were familiar with these students, too.

But SUNY Empire, led by Ernest Boyer, James Hall, and other senior founding administrators, crafted from a range of small-scale, existing innovations in the USA, a bricolage practice of innovation shared in method with the OUUK. That is, SUNY Empire created a home-based study system that built from the adult learner up, using the resources of the statewide system, centrally supported by the mentor who would guide through a form of Socratic dialogue, a practice well described by Lee Herman and Alan Mandell (2004), both friends and colleagues from whom I have learned so much, in their book titled *From Teaching to Mentoring* — titled I would say provocatively if I did not know how gentle Distinguished Professor Mandell is. The core ideas at SUNY Empire's foundation as I understand them were more radical than anything we had conceived in the U.K.: that the individual learner creates her or his own program of study rather than engaging with a curriculum designed by faculty and inherited from others. This was indeed courageous. It was to refuse the power that the university hitherto had assumed as its prerogative by definition. In addition, the knowledge that the adult learner had gained outside the academy, not only in terms of credit from other universities but also from life and work experience, could through its expression through a portfolio be given academic credit. This was equally radical I suggest, as it recognized that knowledge and understanding generated from outside the academy were worthy of recognition within the currency of academic awards.

5. What has Changed at the OUUK and SUNY Empire?

So where are we now in terms of these aging radicals?

I see some common patterns between us both. Firstly, with the OU, while the initial qualifications offered for the

first 20 years or so were unnamed in the sense that they were a "B.A. Open" and only a "B.A. Open," and composed through free choice by the student not according to a pattern designed by discipline-based academics. In this way, the OUUK made a significant nod to the openness of curriculum that SUNY Empire pioneered. It was the OU students, through their own association that has membership in the university senate, who drove change toward permitting so-called "named degrees," a preselected series of modules that deliver a B.A. or B.Sc. in a subject area. Some academics at the OU — I remember that senate debate — defended what they thought was a key element of the OU's radicalism and opposed what they saw as the creep of conventionalism into the university. But the majority listened to the student demands for easier social recognition of their degree titles that society and employers more easily understood, and agreed to the change.

Equally, as I understand it through conversations with your colleagues and looking at your webpages, SUNY Empire, too, has expanded the modes of study to include online degrees made up of conventional courses, as well individually planned and negotiated study plans for credit supported by mentoring, and retains the inclusion of experiential learning, or indeed a particular strength that is apparent, a combination of all three modes.

My assessment for both universities is that these changes have strengthened our ability to include a wider range of students and to innovate in how these students are supported. There is nothing so damaging as "founding father syndrome," if I can term it that, where any change from the original vision is regarded as treason. As SUNY Empire's Emerita Professor Elana Michelson (2020), friend, and colleague of many years, proposed in an article last year, we should "resist a more-of-the-same defensiveness that can keep us stuck in

what we already do" (p. 113). That has emerged as for me the crucial theme of this talk.

And nothing has tested the mission and organizational structures and processes more than the digital revolution of the last 30 years, which I come to next.

6. The Digital Revolution

In the early 1990s or so, the digital revolution made its challenging entry, for me first in the form of desktop computers for email and managing text, although elsewhere in the university it began to transform student records and logistics. By that time, the educational radicals of The Open University, U.K., were in many cases in their 40s and 50s. And it seems to be true that while the technologies we grow up with, and perhaps up to the age of 40, are seen as part of the natural world, those that come later in our lives for some at least intrude as a personal challenge and an unwelcome one at that.

But I remember when the first desktop, just one, was installed, with its black screen and winking green text. And I sent the first email in my life, which was as it happens to a colleague in Australia. It could hardly have traveled farther. And some five minutes later, I received a reply. I couldn't believe it. I think, literally as well as metaphorically, my mouth dropped open. Suddenly the world changed shape, and some dimensions of geographical distance, of time, and of communicating, sharing, and working with others, were changed forever.

Skeptics

But those who were armored against new technological innovations, over and above the ones we had worked with for the last 20 years, represented themselves as weary skeptics in the face of naive tech enthusiasts who had no understanding of "real" communication, "real" relationships, or "real" learning. And for an innovative technology-supported university just 20 or so yearsold in the 1990s, there

were a surprising number of such conservatives who refused to model continued innovation, and who gradually became more and more forlorn and unhappy voices. It became so difficult to distinguish a new conservatism from a legitimate protection of the educational mission, a continuing challenge.

7. Anti-commoditization Practices

So where is innovation most strong now?

Open Versus Commercial Practice

Of great interest is the reaction to the high levels of commoditization that the digital revolution has brought — above all of our personal data — in the form of a pushback with anti-commodification practices in fields such as open software, open publishing, and open educational resources [OERs]. If it is true that every force engenders resistance, nowhere has this been seen so strongly as in the open publishing movement of the last 20 years. I will be fascinated to see where the next moment of stasis comes in the field of open versus commercial publishing. As for open educational resources, I remain wedded to the idea that courses can be more speedily, cheaply, and equitably produced if we are able to share and adapt — facilitated by digital systems. But apart from the valuable open-source production of some textbooks in North America where textbook prices are very high, I have personally seen less than enough evidence of open educational practice, that is, OERs in use in the production of learning resources and courses rather than lying unexamined in unvisited repositories. I hope to be proved wrong!

8. Informal Learning

On the other hand, the use of OERs for informal learning has had more success, for example with the OpenLearn site of The Open University, U.K. (n.d.), which makes freely available discontinued courses and fractions of current

courses and is used by millions of informal learners. As well as sites like this there are a million blogs, curated collections of resources on every subject under the sun, and spaces for association and discussion. The digital age has produced an extraordinary creativity based on informal learning and ease of communication. We can see it happening in front of our eyes as people stare at their screens in every sitting room at home, every café, on every bus, train, or airplane. Is it here, not only in the study of but in the production and curation of resources, that the spirit of innovation in learning might burn most fiercely in the current period? And are educational institutions still fit for purpose with their architectures of learning still in analog form in terms of lengthy programs of study and credit systems, and able to support the informal learning that is going on all around them, which is, for the most part, ignored, unrecognized and unvalued? I suggest that the microcredential agenda has now far more potential than the early days of badges of competency information technology companies might have suggested.

9. It Has Not Worked

But to Conclude with an Overall Challenge to SUNY Empire and the OUUK

If we are to be critical, and I include self-critical, I would want to ask if the notion of openness, while an advance on the notion of opportunity to learn, a privilege granted by others, is in itself an adequate basis for social justice, and what the widely promoted rationale for a university like the OUUK of social mobility really means. I draw on the work firstly of Michael Young (1958) on meritocracy, and Selina Todd (2021), and in particular her recent book *Snakes & Ladders: The Great British Social Mobility Myth*.

Michael Young, an innovator in ideas in education as well as other sectors, and influential on the founding ideas of the OUUK, wrote a satire as long ago as 1958 using the neologism of meritocracy as descriptive of a dystopian society where the able minority rule for their own benefit a less able majority, and extend these benefits to their own family only, and have in the notion of meritocracy a set of beliefs that make this entirely defensible. Young was profoundly disappointed however that meritocracy became a term of approbation rather than understood as he intended as a satirical account of new forms of privilege and the justification of hierarchy that it supports. So, I think it is fair to ask if the OUUK, and perhaps SUNY Empire, while we have widened slightly the terms on which people may move in society, have unwittingly failed to critique the social mobility that we support. To strengthen

“So, I think it is fair to ask if the OUUK, and perhaps SUNY Empire, while we have widened slightly the terms on which people may move in society, have unwittingly failed to critique the social mobility that we support.”

the urgency of this question, I turn to Selina Todd’s (2021) recent work, *Snakes & Ladders*. She wrote that “By 2010 40% of London’s children lived in poor households ... London had become the most socially polarised city in Britain, but researchers found that a similar inequality of both wealth and

opportunity characterised the largest provincial cities too.” She added that we “saw social mobility strategies as replacement for social policies that were designed to prevent or minimise poverty and inequality” (pp. 328-329).

In other words, it has not worked. If the original founding vision of our two universities was a commitment to improving social justice, that is to say, diminishing the gaps between the richest and the poorest and supporting social mobility, thus, creating more opportunities for secure employment and housing, and health outcomes to be available to a larger and larger proportion of the population, it has not happened. The gaps are greater, the poor are relatively poorer, the richer are relatively richer, and decent housing

is more and more of a challenge. A sobering moment. The very challenges that we were established to meet have, in fact, over 50 years, developed into worsening problems rather than improved life outcomes for the majority, notwithstanding the millions of students whose life trajectories we have supported. How do we contribute, then, in the light of that? Do we continue in the same way? Or do we recognize that the hopes of 1971 have in some ways gone backward and that we must rethink how we deliver our missions?

I would like to focus on my own answer to those questions, which are the questions I hope to leave you with, on whether our understanding of social justice and, in particular, social mobility is adequate. I think they are not. Firstly, it is all too usually implicit, not thought through. To renew our mission statements, which have not succeeded overall in embedding change for the better in our societies, despite the many achievements of our students, we need to discuss and debate what we mean by social justice and social mobility, and then plan again how we can better deliver on those ambitions; better than we have done so far.

Secondly, I think the very strength we thought we had in supporting the individual learner may also be a weakness. It is not that it is wrong, rather, it is inadequate. While we thought we were mitigating the most damaging characteristics in our societies, perhaps we were too often reflecting and reproducing their individualism. There is a clue, I think, in that both universities have been pulled back from “open curriculum” being the sole program offering, to complement the mentor-supported curriculum planning process in the case of SUNY Empire and the Open Degree in the case of the OUUK, to qualifications that are built around the same principles of established fields of knowledge with names that are immediately recognizable in communities and by employers, that is to say, a B.Sc. in economics or a B.A. in literature.

And while the open curriculum continues to engage many, at least half of our OUUK students, perhaps in their decision to take named degrees in subject areas, implicitly express the notion that they are not just individuals; they are or want to be part of wider communities defined by knowledge area. In other words, the truism that human beings are social animals not just individuals is being expressed in its own ways by our students.

Relatedly, can we do anything about the very long-established notion that social mobility is an individual’s farewell to her or his own community, for admission to another community or social class? This individualistic notion of social mobility is impoverishing for the community left behind, as those most able and energetic members of the community are encouraged to get up and go, and at the same time negates broader notions of social solidarity that have contributed so much to the fragmentation and anomie that we can recognize in the U.K. and perhaps, it is for you to say, in the U.S.

So, let's celebrate at 50 years the many, many lives of individual students whom our universities have supported in their life trajectories, and whom no one else chose to notice. But let us also reflect on the challenge that the injustices in our societies that we were established to mitigate have, in fact, gotten worse. Let me return to the question as to how well radicals age. The task before us, I propose, lies in our capacity to draw on the radical courage of SUNY leaders Ernest Boyer and James Hall and in the U.K. Government Minister Jenny Lee, and as young and old alike renew the moral challenge to our societies today to reinvent our universities to support a fairer more just society, just as our

founding mothers and fathers did 50 years ago. In other words, we still have work to do!

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A Peek Inside #3
Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

From Microaggressions to Hate Crimes: Asian Americans' Experiences During COVID-19

Gina Torino, Staten Island

Since the beginning of the pandemic in late 2019-early 2020, the U.S., along with the rest of the world, has been overwhelmed by COVID-19. Communities of color in the U.S. have been disproportionately impacted by the virus in negative ways. Moreover, there has been a precipitous rise in the frequency and severity of microaggressions as well as overt racism and hate crimes directed toward Asian Americans. In this piece, I will discuss the rise of discrimination in the Asian American community as well as some recent research that discusses the long-term psychological impact of the aforementioned incidents. As mentors and staff who work with and serve students representing various racial and cultural groups, it is imperative that we all attempt to understand how our own biases may unknowingly be transmitted through our words and behavior. Thus, interventions for minimizing the incidence and impact of microaggressions and racism will be discussed.

Over the last two decades, there has been mounting evidence that various forms of oppression and discrimination have become more subtle and nuanced. Authors across disciplines have explored these manifestations for people of color, women, LGBT individuals, and more recently, disabled, and religious minorities. Across the literature, the unifying theme is that expressions of bias and discrimination have moved from overt and blatant to more covert and ambiguous. Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) reintroduced the term microaggressions in a theoretical taxonomy that included people of color, women, and LGBT individuals. In that work, microaggressions are defined as: "brief and commonplace daily

verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative ... slights and insults to people of color, women, and LGBT individuals" (p. 273). Oftentimes, microaggressions are manifestations of unconscious biases and stereotypes we possess; however, they can also be at the conscious level of awareness. An example of a behavioral race-based microaggression would be a white woman clutching her purse more tightly when a Black man enters an elevator (Torino et al., 2019). The message conveyed is that all Black people are criminals. A verbal microaggression would be acting surprised when a female college student states she is a math major. So, someone might say, "Oh, you are a math major?" The reaction of surprise is based on the stereotype that women are not good at math.

Some of the early research documented microaggressions perpetrated against Asian Americans. The initial qualitative research study by Sue, Bucceri, et al. (2007) indicated several broad themes including: (a) alien in own land, (b) ascription of intelligence, (c) exoticization of Asian women, (d) invalidation of interethnic differences, (e) denial of racial reality, (f) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, (g) second-class citizenship, and (h) invisibility. An example of the first theme included, "Where were you born?" The message is that if one is Asian, one cannot be born in the U.S. Subsequent research on Asian American microaggressions validated the initial research and broadened the themes that included: being excluded/avoided, being ridiculed for speaking with an accent, and having one's international



Gina Torino

values/needs disregarded (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014). Of note is the general theme that despite having multigenerational roots in America, Asian Americans are treated as perpetual foreigners/outsideers.

Xenophobia against Chinese Americans has been around since the mid-19th century with the influx of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. The term that was used was "yellow peril" which reflected fears that Western values would disappear, and that the "exotic" Chinese person would come to dominate. This fear was stoked by early depictions of fictional characters such as Fu Manchu and Ming the Merciless. And, shortly after it was thought that COVID-19 originated in China, Asian Americans began to experience discrimination in various forms. One predominant theme across the verbal incidents has been the linking of Asians to COVID-19, where the aggressors are purportedly calling Asian people "coronavirus," "Chinese virus," or "diseased," and telling them that they should "be quarantined" or

“go back to China” (Tessler, Choi, & Kao, 2020). A former government official often referred to the coronavirus as the “Kung Flu” (Lee, 2020). Last year, in a *New York Times* piece titled, “Coronavirus Racism Infected My High School,” Katherine Oung (2020) discussed the microaggressions she experienced as a Chinese American during the outbreak. For example, her classmate of almost three years whom she considered to be a friend said: “Everyone knows Chinese people are disgusting. They’ll eat any type of animal. They’re dirty.” Oung stated that these words expressed to her by her friend felt like a “stab to my chest” (0:00-0:15).

Moreover, between March 19, 2020, and March 31, 2021, the nonprofit organization Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) Hate received 6,603 reported incidents of discrimination targeting Asian Americans across the U.S. According to their data, physical assaults made up 12.6% of incidents; coughing/spitting comprised 8.5%; verbal harassment made up 65.2% of incidents; shunning or avoidance comprised 18.1%. Women are attacked two times more than men. Chinese people made up the ethnic group most often targeted, making up 43.7% of incidents. Asian Americans as a whole, though, are being racially profiled and attacked: Koreans (16.6%), Vietnamese (8.3%), and Filipinx (8.8%) have also faced COVID-19 discrimination in high numbers, and states with high Asian American populations report the most incidents (CA (40%); NY (15.1%); WA (4.8%); and IL (3.2%) (Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Cayan, 2021).

There has also been a rise of discrimination directed toward the elderly in Asian American communities. Nationally, Stop AAPI Hate reported that of the 6,603 incident reports, those by elderly Asian Americans (60+) went up from 6.3% in 2020 to 7% in 2021 (Jeung, Yellow Horse, & Cayan, 2021). On January 31, 2021, a 91-year-old man in Oakland, California’s Chinatown was violently

shoved to the ground. That same month, an 84-year-old man died following an attack in San Francisco (Wiley, 2021). On February 18, 2021, a 74-year-old Filipino man died after a random attack in Arizona (KVOA Television, 2021). On March 16, 2021, a man killed eight people, six of whom were Asian women, at three spas in Atlanta, Georgia; anti-Asian bias has been suspected in this case (Hauser, 2021).

Some first-hand accounts reported to Stop AAPI Hate (2021a) include:

I was waiting to cross the street when I felt something on my head and it turned out to be spit all over my hair and the back of my coat. I was repeatedly spit on by a big white guy. (67 y.o., New York, NY)

As I was leaving a restaurant, a white male stormed up to me and verbally harassed and terrorized me. He screamed, ‘return to China you f***ing Asian’ and other hateful, racial slurs, threatening me physically. This went on for several minutes as I departed the scene quickly to call police. A clear case of racial hatred towards me. I called the police who arrived quickly to apprehend him. I gave a verbal account to another officer who arrived later. I have not heard back from anyone. (67 y.o., Alamo, CA)

On my daily walk in my hometown Sausalito, I was wearing a face mask when a white woman yelled at me, ‘I hate Chinese people! Why do they come to this country?!’ when she passed me. I was stunned by her words which caused me to fear and be more alert of my surroundings. (71 y.o., Sausalito, CA) (pp. 3-4)

While the long-term mental health impacts of recent events are unknown, scholars have posited that these hate crimes and other related microaggressions related to COVID-19 may have deleterious physical and psychological effects on Asian

Americans (e.g., anxiety) (Chen, Zhang, & Liu, 2020; Tessler, Choi, & Kao, 2020). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers had found that racist incidents delivered in overt forms and through microaggressions negatively impacted Asian Americans’ self-esteem and contributed to overall mental health problems (Nadal et al., 2015; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017).

Support in response to the devastating reports of hate crimes and discrimination is being seen throughout the country. For example, in Oakland, California, Jacob Azevedo created “Compassion in Oakland” which is a volunteer group that offers to walk with anyone in Oakland’s Chinatown neighborhood if it might help them feel safer (Smith, 2021). In addition, the Stop AAPI Hate coalition and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center (AASC) have received \$1.4 million in funding from California to support ongoing research and community programs that address rising anti-Asian American racism (Stopaapihate.org, 2021b). President Biden signed a memorandum in January 2021 acknowledging that “inflammatory and xenophobic rhetoric has put Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) persons, families, communities, and businesses at risk” (The White House, 2021, para. 1). “The president also told the Department of Health and Human Services to consider issuing COVID-19 guidance addressing language access and sensitivity when it comes to the AAPI community” (Somvichian-Clausen, 2021, Steps in the right direction section, para. 2).

As mentors and staff at SUNY Empire State College, there are actions we can take to mitigate the harmful impact of microaggressions on our students. In the new book, Derald Wing Sue et al. (2021) discussed in detail microintervention strategies that one can implement in daily life and higher education settings. Briefly, if one experiences a microaggression, one approach is to **make the invisible, visible** by asking for clarification,

thereby making the communication explicit (e.g., "You believe I am sick because I am Asian."). Another approach is to **disarm the microaggression** by describing what is happening and through interruption and redirection (e.g., "I am having a reaction to what you just said. Let's discuss this together."). One can also **educate the offender** by differentiating between intent and impact (e.g., "I know your management efforts have focused on issues of diversity and inclusivity but your statement does not reflect your intent"). Finally, one can **seek external intervention** by reporting the incident and seeking support through the community.

When one commits a microaggression and realizes it or if one gets confronted by someone, it is best not to get defensive. First, it is imperative to take stock of one's own thoughts and feelings and ask the person for help in understanding the microaggression. Second, it is very helpful to acknowledge the other person's hurt and to apologize to that individual. Finally, it is especially imperative to reflect on where the microaggression came from in order to avoid similar instances in the future (Sue et al., 2021). We all possess biases, and it is important to take responsibility for increasing our understanding of them as well as privileges we might hold based on identity groups (e.g., age, race, gender, ability, weight, etc.). To understand oneself better, one can participate in workshops, webinars, and/or small facilitated groups on crucial conversations. These difficult dialogues can be challenging at times, but they can foster a deep understanding of one's own racist views. In addition, a few online assessments of the Implicit Association Test (IAT) can be taken to get a sense of one's own racial cultural preferences (Project Implicit, n.d.). On an organizational level, it is important to change hiring/promotion practices and integrate cultural competency. Bringing in outside diversity consultants to provide training and to provide expert

insights into microaggressive incidents is also very useful. By working together and developing higher levels of self-awareness, we can make SUNY Empire State College a more equitable and inclusive environment for all.

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From the Whale Coast to Cloud Forest: Creating a Transformative Scientific Learning Opportunity for Undergraduate Students in Costa Rica

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¡Pura vida! — The universal Costa Rican greeting, universal Costa Rican farewell, and a moniker that translates to “Pure life!”

Introduction

Transformative episodes enhance undergraduate learning experiences. In the natural sciences, these experiences may come in the form of traditional laboratories or field exercises that demonstrate the employment of equipment and techniques that are typical for the discipline. However, transformative experience may transcend the pairing of applied and theoretical instruction. It is also the environment in which these lessons are demonstrated that have the potential to holistically impart a significant emphasis on the experience, and thus enhance individual learning (Davies et al., 2013). While field study in the biological sciences can be conducted in representative locations that are in close proximity to an institution’s campus, international study abroad programs enhance the transformative perspective by providing a dynamic and novel learning environment. It is the interaction between traditional and nontraditional pedagogical practices that gives the student a multidimensional approach to learning, and hence a more global education (Van Doorn & Van Doorn, 2014). Here, we detail the creation of the first Tropical Ecology field course to Central America and reflect on our partnership between SUNY Empire State College and Walking Tree Travel,² and the impact that our vision may have on the undergraduate student experience.

Goals

As we embarked on our collaboration between SUNY Empire State College and Walking Tree, we sought to highlight some preliminary goals for our program:

1. To establish the first Tropical Ecology field experience as a residency course at SUNY Empire State College.
2. To create a transformative learning experience for students by pairing natural science themes with conservation, sustainability, and cross-cultural perspectives.
3. To infuse instruction with unique fun, adventure, and increased enthusiasm for learning.
4. To provide an opportunity for underrepresented populations to engage in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines.

The Tropical Ecology Program

Stemming from a long-standing and successful Tropical Ecology field and travel course in Panama, the genesis of this new project was conceived from a 2014 collaboration between SUNY Ulster (a community college in Stone Ridge, New York) and SUNY Empire State College. Detailed in *All About Mentoring* by Cattabiani et al. (2014), we outlined both the practical and pedagogical applications of our collaboration and the transformative learning opportunity between two public-serving institutions. Moreover, we reflected upon the actual experience in Panama and the greater personal and academic impacts on our students.

Using the course design as a model, the intent was to replicate a similar Tropical Ecology academic experience based at SUNY Empire State College. Our current modes of study offer flexible learning options. Consequently, one of our first considerations was to employ a mode of study that likely captures both the prescriptive essence for content instruction and then pair it with an immersive experience of field study. It seemed that our residency model would be the optimal mode for instruction. Here, we provide distance instruction to our students across the state and internationally throughout the term, and then bridge the in-person portion as the travel component. With the majority of the course’s content and assignments already designed, it would be necessary to continually update to reflect the current knowledge in the field. We believed that its adoption would be relatively seamless and could utilize its dissemination and participation to fit our residency mode.

While we originally intended to launch the program in Panama, we moved the desired in-person experience to Costa Rica. We approached Walking Tree Travel based on its expertise in coordinating educational, research, and service-learning programs with colleges and universities. Moreover, its affiliation with the Smithsonian Institute³ affirmed its commitment to understanding the natural world. Walking Tree Travel is a small, mission-driven organization dedicated to bringing students on meaningful international adventures. Founded in 2005 by three childhood friends who share a profound respect

for the transformative powers of international travel, Walking Tree customizes each program to meet the goals of the travelers with a dedication to respectful cross-cultural learning. Walking Tree has been organizing science-focused programs in Costa Rica since 2006 and is proud to partner with wonderful communities, conservationists, and service providers who share their philosophy of travel.

Practically, the logistical coordination for travel to and within Costa Rica is relatively easy. Internally, transportation is supported by a stable infrastructure and reliable network of roads on both the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Travel to and from San José, Costa Rica, is relatively easy with either direct flights or connections from most major U.S. cities. U.S. citizens need a valid U.S. passport to enter the country. The local currency, the Costa Rican colón (CRC), is also interchangeable with the U.S. dollar. Spanish is the official language of Costa Rica; however, an international population of expatriates has also made English a fairly common language in many parts of the country.

Similar to Panama, Costa Rica embodies analogous tropical ecosystems within a relatively small geographic area. However, unlike Panama, Costa Rica has long championed ecotourism and has been a model for sustainability and environmental conservation (Evans, 2010). For example, 99.62% of the country's energy is generated from renewable green sources such as wind, hydrothermal, geothermal, and solar (Apergis & Payne, 2011). Since the abolition of its military forces in 1948, the Costa Rican democratic government has invested heavily in social services, such as free public education and health care, as well as environmental protection. As a result, Costa Rica began to establish their National Parks System, which covers nearly 25% of the entire country (Evans, 2010).

Costa Rica: A Biodiversity Hotspot

Costa Rica is one of the most prominent biodiversity hotspots in the world. With a relatively small landmass of 19,700 square miles, which is comparable to the size of West Virginia, the flora and fauna of Costa Rica account for approximately 6% of the world's biodiversity. There are greater than 500,000 species of plants and animals, with likely several thousand more that have yet to be described. In terms of flora, Costa Rica has over 9,000 species of flowering plants across 12 representative tropical biomes (see Table 1). In addition, there are also 800 species of ferns (*Cyathea* spp. [several species]), primarily found in rainforest regions. In terms of fauna, Costa Rica supports 200 species of mammals, 850 species of birds, 200 species of amphibians, 220 species of reptiles, and 300,000 species of insects, accounting for a significant portion of the fauna biomass. The combination of active conservation and ecotourism has preserved the country's sensitive ecosystems and subsequently underscores Costa Rica as one of the most biodiverse countries on Earth.

Boots on the Ground: Onsite Location Visits

Walking Tree provided itinerary options based on select criteria that we wished to infuse into the experience. While we wanted to preserve cultural, educational, and social experiences, the aim was to primarily study various Costa Rican ecosystems and for each student to incorporate an empirical research project. Typical of many field courses in biology, and as required during our Tropical Ecology course in Panama, the opportunity to design an empirical study and utilize field techniques allows students to apply the scientific method and execute individual scientific research. The connection between scientific theory and application is enhanced when pedagogical practices can demonstrate the direct link between them (Lunetta et al., 2007). Moreover, the additional experience of collecting data in novel

habitats, such as the tropical ecosystems, has been shown to increase participation in both the exercise and as an opportunity for career selection (Lopatto, 2007). Thus, it was important for us to ensure that students learned about tropical ecosystems at representative locations throughout Costa Rica, but continued to draw parallels with active scientific application.

After Walking Tree conceived of a possible student itinerary, we knew that it was important to conduct location visits. It was central for us to undergo the same likely experiences that students would have during the course so that we could be genuinely confident about how each activity, location, and accommodation may mirror the expectations. Equally important was to meet with local organizers, researchers, and institutional staff at these locations so that we could plan collectively for these activities. In particular, meeting with local researchers also provided several opportunities for students to participate in both individual research projects for the course, but also in ongoing research at the facility. The ability to participate in active research with scientists provides another dimension for students to learn and engage in the scientific method.

For the site visits, we planned a route to each location based on the tropical ecosystem type over the course of five days (Figure 1). While we proposed that the actual course be longer, five days allowed us to examine each location for access to nearby ecosystems, inspect the accommodations for students, participate in proposed activities, and liaise with researchers and institutional staff. Upon arrival at the Juan Santamaria International Airport, we were met by Juan Pablo "J.P." Rabanales, Walking Tree Travel's country operations manager for Costa Rica. We spent 24 hours in Alajuela, which is a large suburb northwest of the capital of San José, Costa Rica, and is situated on the foothills of the surrounding mountains that envelope the city of San

Table 1. The 12 representative biomes found in Costa Rica.

Biome	Description	Representative Area/Region
Lowland tropical rainforest	Consistent rainfall and warm temperatures; vegetation abundant from forest floor to canopy	Corcovado National Park
Tropical dry forest	Seasonal dry/wet periods; dry period particularly from November to April; dominated by deciduous vegetation	Nicoya Peninsula
Cloud Forest	High-elevation, cold-tolerant species with persistent precipitation	Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve
Highland mountain rainforest	Predominantly evergreen species; cold and warm tolerant species	Tenorio National Park
Páramo	Arid grassland and scrubland	Southern Talamanca mountain range
Semi-deciduous mid-elevation forest	Dominated by semi-deciduous trees that reach canopy (75-125 feet); forest floor and understory comprised of dense vegetation	Arenal National Park
Mangrove forest	Brackish and saltwater environment defined by mangrove species with buttress root systems; often riparian zones with connecting river systems to oceans	Tortuguero National Park
Wetlands	Shallow freshwater systems that may intersect rivers and marshland	Caño Negro Wildlife Refuge (Alajuela)
Coral reef	Coastal symbiotic relationships between algae and living coral; must be in marine photic zones for photosynthesis	Bahia Ballena National Marine Park
Caribbean coastline	Mix of tropical rainforest, mangrove forest, and riparian forest from the north (Nicaragua) to the south (Panama); also typically wetter with seasonal rainfall	Caribbean (eastern) coastline between Panama & Nicaragua
Pacific coastline	Typically tropical dry forest interconnected from the north (Nicaragua) to the south (Panama)	Pacific (western) coastline between Panama & Nicaragua
Shallow seas	Relatively shallow (<90 feet) marine areas along the Pacific and Caribbean coastlines, within the photic, euphotic, epipelagic, and sunlit zones	Gulf of Nicoya

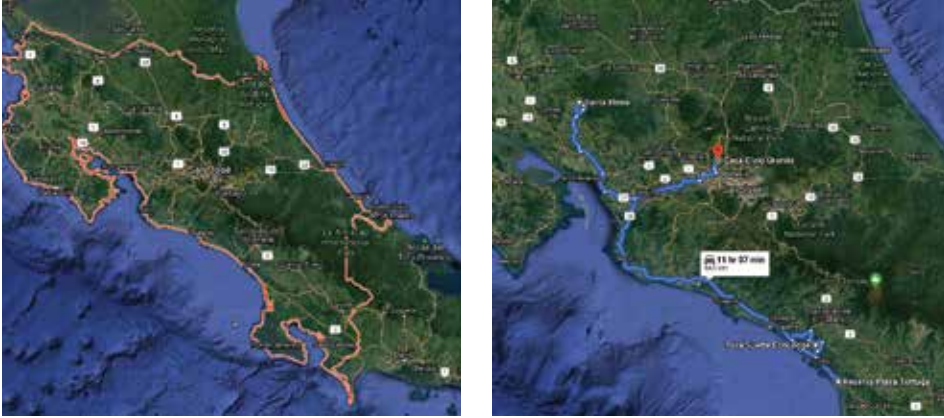


Figure 1. Map of Costa Rica (left). Travel route during location visit: 1) Alajuela, 2) La Florida, 3) Ojochal, and 4) Monteverde (right).

José, which was strategically planned in the Central Valley of San José canton. As the capital and largest city in Costa Rica, the metropolitan area of San José hosts over 2 million residents and accounts for more than half of the country's population. Much of the population is highly diverse, with mixed Indigenous, other Central American, and European (mestizos) ancestry. In a demographic similarity, and as a suburb also known for its diversity, Alajuela also boasts one of the largest indoor food and produce markets in the greater San José canton region. Upon our first full day, we visited these markets, which provide a context for local cuisine, but also larger social issues like food systems, food security, and the association between food and culture. Moreover, local food and agricultural markets can be used as regional biodiversity indicators in terms of the produce that is harvested and animals that are sold (Burger et al., 2004). In Alajuela, we stayed at Casa Cielo Grande (e.g., Big Sky House), overlooking Alajuela and the surrounding Central Valley. At 4,300 feet in elevation, Casa Cielo Grande is situated in a mountainous region north of San José and resides at an altitude that demonstrates the ecological mirror of increasing latitude toward the north and south poles. While also located on the leeward side of prevailing wind systems and easterly of most precipitation, this part of Alajuela had very low humidity.

The dramatic shift in elevation mimics extreme daily temporary changes, which is subsequently reflected in the type of flora found (e.g., succulents like cactuses, Cactaceae) in deserts — another climate that is dry with extreme temperature variation.

From Alajuela, we traveled southerly with J.P. along the Pacific coast toward the Osa Peninsula. Near the seaside town of Tarcoles, we stopped at a bridge that is suspended above the Tarcoles River, an aquatic system known for resident American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*) and spectacled caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*), near Carara National Park. We then continued onto Pura Suerte,⁴ a fully sustainable farm located in La Florida, about 30 kilometers northeast of Dominical. Originally conceived as a center for sustainable living in 2000, the 150-acre farm encompasses 20 acres of organic farming, 75 acres of primary growth tropical rainforest, 30 acres for reforestation from what was once a purely agricultural portion, and 20 acres of secondary tropical rainforest growth. With approximately 1,900 species of trees in Costa Rica, both primary and secondary forests exemplify flora typical of Central American tropical rainforests, such as walking palm trees (*Socratea exorrhiza*), Guanacaste (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*), and trumpet tree (*Cecropia obtusifolia*). The remaining acreage is interspersed with lodging, sustainable infrastructure, and common areas. Here, the neighboring caretakers, Roy

and Graciela Jimenez, greeted us; they were our hosts during our stay at Pura Suerte. Roy and Graciela also operate their own sustainable property, Finca Sueño. As we toured the property, we walked through the organic coffee (e.g., native species of *Coffea* spp.; Figure 2a) plantations, organic fruiting



Figure 2a

flora like banana (*Musa* spp.) and passionfruit (*Passiflora maliformis*), and native cocoa trees (*Theobroma cacao*). We toured the gardens that consisted of both hydroponic and soil-based crops, which are provided water from a network of rainwater systems throughout the farm. Adjacent to the rainwater collection systems was an aquaponic system established for growing blue tilapia (*Oreochromis aureus*) in the enclosures and feeding the water with fish waste back to a separate garden system situated above the enclosures. The aquaponic system is a closed-loop system where the fish are fed on decaying plant matter, and in turn, the fish waste (e.g., nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) supply the plants with natural fertilizer (de Silva & Anderson, 1994). Other livestock such as chickens, goats, cows, and pigs were also raised humanely on the farm. Excess agricultural products were sold at the local farmers market in La Florida. Consistent with the theme of sustainability, the farm was nearly 100% energy-independent. For example,

from the pig waste, the farm produced biogas, which was held in large vinyl bladders and used for cooking fuel. A solar panel system also found on the rooms of several buildings on the property provided the farm with electricity, with AC/DC conversion and storage capacity for use in the evenings.

From Pura Suerte, we traveled southward to the Pacific coastal town of Uvita. Before leaving La Florida, we stopped at the local school to talk about some of the service-learning projects that Walking Tree initiated. Walking Tree groups have been visiting La Florida for 15 years, living with local families and doing service projects. Walking Tree works with La Florida municipal leaders to conceive and coordinate the service work, which is a careful and respectful collaboration between community members and visitors. Most projects have involved the local school or other public installations and consist of light construction work under the guidance of a local foreman.

Approximately 12 miles south of Uvita along the Osa Peninsula in the town of Ojochal is the Reserva Playa Tortuga,⁵ a nonprofit research institute dedicated to the conservation and study of native flora and fauna. It is here at the Reserva Playa Tortuga where we envision our students will spend a significant portion of their time executing individual projects. Ideally, the methodology should be designed prior to the departure of the trip; however, it is often common to adjust protocols based on the conditions of the field location. In addition to the students' own projects, they will participate in ongoing research and conservation efforts by resident and transient scientists at the Reserva Playa Tortuga. Formed in 2009 and situated on 175 acres of coastal land alongside its namesake beach, Playa Tortuga, the institute hosts a number of international scientists and volunteers for projects in monitoring native birds, mammals, bats (Chiroptera), American crocodiles (*C. acutus*), tree boas (*Corallus* spp.), butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera), and sea turtles (olive ridley, *Lepidochelys*

olivacea; green, *Chleonia mydas*; leatherback, *Dermochelys coriacea*; hawksbill, *Eretmochelys imbricata*). In particular, their sea turtle conservation project has been the longest operating research area, which also includes monitoring of nestling sites and predator-proof hatcheries. Some research is seasonal, as well as dependent on the natural circadian rhythms of individual species. For example, some ectotherms (e.g., cold-blooded organisms) like tree boas and crocodiles are more easily monitored in the evening, whereas birds may be more active during the crepuscular (e.g., dawn and dusk) hours. Similarly, sea turtle nesting and hatching occurs on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica from July to December.

The nearby coastline of Uvita is known as the Costa Ballena (Whale Coast). One major topographical feature is the artificial sandbar constructed in the shape of a mysticete fluke, which is called the Cola de Ballena (Whale's Tail). Crafted originally as a jetty for transporting goods from the rainforest to barges, Marino Ballena National Park was designated as both a coastline and marine protected sanctuary, essentially ceasing all commercial and recreational harvesting of flora and fauna within the park's zone. In Uvita, students may also have the option to join a whale watching tour. From December to March and again from July to December, humpback whales (*Megaptera noaeaglie*; Figure 2b) make their northerly and southerly



Figure 2b

migrations, so students are likely to see mothers and their calves voyaging to their seasonal destinations. It is also

possible to spot resident populations of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) and common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*).

Reserva Playa Tortuga exhibits a coastal tropical ecology where riparian systems overlap estuarine systems. Often at these intersections, mangrove forests are established and create a rich ecosystem to support diverse flora and fauna. During our time at Reserva Playa Tortuga, we will experience a kayaking tour on the Rio Sierpe (Serpentine River). Typical of many riverine and estuarine ecosystems, tropical mangrove forests also shelter the juveniles of many species and become a regional nursery to aquatic and marine species (Robertson & Duke, 1987). From a community interaction web perspective, the richness of the ecosystem also increases likely competition for resources as well as predation from marine and aerial predators (Sheaves et al., 2015). There are seven species of mangrove trees in Costa Rica. For example, the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) is found commonly in many mangrove systems across Central and South America. This riparian system hosts a nursery for juveniles, but they provide shelter for crustaceans, such as the mangrove tree crab (*Aratus pisonii*), and produce edible fruit for birds, mammals, and bats. Some common primate species found in southwestern Costa Rica and within the mangroves are white-faced capuchin monkeys (*Cebus imitator*; Figure 2c), golden-mantled howler monkeys (*Alouatta palliata*), and Geoffrey's spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*). Many other iconic and Indigenous species of fauna can be found in the mangrove forests, such as the blue morpho butterfly (*Morpho* spp.), northern tamandua (*Tamandua mexicana*), two-toed (*Choloepus hoffmanni*) and three-toed sloths (*Bradypus variegatus*), coati (*Nasua narica*), colorful macaws (*Ara* spp.), Lesson's motmots (*Momotus lessonii*; Figure 2d), leafcutter ants (*Atta columbica*; Figure 2e), basilisks



Figure 2c

(aka Jesus Christ lizard, *Basiliscus* spp.; Figure 2f), red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*; Figure 2g), and poison dart frogs (Dendrobatidae).

We departed the Osa Peninsula and said farewell to J.P., who returned to San José to welcome the next cohort of Walking Tree travelers. From Ojochal, we journeyed to Monteverde, an evergreen area situated at an elevation of 5,100 feet. Known as a cloud forest (i.e., forests that range in elevation from 3,500-9,500 feet), the Monteverde region



Figure 2d



Figure 2e

overlooks the Guanacaste province and the Nicoya Peninsula to the west. Unlike Alajuela, much of Monteverde is exposed to the windward side, thus inheriting persistent precipitation throughout the year. However, similar to Alajuela, the altitude of Monteverde also mimics diverging polar latitudes, where the temperatures are significantly cooler than the surrounding rainforests that are lower toward coastal elevations. The interaction between the precipitation and cooler temperatures creates a lushly green environment but is a stark contrast from other tropical rainforests in Central and South America. The physical attributes of this ecosystem have also shaped the diversity of the flora and fauna species that differ from other tropical regions. While there are some flora and fauna that overlap with transitioning ecosystems, there are species that are only found in cloud forests. Through a series of interconnecting cloud forest patches, such as the Santa Elena Preserve and Bosque Eterno de Los Niños (Children’s Eternal Forest), the largest protected area is the



Figure 2f

Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve.⁶ Historically, Quakers, who migrated from America to avoid the Korean War draft, colonized the area in the 1950s and purchased land in the Monteverde (Green Mountain) region. Through collaboration between the first settlers and a burgeoning interest from scientists who recognized its biological and conservation importance, the Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve was established as a formal and private sanctuary to protect the flora and fauna found within its boundaries.



Figure 2g

As a distinctive climate within a tropical region, Monteverde supports flora and fauna unique to its region. Known for its forest canopy of tall trees such as the strangler fig (*Ficus aurea*; Figure 2h), the cloud forest includes 878



Figure 2h

known epiphytes, which comprise 29% of all floral species. One of the most prominent groups of epiphytes, the bromeliads (Bromeliaceae) are one of the greatest contributors to water and nutrient cycling, as well as relative floral biomass (Nadkarni & Wheelwright, 2000). In addition, the Monteverde region also has the largest concentration of orchids in the world, which comprises over 500 species. With such a high concentration of flowering plants, Monteverde also supports large resident and migratory hummingbird populations (Trochilidae; Figure 2i). The Monteverde region is also the geographical location of the Continental Divide through Central America. As a result of a physical barrier, it has kept some species in isolation on either side of the divide but also becomes a stopover for many migratory species. For example, the resplendent quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*) is an iconic resident in Monteverde that moves seasonally between higher and lower elevations. Adjacent to the reserve and also once a former private residence,

the Curi-Cancha Reserve exhibits the same ecology as the surrounding Monteverde region but is a popular location for bird watching and evening tours. Many typical mammalian, avian, and herpetological species that are found across Costa Rica also inhabit Monteverde and have adapted to the cooler climate. Following our time in Monteverde, we returned to Alajuela and San José as we awaited our departure to the United States.

Creating the Final Itinerary

After the site visits, we conferred with Walking Tree in order to devise a 10-day experience where students were immersed in representative tropical ecosystems. In addition to learning about the various ecological processes, students would also have the opportunity to conduct independent scientific research and participate in ongoing research projects. Interspersed throughout the itinerary are options to engage in additional cultural activities that provide more transformative learning opportunities. While we initially proposed for the inaugural trip to launch during the spring 2021 term, the coronavirus pandemic impacted



Figure 2i

both SUNY Empire State College and Walking Tree's operations. Federally, regionally, and internationally mandated restrictions enacted strict guidelines for international travel. However, and understandably, individuals also elected not to engage in international flights to reduce the risk of infection and spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected logistical travel to international destinations and has had a negative economic impact on organizations that support these educational expeditions. As a result of several interacting factors, we elected to postpone the inaugural course to the spring 2023 term, with likely travel time sometime between the end of February and early March. Integrating our ideas, goals, and experiences, we were able to craft a comprehensive itinerary that incorporates our goals for the program and enhances transformative learning (Table 2).

Potential Impact for Undergraduate Mentoring

SUNY Empire State College has had relatively few opportunities for our students to study abroad, despite our international partnerships. The Tropical Ecology program seeks to be the first course with an international travel component that allows students to study the natural world in the field.

We believe in the importance of mentoring undergraduate students as an uncompromising pedagogical constitution. This resolution is genuine across all academic disciplines. However, here we have the direct opportunity to mentor students in the natural sciences and to do so in an environment that embodies biodiversity and conservation. Another facet of transformative learning is the opportunity to mentor students while engaged in the applications that are the demands of the discipline, such as field research, use of ecological methods, employment of data collection techniques, and operation of typical field equipment. The mentoring relationship directly is evident during

Table 2. Itinerary for spring 2023 Tropical Ecology course in Costa Rica.

Day	Location	Activities
1	USA — Alajuela	1. Arrival from USA to Juan Santamaria International Airport. 2. Orientation meeting at Casa Cielo Grande regarding trip details, expectations, and safety.
2	Alajuela — Pura Suerte	1. Depart for Pura Suerte. 2. Stop along Rio Tarcoles to see crocodiles. 3. Tour Pura Suerte for indigenous and invasive flora and fauna. 4. Visit coffee and cocoa plantations. 5. Discuss sustainable practices of the farm. 6. Interact with community members and engage in cultural exchanges.
3	Pura Suerte — Oso	1. Hike to Nauyaca waterfall in rainforest. 2. Depart for Reserva Playa Tortuga (RPT). 3. Meet researchers and discuss conservation efforts at RPT. 4. Tour the facilities. 4. Prepare individual projects for the course. 5. Establish roster to participate in ongoing research, such as monitoring of crocodiles, bats, birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects.
4	Osa Peninsula	1. Participate in morning beach cleanup around nesting turtle sites. 2. Hike through nearby rainforests. 3. Begin individual research projects. 4. Engage in scheduled research projects with onsite scientists.
5	Osa Peninsula	1. Continue data collection for individual research projects. 2. Continue participation in various research projects at RPT with scientists.
6	Osa — Alajuela	1. Depart RPT. 2. Kayak through mangrove forests along Rio Sierpe. 3. Evening reflection on our work at RPT.
7	Alajuela — Monteverde	1. Explore Alajuela's Central Market. 2. Depart for Monteverde. 3. Conduct night hike into evergreen cloud forest.
8	Monteverde	1. Explore and hike the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. 2. Visit surrounding communities, such as Santa Elena.
9	Monteverde — Alajuela	1. Soar through forest canopy on ziplines. 2. Depart for Central Valley/Alajuela. 3. Evening reflection on science, culture, and conservation.
10	Alajuela — USA	Fly home.

field research, and the pedagogical instruction is strengthened with this process of facilitation.

This approach is especially important for fostering diversity and burgeoning interest in STEM fields. At SUNY Empire State College, we serve a large number of underrepresented populations and first-generation college students, and this is particularly evident in our STEM disciplines. While STEM programs are beginning to demonstrate increased enrollment of underrepresented populations, there is still no equitable representation across the disciplines. Historically, African American, Latino, and Native American representation in STEM disciplines trails behind white and Asian American enrollments (Estrada et al., 2018; Hurtado et al., 2010; Toven-Lindsey et al., 2015). In 2010, students who identified as underrepresented minorities (URMs) accounted for only 14.7% of all undergraduate bachelor's degrees that were awarded in STEM (Estrada et al., 2018). By comparison, this number increased to 24% in 2013 (Strayhorn et al., 2013). This discrepancy is also revealed through gender inequality. In the United States, women represent only 35% of currently enrolled undergraduate students in STEM fields (Botella et al., 2019). Given the current climate regarding cultural sensitivity to issues of race, gender, and diversity, many higher education institutions have begun to acknowledge the lack of representative diversity in their students and faculty (Smith, 2020). However, actionable changes for improving diversity across campuses still have much to achieve.

Our Tropical Ecology course and program has the potential to continue to foster interest in the natural sciences and to provide an opportunity for many STEM students of underrepresented populations to engage in the sciences. In many ways, the course can act as a gateway for scientific inquiry or continue to reinforce a developed interest in the sciences. The course is not merely

an innovative learning opportunity for our students, but it may also provide insights into future STEM careers and scientific research.

The Importance of Cross-Cultural Learning

Travel courses to international destinations are inherently interdisciplinary. While the emphasis for our program is on ecology and conservation, cultural and social interactions enhance both personal and academic experiences. Cross-cultural interactions create long-lasting and memorable accounts of unique learning experiences (Anderson et al., 2006). Our vision is to avoid an educational silo by focusing solely on the natural sciences. As we interact with local communities, research scientists, and environmental stewards during our travels, our hope is for students to develop a greater appreciation for the preservation of culture. We want our students to reflect on wider societal and cultural considerations, such as the impact of climate change on coastal communities, food security, access to education in remote locations, and the future of ecotourism in Costa Rica. The implications of anthropogenic interactions on human communities also have implications for the success of future generations. Thus, we aim for our students to become stewards of cultural and environmental sustainability and represent themselves as global citizens.

Reflections on the Program

Kevin Woo

Currently, at SUNY Empire State College, our Center for International Education⁷ engages in global partnerships to work with students in Albania, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey. Our program allows international students to earn undergraduate degrees from SUNY Empire while studying in various host countries around the world. To that

extent, our programs have catered to international students already abroad, but we have had very few opportunities for SUNY Empire students from the states to experience international learning overseas. Stemming from my own personal and professional experiences, it became evident that the importance of creating such a program, particularly in the natural sciences, would give our students the opportunity to engage in academic and transformational learning as part of their curriculum. Developing the program and initially working collaboratively with my colleagues from SUNY Ulster (Cattabiani et al., 2014) provided the motivation for creating such an opportunity for our SUNY Empire students and other potential partner institutions. While the overall framework was already established with my colleagues, initiating a program that allows SUNY Empire students to travel abroad required logistical coordination, such as travel (to and from countries and internally), accommodations, working with local institutional partners, and academic activities. Administratively, the creation of the experience as embedded within a course also required formal approval before it would be available for students to register. Parallel to the necessary logistical concerns for traveling, navigating the process for course approval ensured that students could take a course on tropical ecology, engage in the academic content, and concurrently participate in a transformative experience in a foreign country. For some students, particularly for the typical student population at SUNY Empire, this may have been either the first or one of the few opportunities to travel to an international destination. Thus, for our students, it was important for me to deliver this opportunity to the SUNY Empire community and to form new collaborations, such as our relationship with Walking Tree Travel, which provide an updated framework for the program's longevity.

Gabriel Duncan

Walking Tree Travel's mission is to inspire students to become curious and compassionate global citizens by taking an active interest in the world around them. For us, travel should be profound, challenging, fun, and emotional. A tropical ecology field experience helps students conceptualize and apply learning from a classroom to the field, and in this case, a field far from home. We want students to be inspired by the people they meet who share an interest in these scientific pursuits and to be inspired by the cultural similarities and differences between them. Most of all, we want students to be inspired by the tropical ecology they see and more committed to the study and preservation of tropical ecology than ever before. Our name, Walking Tree Travel, was inspired by trees of the tropics that have roots that actually move the tree toward nourishment. The name evokes the metaphor of establishing roots in local communities but maintaining a desire to move and travel. We are confident this field experience embodies the name Walking Tree Travel in many ways.

Juan Pablo Rabanales

As a program leader for Walking Tree Travel, I always aspire to expose students to new experiences and give them the necessary tools to process the experiences. Personally, I consider hands-on learning a key aspect of our programs. Exploring a tropical forest in a foreign country, visiting biological stations, participating in academic research, and getting to know field researchers and how they live their lives, are all experiences that not every student gets to have. I believe these are extremely beneficial and inspirational for their professional and personal development. Other than motivating students to learn about tropical ecology, I also like to push students to reinforce the sense of connections between

cultures and become more conscious of their role as global citizens and actors of change in the world.

Lori McCaffrey

As the collegewide residency coordinator, I collaborate with faculty to create engaging and experiential learning opportunities for students. Our goal is particularly important for students pursuing natural science degrees. Because SUNY Empire State College does not have traditional laboratory facilities, we aim to provide students with opportunities for hands-on field experience through residencies. The Adirondack Environmental Studies Residency and the Ecology and Earth Systems Field Research Residency have allowed students to develop field and laboratory research and analysis skills in environments typical of the Northeast region of the United States. The Costa Rica residency will be the first of its kind at SUNY Empire State College to provide students with science-based experiential learning in an international setting with a rich, biodiverse climate significantly different from New York state. Dr. Woo and Walking Tree Travel have developed an itinerary that will afford students hands-on research, meaningful cultural experiences, and an abundance of opportunities to study unique flora and fauna. I envision Costa Rica's diverse climate, ecotourism and conservation initiatives, history, and culture will allow us to expand the residency in the future to include students and faculty from a variety of disciplines and areas of study. I welcome the challenge of planning an international residency and look forward to collaborating with the experienced and passionate educators at Walking Tree Travel.

Conclusion

International travel opportunities that are associated with academic courses enhance content learning, but also create a transformative experience. As demonstrated from the previous iteration of Tropical Ecology in Panama,

our Costa Rican program intends to replicate these scientific and cultural experiences for all students, particularly those from underrepresented populations in STEM. From our own individual reflections, we also presented a collaboration in which our collective aim was to promote scientific inquiry and sustainable philosophies and practices for global stewardship. It is this lasting impact that we wish for students to expand their personal growth and impart their experiences moving forward.

Notes

- ¹ Kevin Woo (Kevin.Woo@esc.edu) is an associate professor in the Department of Natural Sciences, School of Science, Mathematics, & Technology, SUNY Empire State College. He is based in Manhattan and is also affiliated with the Center for the Study of Pinniped Ecology & Cognition, St. Francis College, Brooklyn Heights, New York. Gabriel Duncan (gabriel@walkingtree.org) is co-founder of Walking Tree Travel, and Juan Pablo "J.P." Rabanales (jp@walkingtree.org) is country director and country operations manager — Costa Rica. Walking Tree Travel is based in Denver, Colorado. Lori McCaffrey (Lori.McCaffrey@esc.edu) is collegewide residency coordinator, SUNY Empire State College, and is based in Saratoga Springs, New York.
- ² Walking Tree Travel: <https://walkingtree.org/>.
- ³ Smithsonian Institute: <https://www.si.edu/>.
- ⁴ Pura Suerte: <http://www.purasuerte.com/>.
- ⁵ Reserva Playa Tortuga: <https://reservaplayatortuga.org/>.
- ⁶ Monteverde Cloud Forest Biological Preserve: <http://cloudforestmonteverde.com/>.

⁷ Center for International Education: <https://www.esc.edu/international-education/>.

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50th Anniversary Reflections

Colleagues from SUNY Empire State College

Our collective work is anchored in a call to “reflection,” so this important milestone — yes, SUNY Empire State College at the half-century mark (and kicking) — offers us a special opportunity to wonder about what we have done and what we have not done, and about what our next half-century commitments should be. As prompts, we welcomed colleagues to respond to three questions: “What is your sense of what the priorities of the college should be as we move forward? What are the values that should shape our work? What is your vision of our college over the next 50 years?” Thanks to those who offered these reflections. As our colleague Richard Bonnabeau wrote, now 25 years ago, may “the promise continue.”

Tanweer Ali, Prague

In recent decades, the dominant discourse on education has been framed by human capital theory, which sees schooling as primarily an ingredient of material success (despite scant empirical evidence). From this point of view, humans are atomized, selfish individuals, factors of production driving ever-increasing corporate profits. In this world, markets reign supreme. Helping people lead fulfilling lives and cementing democratic values on a societal level are assumed to be of little value. Such an instrumentalist view of education is also deeply immoral.

This paradigm must change if we are to avoid sliding into barbarism and meet two massive challenges facing humanity over the next 50 years: the threat of catastrophic climate change and the rise of artificial intelligence. There is a growing awareness of the need to transform the ways in which we live and

work. Education will be vital in preparing us for these changes, promoting human flourishing in the broadest sense.

SUNY Empire State College, with its deep commitment to inclusiveness and accessibility, and its track record of innovation, can play a key role in this transformation. The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies can be a central force in formulating a vision of the relationship between the college’s mission and the world of work in the decades to come.

Ye Chen and Eileen M. Angelini, Saratoga Springs

SUNY Empire State College is a pioneer in adult education and will continue to lead nontraditional learning over the next 50 years. SUNY Empire will become a borderless, smart, intelligent campus for all regardless of one’s location in the world. Our teaching and service will integrate well with innovative technology (e.g., artificial intelligence, automated tools, and big data analytics) to provide flexible and personalized education. Our mascot, Blue, will be a smart and adaptive supporter, communicating effectively and efficiently with our learners. Education may even transform into opportunities offered on an on-demand basis, expanding the flexibility of our degree and certificate programs. SUNY Empire will become the bridge connecting the corporate world with the workforce. The SUNY Empire corporate-academic campus will be the new model of nontraditional higher education — customized by industry fields or a specific corporate partner, as well as by strong employer partnerships to train employees — all leading to a higher quality workforce.

Richard Bonnabeau, Mentor Emeritus, Saratoga Springs

On January 6, 2021, the United States came within a hair’s breadth of losing its republic. While possibly half of the electorate believed that the presidential election had been stolen, the other half did not. Each side was utterly astonished by the supposed irrational thinking of the other. How can both be right or wrong?

So, in this context, what can we — SUNY Empire State College — do before the next national election to further promote right thinking — not left nor right, nor the in-betweens, but evidenced-based critical thinking — about issues that profoundly impact the individual lives of our nation? What then might be our next steps?

I believe that the assault of January 6 is of a much greater magnitude and threat than the tragedy of 9/11, which resulted in noteworthy educative responses by faculty and students. But we should try to do more. Our mentoring ethos already has a laser focus on developing critical thinking skills. With many thousands of graduates and many thousands of enrolled students, is this not the time to think of civic engagement as one of our core values? And starting initially with our college senate (which includes student representatives) and United University Professions [our union], why not create statewide networks with other SUNY campuses (and perhaps other colleges, too) and move on to develop national networks? This must sound extraordinary, even foolhardy. But if democracy is hanging by a thread, what are the other choices? This is not just for us, but for the captives of

autocratic regimes of the world forced to surrender the civil liberties of their birthright.

Val Chukhlomin and Bidhan Chandra, Saratoga Springs

Toward 21st Century Mentoring and State-of-the-Art Online Learning

Just 10 to 15 years ago, SUNY Empire State College was considered a national leader in online learning and a pioneer in adult education, with a range of unique features such as individualized degree planning, prior learning assessment, and faculty mentoring, and it was clearly a rising star in the SUNY system. Since then, the rest of the academia has been quickly catching up. These days, many nontraditional and traditional universities have started targeting the adult learner and developed formidable capacities in online learning. Also, thanks to the unprecedented circumstances forced by COVID-19, many lesser-known or previously less-active players are now emerging as dominant providers of online education. Unfortunately, the college did not pay sufficient attention to the changing marketplace and, as a result, finds itself in a rightsizing situation. We firmly believe that the college has the capacity, including a critical mass of experts, to reinvent itself and regain leadership in adult education and online learning by fully utilizing its human potential and strategically responding to the challenges and opportunities in the current and future marketplace. One way of doing it is to reestablish itself as a premier skills management institution, with customer-friendly and technologically advanced, quick and efficient student service; stackable credentials; professionally recognized and accredited programs; state-of-the-art online programs; and continuous academic innovations.

Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

When I imagine SUNY Empire State College's next 50 years, I hope we continue to meet our amazingly diverse (in all ways) adult students where they are, genuinely engaging them around their interests, goals, hopes, and aspirations. I hope a love for the revered practice of mentoring comes to life in every conversation with a student — in every effort each of us makes to understand, to make meaning, to grow, change, serve, and strengthen our community. I hope we celebrate flexibility, deep care for each other, and the unscripted, reciprocal process of learning together: mentor and student, mentors together, our community as a whole. I also hope that SUNY Empire State College is a celebrated, increasingly well-funded, and unique institution committed to the careful and caring engagement of learning in all its beautiful and complicated aspects. Finally, I pray (in a meditative, not religious way) that SUNY Empire will not be tempted to follow the trends of fast-paced modalities and systems as thin substitutes for what matters the most: a high-quality academic institution where the humanness of teaching, mentoring, and advising are central. Let care, curiosity, and compassion lead us in our next 50 years.

Xenia Coulter, Mentor Emerita, Ithaca

Hope for the Future of SUNY Empire

In today's world, we are awash in readily understood and continuously updated information. We no longer need to worry about our students lacking access to important facts and theories. What if instead faculty, each year, working together, sought to identify specific human behaviors that support the democratic needs of our society and then invented new kinds of learning experiences that strengthen those behaviors in ways that textbooks, exams, and literature reviews do not? For example, today we

see a growing desire for authority — for people in charge to wipe away the conflicts that inevitably result from the complexities of our changing world. Faculty together might conclude that their courses, no matter in what field, should raise questions rather than provide answers, require students to ponder diverse points of view, and help them practice rational and empirical ways of determining their value. With good guidance, students might then become less fearful of uncertainty and more confident in their collective ability to address change. At the end of each year, faculty would analyze whether their courses achieved those ends, make improvements if appropriate, and add activities that help students strengthen whatever other democratic skills faculty deem newly important.

Cathy Davison, Saratoga Springs

When asked what values should shape our work over the next 50 years, Peter Allen's lyrics to "Everything Old Is New Again" from the musical *All that Jazz* immediately came to mind:

Don't throw the pa-ast away
You might need it some rainy day
Dreams can come true again
When everything old is new again
(lines 13-16)

Yes, higher education is changing. Our student body is changing. Should our values change to keep pace? Do they need to change?

Our core values statement (SUNY Empire State College, 2005) is one that is rooted in Dr. Ernest Boyer's vision for a new university college (State University of New York, 1971). This new college would respond to the needs of each student and identify and build upon learning gained outside a traditional college classroom. The promise and possibility of individualized education is one that has always been central to SUNY Empire State College. Let us not forget why many SUNY Empire students choose us — because they

don't see themselves and their learning "fitting" into a preplanned curriculum. They see that they can build upon their prior learning, wherever and however it is gained, to earn a degree that is meaningful to them. Let's be sure that in the next 50 years, SUNY Empire's *raison d'être* is not forgotten.

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David Fullard, Manhattan

Yes, there is a future for SUNY Empire State College and maybe an exemplary one, but only if administrators proceed in a manner that diversifies the faculty, student body, administration, and staff. Let me be perfectly clear: If the college refuses or even drags its feet on creating and implementing a strategy that puts diversity mandates in place immediately, the effort will fall by the wayside and ultimately fail. As part of the strategy, the college must continually take the temperature of the situation and adjust wherever necessary to ensure the desired result. If we are not continually attractive in our diversity, we will not garner the interest of quality and dedicated faculty and staff who share our goals. Those we would like to study at our college will go elsewhere.

I am happy to say that I do see more recent movement toward increasing diversity than I've seen in my past 23 years with the college, but it's not enough and I'm afraid we will miss the boat and fade into obsolescence. I am not just talking about a diversity plan on a piece of paper. I am talking about providing faculty, staff, administrators, and students with very specific and tangible strategies that will help all of us grow within SUNY Empire State College. This will require a distinct, dedicated, committed, and undiluted effort if any positive, noticeable, and significant change is to be realized.

Dana Gliserman Kopans, Saratoga Springs

The Next 50 Years: "Employments for our senses, and subjects for arguments."

I take my title from Margaret Cavendish's 1666 satirical utopian feminist proto-science fiction work *The Blazing World*. It is a capacious work, but the line I'm using here is the plea of the experimental philosophers. Cavendish saw the danger of scientific and technological innovation as a cause of social fragmentation, but these scientists (who were also bears — it's quite a book) were right that experiments and the debates about them are less about the uncovering of truth and more about what is best about the academy: the collective process of knowledge-production. And I've gone back a few hundred years, but Cavendish gave us a road map to the next 50. The world of higher education has done a lot of work to catch up to SUNY Empire in the past year, but we need, nonetheless, to lead; not necessarily in the field of technology, but in teaching our students how to think critically and ethically about it. We need to give our students employment for their senses and subjects for arguments: we must not merely produce workers, we must also improve the world into which we send them. The crises are always already

looming, and we need to be the bold experimenters and philosophers in the service of social justice.

Renata Kochut, Hartsdale

We live in a world of dynamic sociocultural and technological changes. Colleges worldwide must follow them or even precede them to stay relevant in this competitive environment. We can imagine how higher education will follow these changes with e-learning, virtual reality-supporting lectures, and globalization of offerings. We would see more and more programs that offer national and international certificates, programs that are created jointly with external businesses and institutional partners. Colleges would focus more on hands-on experiences that would get students ready for their professional lives. These ideas follow SUNY Empire's (n.d.) mission as a college providing "innovative, flexible and quality academic programs that empower people and strengthen communities" (para. 1). However, there should be a greater emphasis on affordability. According to NCES (2018), in the 1971-1972 academic year, the average undergraduate tuition and required fees charged by 4-year public institutions for full-time students were \$2,579. This price is adjusted for inflation. Currently, students pay four times more! In the 2017-2018 academic year, students were on average paying \$9,037 for a year of a college education. SUNY Empire's mission for the future should focus on providing our education at much lower costs. More students would enroll in higher education institutions, allowing SUNY Empire to better serve underrepresented communities. SUNY Empire can accomplish this by replacing textbooks with open educational resources, engaging with local businesses and institutions to create innovative programs that would allow companies to sponsor students, expanding credit evaluation programs, and leveraging technology to

communicate with students. Students would also benefit by receiving an education without drowning in debt. Society and economies would gain from the money saved or spent on other goods and services.

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Maureen Kravec, Watertown

SUNY Empire State College was founded on the premise that the learner and the learning should be at the center of the educational experience. We were created to serve students' individual needs, no matter where they lived or the constraints they faced about attending classes. Over these 50 years, we have become more technologically advanced and started new programs. Still, as ever, we welcome the cultural diversity and neurodiversity our students bring to us and the contributions they make in their communities. May we continue to learn from one another and respect one another as equals in this journey. May we continue to foster the growth of each individual student through recognizing the skills and learning each brings to the college and offering students opportunities to learn and change. May we continue to remember that achieving a college degree is not only about earning grades and certificates, but also about engaging and solving local and global problems thoughtfully, ethically, and creatively.

Jeannine Mercer, Thessaloniki, Greece

If society views higher education as a path to enlightenment, universities need to provide students with distinctive knowledge and benefits beyond the societal acceptance that a degree provides. If we teach trades and career skills, are we worth our cost as technology looms and we are overwhelmed with information found online? Phones, and soon smart glasses and lenses, are becoming brain appendages, answering our many inquiries and solving complex problems as we move toward biometric wearables and transhumanism. What is and will be lacking is teaching people how to think for themselves, beyond and without the technological tools. I envision a focus on guided think labs, getting back to basics, and teaching students how to ponder and answer the favorite question of toddlers: Why? The broader view will be valued, as we teach students how to pull back and reexamine systems and processes macroscopically. Also, as true experience becomes delinquent among the new generations, our college may seek to find ways to provide experience equivalents.

Diane Perilli, Manhattan

The student-centeredness approach at SUNY Empire sets it apart from other institutions. The desire for opportunities, choices, and flexibility will always be in demand by students. We can replace many tasks with technology, but the benefit of personal touch is lasting. SUNY Empire rises to the challenge of meeting the needs of our diverse student body. Individualized learning happens from individualized teaching, which involves personalized care, attention to detail, and respect. Effective teaching and learning are facilitated with supports, be it academic, technical, or simply words of encouragement. SUNY Empire's holistic approach to education makes the college greater than the sum of its parts.

Amy Ruth Tobol, Brooklyn

Over the 24 years I've been at SUNY Empire, my passion has been providing the individualized mentoring and education that have helped our students succeed. In the future, we need to fully resource our commitment to providing individual attention to every student and to an education that fits their lives. This means offering an education in all modes and providing a welcoming environment for every single student who needs us. Providing this kind of education takes time, labor, and money. We need to find more sustainable sources of income. We barely have the faculty, staff, and technologies we need now to meet student educational needs. We must also address the social needs of our students, providing food for those in a college without cafeterias.

How about this:

Let's get into the manufacturing business! Seriously: small SUNY Empire factories around the state, producing needed goods (3D printers are amazing ... PPE [personal protective equipment]?), generating regular income, new learning opportunities, and internships. Who's with me?

Finally, the future should find us recommitting to Ernest Boyer's [1990] "reconsideration" of scholarship [from his book *Scholarship Reconsidered*], as his ideas are at the root of some of the most innovative and important faculty work. I want our community to celebrate public scholarship, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and other forms of scholarly activities that are different from simply peer-reviewed journals. In the future, all of our faculty should be promoted and tenured using Boyer's ideas as the frame.

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Tina Wagle, Buffalo

While I know this could be misconstrued, I sometimes wish things could go back to the way I feel they were. I miss the intimacy, collaboration, and positive spirit that has made us what we are as a college community.

At the same time, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the strong connections I have made with newer faculty and the importance and energy they bring to the college. I am so pleased to be able to call them colleagues and friends.

Additionally, I cannot stand being the “best kept secret.” We should never be dwarfed by other SUNYs. We need to shine our light. At one time, some of our most innovative ideas were frowned upon by the very institutions that are now copying us. If any institution can do something new and innovative, it is this college. At the same time, we need to be able to sit back and reflect on what is working well and where we can improve. We must take care of what we have and find the space to do that. Growth is important if it is meaningful and targets a need. We should not grow just to grow. So, while we might think we are poised to champion innovative practices, we often fall short on the necessary resources.

In the years ahead, we also have to focus our attention on academic quality. In the most practical sense, we cannot afford to offer less to our students, especially if we are claiming that we are modeling what good teaching practices should be. We need time and space and support to do all of this and to rejuvenate.

Nadine V. Wedderburn, Schenectady

At this moment in the institution's history, SUNY Empire State College has an opportunity to help define and exemplify “academic quality” for the next generation of higher education students, teachers, and administrators. In my mind, academic quality is largely dependent on the quality of curriculum

and instruction. Quality programs consist of well-rounded curricula — grounded in scholarship — that students find relevant, current, and valuable; and, therefore, are programs in which students are more likely to enroll and be successful. As students' interests and curiosities evolve, quality programs demand faculty who practice inclusive pedagogy, promote the exploration of a variety of knowledge sources, and encourage the development of all students' research, critical thinking, and analytical skills. Consequently, priority must be given to making a significant investment in systems and processes that recruit, nurture, and retain a diverse, highly qualified professoriate.

For me, in everything we do, there is only one overriding value: compassion — to ensure that every SUNY Empire State College constituent recognizes each other as fully deserving of their right to be here and succeed here. Evidence of this value will be borne out in all aspects of the institution's life: from facilities to fundraising; communications to curriculum; academic affairs to student affairs; financial resources to human resources; instruction to graduation — across the state and around the world. To do less is to undermine confidence in any other value statement.

My hope is that, throughout the next 50 years, SUNY Empire State College (n.d.) will be going strong and staying true to its mission of providing “access to innovative, flexible and quality academic programs that empower people and strengthen communities” (para. 1).

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SUNY Empire State College. (n.d.). *College mission and vision*. <https://www.esc.edu/about/college-mission/>

Melissa Wells, Staten Island

College students are more diverse in race, ethnicity, and ability than ever before (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, & Chessman, 2019). It is imperative that

higher education is aware of the needs of its students and has a plan and a guiding framework to ensure that all students are provided the supports they need to achieve the high standards of the learning institution. SUNY Empire State College is at the forefront of inclusivity and making sure all students have a seat at the table. This was recently demonstrated by the creation of the Shirley A. Chisholm Center for Equity Studies and The Center for Autism Inclusivity.

Without a framework and support for diverse students, many will not succeed. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), the graduation rates for full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution are 23% for those who identified as Black, 30% for Hispanics, 32% for whites, 36% for Asians, 34% for Pacific Islanders, 27% for American Indians/Alaska Natives, and 25% for those who identified as multiracial. The Statista Research Department (2021) found that the employment rate of persons with a disability in the labor force who had a bachelor's degree or higher was 25.7% in the United States. However, only 7.6% of people who had less than a high school diploma and had a disability were employed in 2020.

SUNY Empire State College has demonstrated its belief in educational equality. By focusing efforts on training faculty and staff in pedagogical efforts to teach and mentor a broad student body of learners, SUNY Empire is making sure everyone gets a seat at the table, now and in the future.

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Christopher Whann, Manhattan

The college has always been a “serve students first” place, and it should always be one. There is too much administrative (and sometimes administrator) detritus interfering with that goal of service. Whether it is individualizing degree plans, opening students’ eyes to new opportunities, or faculty creating chances for students to explore through new programs, groups, or independent studies, or supporting student opportunities, we must focus on students first. Though we don’t always

agree on how to do this, I think the faculty and staff are dedicated to this goal.

There is nothing wrong with restructuring our administrative hierarchy to accomplish our goals better, saying “yes” or “no” to proposed changes in a strategic way, or exploring programmatic opportunities that improve what we do, but the students should always come first. If the changes work, great. If they don’t work, change them again. But never lose sight of why we are here.

“Although the role of the teacher in such unpredictable systems follows no recipe, it is critical: demanding an ongoing awareness of risk and opportunity, a willingness to support students in learning that stretches, that may well unbalance and dis-comfort them; asking that we listen and make — sometimes unmake or remake — decisions in the face of uncertainty, stay present with students and ourselves.”

— Jody Cohen and Anne Dalke, 2019
Steal This Classroom: Teaching & Learning Unbound
Punctum Books, p. 29

College Students and Adults with Developmental Disabilities Compose Nonfiction Nature Writing

Mary Zanfini, Staten Island

Mentor Mary Zanfini wrote the following reflection about her and her students' work with Lifestyles for the Disabled¹ in October 2020 as part of her Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning project, and as a follow-up to her two All About Mentoring articles, "On My 'Bucket List'" (issue 51, winter 2018) and "On 'My Bucket List'" Continued or "How We Have Grown" (issue 53, spring 2020).

In September 2017, SUNY Empire State College formed a partnership with a local day habilitation program called Lifestyles for the Disabled. SUNY Empire belongs to a cohort of colleges across Staten Island that invites adults with developmental disabilities into their college classrooms. Louise Vallario, a special education teacher from Lifestyles, and I collaborated to foster the partnership at SUNY Empire. Our initial course taught poetry to a class of matriculated students from SUNY Empire who were joined by Lifestyles students interested in postsecondary education.

Our first course with Lifestyles focused on the work of Edgar Allan Poe. We composed a body of poetry that we shared through an article in *The New York Times'* The Learning Network on October 25, 2018, titled, "Reader Idea | College Students and Disabled Adults Create Spooky Found Poetry Together."²

We decided our second course would be on nature writing. The first thing to be determined was how we would define "nature journaling." What is it and how do we do it? We decided to look at and strive to emulate some nature writing by American writers. After searching for authors who would be accessible to all our students, we decided on three: Emily

Brontë (her poetry), Emily Dickinson (her envelope poems), and Henry David Thoreau (his journals). All three were, among other things, nature writers.

Next, we had to determine what supplies we needed to craft our nature journals. Money was limited so we purchased blank nature journals, pencils from The Walden Woods Project (which houses the Thoreau Institute),³ magnifying glasses, colored pencils, brushes, and watercolor paints. In the field, the students were also to make use of their cell phone cameras to take photos. Not all the Lifestyles students had the fine motor skills needed to capture what they saw on paper.

We also adapted an idea from "The Vintage Female Birder" blog.⁴ (This is a blog that concentrates on birding in the local community). We would make a "unique tool" from the deadwood found around our homes, tie four sticks together with yarn and make a "frame" to look through. The frame would be used to get students to hone in on one part of the landscape and write about it. We would later discuss why this view was important to them. They would then write about what they had "framed."

We began our first class by defining what nature journaling is and how to go about doing it. That class took place in the third week of January 2020. We distributed the blank nature journals, pencils, and magnifying glasses. I brought in cuttings from my holly bush and a juniper tree. Our first lesson was in observation. We coached the students to employ their senses: to see, touch, and smell the cuttings. We used the following prompts to stimulate ideas: Do these cuttings remind you of anything? How do they feel? How do they smell? Then we asked the students

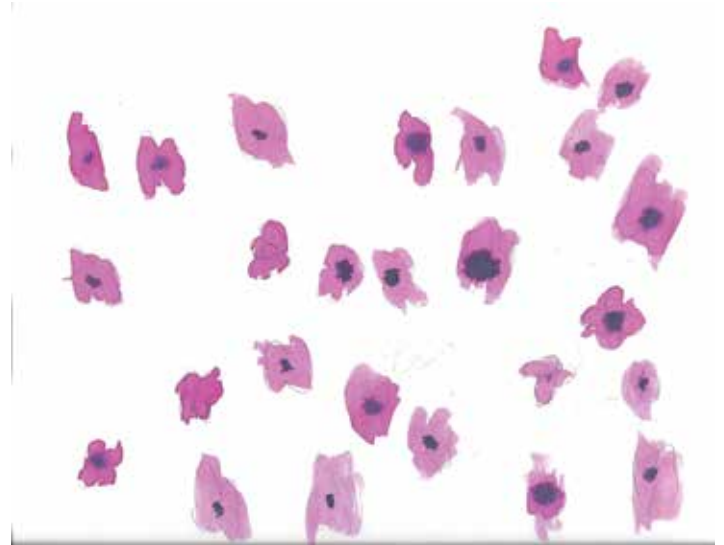
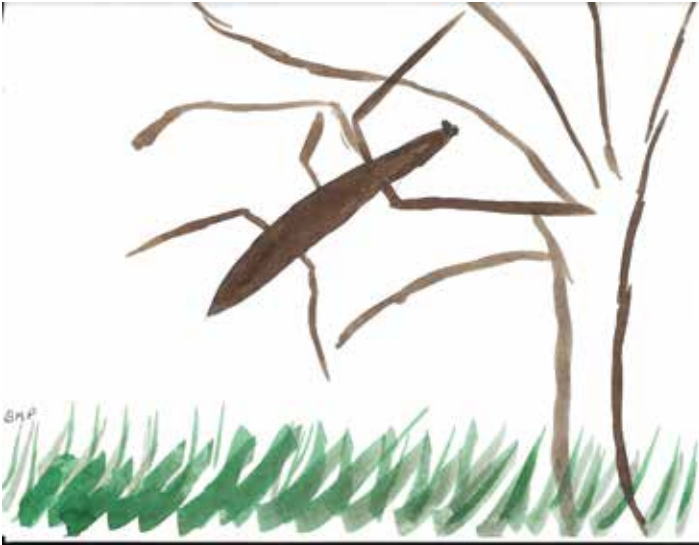


Mary Zanfini

to compare the two cuttings. We used our magnifying glasses to take a more detailed look at the holly and juniper cuttings. We then asked the students to record their observations in their journals. The SUNY Empire students primarily assisted the Lifestyles students during this exercise.

The students began with writing their observations and then moved on to "illustrating" what they observed. Some students made drawings, others made rubbings of the samples with their pencils, and some taped their samples into their journals. We emphasized that there are no rules or limits for how one journals about nature. Journals can be simple observations or can contain personal reflections about how the writer feels being in nature. The initial lesson seemed to be a success. We planned a field trip to Blue Heron Park⁵ on Staten Island for the following class.

Blue Heron was chosen because it has an indoor Nature Center (it was still January and we needed a place to stay warm) and some of its trails are flat.



We would all be able to move around easily on the Red trail, including one student whose wheelchair could be rolled down this path without difficulty. The park also has outside tables where we could work on our journals. We met at the park at 3:30 p.m. The students (and teachers) were excited about our first outing together.

We started in the main room of the Nature Center. It was packed full of different artifacts to look at, read about, and write about. Everyone spread out, took out their journals and pencils, and got to work. At the front of the center were some live turtles native to Staten Island. We observed the beautiful patterns on their shells; some of the

students began to draw the shells in their journals. Other students took photos. Sgt. Ghanim Khalil, our park ranger, told us interesting facts about the turtles and let the students hold them. This generated a lot of interest. I was surprised at how easily our students sprang into journaling!

Other park rangers joined us. They showed us the fish tank, a corn snake, and walking sticks — camouflaged insects. We were charmed by the antics of the walking sticks. Some students were entranced by the beauty of the snake. We moved into the next room, which had large picture windows that looked out onto bird feeders. As we stood gazing out of the windows, some

students picked up binoculars left on the windowsill for bird watching. Students began to exclaim, "Look, look!" I turned but at first couldn't see anything because my eyes aren't so great anymore. I then saw and heard a downy woodpecker. Sgt. Khalil explained that the woodpeckers hadn't left for warmer climates yet because our winter was so mild. We marveled that there were still bugs around for the woodpecker to eat. Later we saw a cardinal, a blue jay, some crows, sparrows, finches, and a hawk. Everyone got busy taking photos. The birds stayed active and didn't seem to notice us behind the window. After this little show, we stayed until it began to get dark. What a wonderful time we had

on our first journey into the field. We never did get out onto the Red Trail but we planned to come back another time to give it a chance.

The following week in class we shared what we had learned and what we had written in our journals. Louise and I introduced the concept of “picture poems” and described how to create them. Picture poetry is simply a photo with a poem written on it. Two art forms are combined to create the picture poem. One of my SUNY Empire students shared picture poems she had already crafted and explained her creative process. Everyone agreed to work on one picture poem each for the next week. Their journals were beginning to take shape!

The first nature writer we studied was Emily Dickinson. We learned about Emily Dickinson’s life. I showed the class some of her “envelope poems.” We discussed her creative process. We found a PDF containing samples of her envelope poems⁶ and studied them. Why envelopes? In the 1800s, paper was expensive, and the frugal Emily made use of every scrap, even discarded envelopes. Emily, a 19th century New Englander, recycled! She composed her poems on these used scraps of paper. All the better for the environment. After this discussion, the students were ready to tackle their own envelope poems. I gave them some envelopes and they began to work.

At this point, we decided to organize an overnight field trip. This was something we had not done before. In our last course, we visited the Edgar Allan Poe Cottage⁷ museum in the Bronx. An overnight trip was a much more challenging undertaking. Each term, we try to add experiences to the class that college students typically have the opportunity to do. This year, we set our sights on the Emily Dickinson Museum⁸ in Amherst, Massachusetts. I applied to my union, United University Professions (UUP), for Individual Development Award funds to make a

“preview visit” and scope out the trip in advance. I was granted the funds. Next, we had to gain permission from Lifestyles to make the trip. Lifestyles agreed to seek funding for our outing. Parents and guardians were delighted for the Lifestyles students to make the trip. We received the funding from the state and then found two van drivers, as well as a nurse to administer medications to the Lifestyles students while we were traveling.

The Emily Dickinson Museum agreed to provide a private tour of the museum and let us take photos of ourselves in Emily’s parlor holding our envelope poems. We also secured a private tour of the gardens at the site. Our visit was scheduled for the first week of April. Unfortunately, things then rapidly deteriorated. The COVID-19 virus began snaking its way through the City of New York. The museum contacted us in March to let us know the museum would be closing due to the pandemic. We debated about how to tell our students that their “dream trip” would not take place. We decided to be optimistic about it and told them that the trip had been postponed. We assured them that the trip would take place at a later date.

Soon after that, SUNY Empire stopped in-person classes. A week later, Lifestyles closed its doors. We decided to keep the class going and meet virtually. This transition was problematic. Adapting took some time for the Lifestyles students to navigate. After Lifestyles closed, there was a scramble to make sure that Lifestyles students and SUNY Empire students had the necessary technology to continue. Computers were ordered and delivered to students who needed them. The real sticking point was teaching the Lifestyles students to use technology ... at a distance. For example, they had to learn to log onto Zoom. They struggled with the technology. Through the help, patience, and dedication of Louise, we were later able to have nature writing sessions virtually. We relied on the

families of the Lifestyles students to help, too. A lot of patience was needed but it got done. In the meantime, I was tasked with creating a new curriculum that would work in this format.

I developed my lesson plans so our Lifestyles students could appreciate the nature available to them through their windows and in their yards. We narrowed our focus to take in nature one flower or one bird at a time. We told the SUNY Empire and Lifestyles students about a “time-lapsing technique” that seemed to stimulate many of them. The idea is to focus on one part of a garden, describe what happens to it over time, and record the changes in the journal. My SUNY Empire students were no longer there to help the Lifestyles students in person because of the pandemic. But the Lifestyles families and staff stepped up to help with the work. Each week, we read from our journals and shared our insights. One week, we took a virtual nature walk through Central Park by sharing a video made by the Central Park Conservancy.⁹ We had a great time and talked about what we saw in our Zoom meetings. The Lifestyles students had to write in their journals for homework. During this time, we were interviewed by Mary Pannese, Meredith Arout, and Jennifer Romano, reporters from Life-Wire News Service. Our work from this class appeared in a piece in the local paper, *The Staten Island Advance*.¹⁰

This experience was often trying. Tragically, some participants at Lifestyles died. Many of the deceased had Down syndrome and their hearts were too weak to fight off the COVID-19 virus. We lost the director of the Lifestyles college learning partnership program when that wonderful gentleman, Scott Salinardi, passed away during the pandemic. How to move on? How do we handle our grief? As any teacher knows, you cannot fail to mention a tragedy unfolding around you. Louise and I decided to try to deal with the deaths in a positive way. We asked the Lifestyles students to write testimonials to Scott, who they

loved deeply. We put together a written memorial tribute, which we intend to share with his family. Meanwhile, we continued to write poetry ... lots and lots of poetry. The creation of poetry helped us grapple with the grief by finding words to express our thoughts and emotions. In turn, we shared our work in our virtual classroom week after week. It helped us all to be "together." It gave us a purpose.

Stopping was not an option. Sometimes we limped along, tired from the lockdown, anxious from our fears. Other times we laughed about something that lightened our hearts. We were human together. Together ... that is the way to make it through this pandemic with

something worthwhile ... our poetry and our memories. We expect to continue with our virtual nature writing course next term and, if COVID-19 cooperates, finally make our overnight trip. SUNY Empire students will again join us in this unique journey of discovery and sharing. I look forward to it.

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.lfdsi.org/>.
- ² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/learning/reader-idea-college-students-and-disabled-adults-create-spooky-found-poetry-together.html?searchResultPosition=1>.
- ³ <https://www.walden.org/>.

- ⁴ <https://thevintagefemalebirder.wordpress.com/2013/06/29/stick-frame-nature-crafts/>.
- ⁵ <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/blue-heron-park>.
- ⁶ <https://literaryinfrastructures.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/dickinsonenvelopepoems.pdf>.
- ⁷ <http://bronxhistoricalsociety.org/poe-cottage/>.
- ⁸ <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>.
- ⁹ <https://www.centralparknyc.org/>.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.silive.com/togethersilive/2020/05/escape-that-pent-up-feeling-through-nature-journaling.html>.

Student Poetry

Megan S.

I feel crazy, when they are impatient with me,
I am going as fast as I can
People should be thankful
I don't like injustice, such as racism/bullying
and meanness of people by others,
I tried to teach them how not to be
I used to but not anymore, lastly, I don't like Creepy people
They make me nervous; I get mad when
I feel stalked. It is a good thing I don't feel angry.

Jenna

About Love

I love my Mom and she makes me happy
Like a beautiful rose.
I love my Dad he makes me happy
Like a bird singing.
I love my twin sisters; they make me happy
Like the butterflies.
I love my Grandma she makes me happy
Like the pretty lady bugs.
I love my Grandpa and Grandma they make me happy
Like a sunny beach day.
I love my friends from "Lifestyles" they make me happy
Like a unicorn.

Ling

I love the appearance of flowers
And the smell of flowers.
I like to go to the Brooklyn Botanical
Gardens.
There are thousands of flowers
In the garden to enjoy.
There are pink and blue and lavender flowers.
Flowers on a sunny Spring Day.
I also love when the flowers blossom.

Elisa L.

Love

He makes me feel safe.
He is my heart.
He worries about me a lot.
He makes me happy.
He is my heart.
He calls me to be sure I'm safe and happy
He is my heart.
He made a nice home for me.
He is my heart
He is my husband and I love him forever.

Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Project Summaries

IMTL Fellows 2019-2020

The Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL), offered by the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI), provides time and support to those who mentor, teach, or are involved in research or resource development relevant to teaching and learning, for pursuing projects that enhance their mentoring and teaching practices. The following are short descriptions of some of the project outcomes that were part of IMTL 2019-2020. Other projects were pursued by the following individuals and groups: Rebecca Eliseo-Arras and Jenny Mincin; Carolina Kim; JoAnn Kingsley, Debra Kram-Fernandez, Anamaria Ross, Bhuwan Onta, and Stacey Gallagher; Renata Kochut; Norine Masella, Jennifer Nettleton, and Bridget Nettleton; Norine Masella and Kim Stote; Daniel McCrea and Mike Fortune; Anne McDonough; Diane Perilli; and Betty Wilde-Biasiny. More information about IMTL can be found at <https://www.esc.edu/cmlai>. We are excited that IMTL is part of our academic program each year.

Jennifer Nettleton, Jacqueline Michaels, Lynn McNall, and Kim Stote

“School of Nursing and Allied Health (SONAH) Online Teaching Resources”

As an IMTL project beginning in 2017, an online repository was developed to organize teaching resources in a meaningful way so that faculty and adjuncts can efficiently access information needed to teach courses within the SONAH.

The repository is housed in Moodle with a total of five modules containing a wide array of pertinent information such as the college’s mission, core values, best practices in online teaching and mentoring, resources (library, student

services, textbooks), and links to the faculty handbook and college catalog. In addition, there is information related to the SONAH, such as policies and procedures, course design and layout, technology tips, and grading procedures (rubrics, incompletes, etc.). The repository was originally made available during the spring 2019 term.

Lynette Nickleberry Stewart

“Designing 8-week Courses: A Template”

This handbook is grounded in an extensive review of the research and practices in accelerated learning (AL). Many of the suggestions can be applied to full-term courses of any modality and across disciplines. Scholars of adult student experiences in accelerated courses recommend that administrators and instructors ground programmatic and course development in the theory, principles, and methods of accelerated learning for best results. This is a dynamic resource, intended to respond to changes in SUNY Empire policies, practices, and technologies, as well as innovative insights from new research, your experiences, and the experiences of our students. [Note: The text of the handbook is provided in this issue of *All About Mentoring*.]

Kymn Rutigliano

“Wisdom From the Horses: Vital Lessons About Leadership and Life”

Horses are master teachers with rich guidance about emotional intelligence, resilience, and navigating crisis situations. As a result of this project, I am enriching my courses with lessons from the herd for students studying leadership and management.

Nan Travers, Amanda Treadwell, Sarah McMichael, Bernard Smith, and Leslie Ellis

“Continuing the Story: iPLA From Faculty and Student Perspectives”

Our ongoing project is to learn more about the iPLA (individualized prior learning assessment) process through mentor and student experiences. In past years, we looked at retention data for iPLA students, as well as faculty and student surveys to learn more about their iPLA experiences. We will continue this work by conducting focus groups to learn more about faculty experiences mentoring iPLA students and supporting them through the process.

Thomas Kerr

“Pursuing Liberal Credit for Labor Leaders Using iPLA: A Model and a Framework”

This cycle marked the completion of a major project: “An Individualized Prior Learning Assessment (iPLA) Request Development Workbook for Labor Leaders: Using the Threshold Learning Model.” Between 2017-2020, I worked with the supportive IMTL network on what began as a notion to “leverage learning,” like prying against a fulcrum helping to lift student knowledge. Now I theorize a “double reflective” in iPLA request essay writing, allowing the value of prior, present, and future knowledge equally. Thresholding recognizes students’ needs and abilities to start their reflective process at the experience, experiential, and college-level learning phases of the iPLA work. Thanks, IMTL.

**Nan Travers, Susan Oaks,
Michele Forte, Pat Pillsworth,
Marie Pennucci, Margaret Sithole,
Tom McElroy, Bhuwan Onta,
and Debra Kram-Fernandez**

**“(PLA Resource Site) Educational
Planning and PLA Resource Exchange”**

The PLA Resource Site will house resources and tools to help faculty, staff, and evaluators work with PLA (prior learning assessment) students. The team collected and curated PLA information from within and outside of the college in order to have one place where all the information can be found. This site will be located in Microsoft Teams and is organized by different areas of PLA, for example, working with students, different types of PLA, etc.

Allison Moreland

**“Universal Design for Learning:
Improving Learning for All”**

My goal was to write an article on universal design for learning (UDL) for *All About Mentoring*. It was published in

the most recent issue of the journal (no. 54). The idea for the article stemmed from a presentation I gave at the 2018-2019 IMTL residency on UDL. I have made UDL a focus of my work in instructional design as its goal is to create instructional content that is more inclusive of all students.

Linda S. Jones

**“Adult Learners and Undergraduate
Science: Participation and Perceptions”**

My project was a continuation of the project that I began as the 2018-2019 Susan H. Turben Chair in Mentoring. The focus was to identify barriers, related to science courses, to adult learners and to develop learning models that address those barriers. The learning models integrate interdisciplinary design, citizen science, student-directed learning, and project-based/experiential learning and were used to design the Principles of Environmental Sustainability course. The goals of the models are to support

student success and increase retention in science courses and to support lifelong, self-directed study in science.

Karen LaBarge

**“Completing the Transition:
The CMLAI SharePoint Site”**

After the CMLAI website content moved into SharePoint, I worked on reorganizing the various pages and resources into sections that mimic the original concept. The large “Mentoring, Teaching and Learning” section of the site (which contains areas on Mentoring Essentials, Working with Students, Academic Issues, Planning Degrees, Ways to Study, and Evaluating Learning) was the main focus of my IMTL project and needed special attention including updated text and links. After my initial work at the residency, I reached out to the CMLAI team and others for the latest information and continue to work on making this section reflective of CMLAI’s mission and responsive to the needs of new and experienced mentors.

Creative Expressions: Poets Among Us

Colleagues from SUNY Empire State College

The tradition of poetry reading (indeed, writings of all kinds) has been vital to our community. At the annual All College Conference, Fall Academic Conference, and more recently through Creative Expressions, colleagues have shared their writings. Thanks to Nicola Marae Allain, Lisa D'Adamo-Weinstein, Elaine Handley, Mindy Kronenberg, Kymn Rutigliano Harvin, and Tom Kerr — poets among us — for offering us these words and helping us celebrate the arts.

Nicola Marae Allain

Out of the Box

I sense
subtle transformations
in the quality
of everyday experience
and sensibilities.

Awareness
of a deeper part
of myself
has taken root
in the ground
of my being.

Daily meditations
clean my brain,
removing clutter
accumulated
by absorbing
stress of others
transmitted through
computer screens
and electronic
communications.

The refresh
is a reboot,
wiping memory,
deleting excess
information
and unnecessary
data, putting
me back
to a pristine state,
where I began.

Unlearning

If I learned
how to listen,
would I
suddenly see
words
unspoken?
Would the trees
tell me
how to care
for land
and life
long neglected
by beings
who
abandoned
senses and
sensibilities?
If I learned
how to see,
would I
somehow hear
the calls
of creatures
longing for
the space
to survive?
If I learn
to speak,
could I share
the wonders
of a wild
world
wanting desperately
to live
but slowly dying
because we have all forgotten
how to be?

Lisa D'Adamo-Weinstein

Broken, for today

Today I need to be broken
And sit amongst the shards of my own
making
Critiquing each piece
Coddling every sliver
Mourning the shape they once
collectively formed

But, I am not really mourning
I relish in the shatters
Of what was constrained in fixed
existence

I welcome the release of
The wet mess of feelings
The sound of blood pounding
The awareness of being
The freedom of breathing

I like not being the "strong one"
Not being "ok" for everyone else
Absorbing the possibilities being broken
brings
The alliteration of allowing
Celebrating what is yet to come

Broken is not final
Broken is not negative
Broken is a relief
Broken is a gift
Broken is an opportunity

Broken, for today

Elaine Handley
QUARANTINE 2020

I
 Wake to spring's panic dreams news fever.
 Big snowflakes like a white virus infect the ground
 while birds' new librettos go viral.
 Our lives dwindle in harsh germ mystery.

II
 Spring's late, so much to do
 it forgets to get things going:
 buds sealed tight, no mud,
 the snow stays too long.
 But the light — it comes as it should,
 it must, and the cold
 is dazzled by arias from the sun.

III
 It is hard to breathe deeply when you think: ventilator.
 It is hard to breathe when a knee is on your neck.
 It is hard to watch the news while crying.
 It is hard to rock a baby you cannot hold.
 It is hard to say goodbye to your mother over the phone.

IV
 Morning's bloodshot eye opens
 to no taste for winter's news death.
 Epidemic Fever contagion —
 what symptoms might today have?

The wind's funeral song is just outside the door.

CHICKEN LOVE

She has posted herself
 by the backdoor
 in love and waiting.
 Poking her head in the window,
 she startles guests.

When he leaves the house
 she hops down from her perch
 to follow him around,
 purling and muttering her chicken love,
 telling him everything, *everything*.
 This summer she was just one
 fluffy chick who came in the mail.

He feeds her scraps from dinner,
 sunflower seeds meant for other birds.
 Come the snowstorm
 he says he can't bear it
 her feathers glistening with ice
 snow making her a little hat
 as she holds her vigil.

Cooped up with fowl company,
 I imagine she dreams
 of how she will stalk him,
 trail him into the garden, cluck to him
 at the woodpile, settle on her perch
 again by the back door.
 These cold February days
 there is no one waiting for him
 when he takes stale bread to the feeder.

I have come to think his is a roostery love
 we can share. Besides, what accounts
 for who loves who, who erases the sorry aches
 of loneliness, who makes a place
 feel like home?

Mindy Kronenberg
Archeology

What is the evidence of love, really?
A small heartbeat
hidden in the frills
of a rescued seashell,

The glimmer of sun
glowing in a bowl
of arranged stones?
Sometimes a lost object
protrudes from a pocket,
pinches a finger
drawing blood, bringing
the tongue to taste the wound.

Other times a pebble rolls
in the toes of a shoe, never
embedding or escaping,
growing in size until removed.

And what of hair
clinging to an old coat,
its color brighter than remembered,
a single strand pulled from

a sleeve that hangs in a dark
and quiet space where,
undisturbed, it remains
in embrace.

Scarfig Poetry

(inspired by Mark Strand)

I am sipping poetry, a polite gesture of the lips
and throat, feeling it glide down my gullet
and vanish like fine wine or perfumed tea.

But then I grow peckish, crave words
that are sticky and sweet, *petite fours*
that crunch like brightly colored candy in my teeth.

The mouth wants what it wants:
my tongue seeking verse with a craved dissonance
of sour and salt, a brave confession whose voice persists

which brings on the hunger for savory
songs of the ancient world, long juicy tales
with blood, gristle, and fat, my jaws tearing at the pages.

Can this longing ever be sated?
I wash it all down with a sibilant spill
of saucy and spicy slang, a smooth burn of Beat,

relish the echo of all I've imbibed,
nibbled, and devoured, the flavors
raging on my tongue, tingling in my bloodstream.

Kymn Rutigliano Harvin
STOP.

Just stop.

Doing so much.

Racing around so much.

Amassing so much.

Worrying so much.

Fearing so much.

Fighting so much.

Complaining so much.

Destroying so much.

Denying so much.

Ignoring so much.

Wasting so much.

You know what to stop.

You know.

And now I am giving you permission to do what you have long
wanted to do and feared you could not ... STOP.

The world will not come to an end if you stop.

It may, in fact, begin again. Newly.

Life begins anew when we stop. Yes, it does.

Now, will you stop?
(pp. 17-18)

LISTEN.

With your whole being, listen.

To the spaces between the words.

The lines in between.

The whispers that have your best interest at heart.

Stop. Quiet. Listen.

Open where you have been closed.

Invite a conversation.

Listen for the still, small voice.

Consider that the caliber of listening has a great deal to do
with the caliber of speaking.

For you to clearly hear my voice takes more than superficial,
give-it-to-me-quick, can-you-put-that-in-a-tweet kind of
listening.

Listen as if you are on an airplane with its engine on fire and
the flight attendant is telling what you need to do to survive.

Listen as if your life is at stake — because it is.

I will tell you — and all who ask — what you need, not just to
survive, but to thrive.

Please listen.

What will help you listen with your whole being?
(pp. 20-21)

Reprinted with permission of the author. Harvin, K. (2020). *The soul of America speaks: Wisdom for healing and moving forward*. Capucia Publishing.

Thomas Kerr

Struggling Over a Giant Baby Called the Golden Pagoda of Democracy in a Nation at Risk of Losing Hope and Happiness (for Nandar)

Let's start with a lordly Prince who witnessed a struggle between a mother and a giant demon, each tugging on the arms of a baby held over hot flames. The Prince decreed the winner to be the maintainer of control over the baby.

The mother, unable to bear the sight of her screaming, suffering child, relinquished her grip saving his crimson hide. The demon was visibly filled with delight. To the Prince he turned for a prize, to be reprimanded.

Bring out your knives, your injurious cutlery, all you mothers, cease banging pots end solidarity, stand down barricades boys and girls universities are unnecessary. Shots into homes, tear-gas in hospitals, triage units in elementary schools.

Jets bomb the highlands, virus swamps the lowlands, all now diseased. The Lady unseen, the President and cabinet imprisoned it seems, Dr. Sa Sa is on TV. Clarissa Ward, CNN, embedded with the Tatmadaw: our Eichmann, her Jerusalem?

A CJ captures on video cam the bloodshed of a fallen man, gunshot into helmet head. People run into the bullets, a General said. Warn the deceased, listen to the dead. A witness shouts in the street: *my son, my son, see me watching you.*

Then from behind a wall a baby walks into the street. With each step the baby grows. He walks along the wall, toward the dying boy. Holds him in his arms. The giant demon observes this tender act, commands Unit 33 to kill more innocents.

Monks ask for alms, are gifted spent shell casings used and recovered by police, while the baby, now a giant being of impermanence, contemplates a challenge: acting with compassion begets increased violence, capitulation increases uncertainty.

The Prince had told the giant demon he would win a prize, the prize was not the child for the demon will not win what is not wanted to be cared for, to be loved, for only a mother can love. Demons eat children by nature, mothers nurture children.

But look upon this another way: she brought an end to her baby's suffering, he lived briefly with the giant demon, gained from its spirit power, feared not in face of warfare loved others to end their suffering in his arms. This is the meaning of compassion.

Now between unwashed curbs and wishful stars stands a giant baby. Swaddled in golden leaf, pagoda-like, who began crying over burning coals enflamed in history, moving forward with karma, circling toward a popularity.

There'll be no final line to this poem, a tribute to imprisoned poets, whose voices — such a foreign a concept in Western font — the power of a poem to inspire hearts. Nature versus nurture, the karma of the army.

Can the baby stop a civil war? That's to be decided. Face the demon, find its mother, return the vote to people, bring back balance to society. Is that a fair request, demons on our backs, cradling babies in our arms?

Promises Made, Promises Kept?

Ed Warzala, Saratoga Springs

A Review of:

The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission

By Herb Childress

"As for the hands, each man knew that there was no chance of obtaining work anywhere else at present; there were dozens of men out of employment already. Besides, even if there had been a chance of getting another job somewhere else, they knew that the conditions were more or less the same on every firm. Some were even worse than this one."

— Robert Tressell (2012, p. 221; original work published 1914)

Tressell's turn of the century novel described the lives, trials, uncertainties, and fears of wage laborers of the early 20th century. The work of adjuncts and part-timers of the 21st century is, ironically, as uncertain and fearful as the lives of Tressell's painters, plumbers, carpenters, and common laborers. Childress (2019) captures the emotional suffering and the social relations of nontenure-track faculty. The social relations of adjuncts are determined by the overall structure of employment in higher education systems. Just as Tressell's skilled tradesmen were needed when their services were in demand, so too are the services of the "adjunct underclass." When enrollments decline or budgets are cut, contingent and part-time faculty become relatively expendable. This is the larger context within which adjunct faculty commonly find themselves. The adjunct underclass includes all nontenured and nontenure-track (NTT) faculty. Nationwide, approximately half of all college teaching is conducted by NTT faculty. "In fall 2018, of the

1.5 million faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 54 percent were full time and 46 percent were part time. Faculty include professors, associate professors, assistant professors, instructors, lecturers, assisting professors, adjunct professors, and interim professors" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020, para. 1). The numbers of NTT and part-timers are growing. From 2008-2009 to 2018-2019, the growth in NTT faculty increased in public baccalaureate institutions. In that decade, NTT FT faculty increased from 10.4% to 24.7% of full-time faculty. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2019). In sum, the growth in NTT faculty is trending upward while tenure-track positions are declining.

Even though the faculty employment system depends upon the adjunct underclass, the adjunct underclass cannot, in the same way, depend on the faculty employment system. The social relations within higher education are based in economics, even though the functioning of higher education is informed by a spirit of humanism, liberalism, community, and collegiality. All ranks and titles, departments and offices, programs and schools in higher education are interconnected dialectically within a higher education system, and each leg of the system is interdependent in the enterprise of college teaching and learning. However, not all integral parts are permanent and secure and some parts are expendable. In describing the value of his book for those contemplating the academic profession, Childress (2019) asserts, "This is the book my family should have had when they considered sending me to college. It's the book I should have had when I considered graduate school. It's the book that grows from the fundamental question of what college is, what college teaching is and why

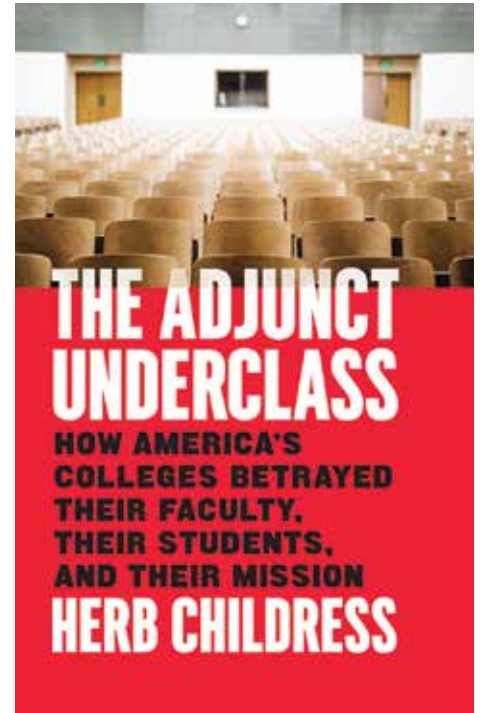


Image credit: University of Chicago Press

some participants — both students and teachers — are secure while others remain ever uncertain" (p. 18). To his great credit, Childress is able to capture and communicate the human costs and indignities of the contingent faculty employment system that is operative in higher education today. Through interviews with contingent faculty, postdoctoral researchers, graduate students, and college administrators, Childress captures the relational nature of contingent faculty life. Quotes from these interviews punctuate the chapters to remind the reader of the indignities, disappointments, and suffering experienced within the faculty employment system. Part-timers and NTTs interviewed by Childress live in a world of uncertainty and disrespect and may have feelings of being undervalued and invisible.

In 2020, when college budgets were endangered by the COVID-19 crisis, contingent faculty quite predictably

became one of the first “line items” earmarked for budget cuts. The more contingent faculty employed by any institution, the more hurt and fear of uncertainty permeate the community that colleges aspire to be. It is not just the colleague we know whose life and family are thrown into uncertainty when budgets are deeply cut, but rather it is the entire ecosystem of social relations that exist within a college community. Full-time, tenured faculty colleagues find themselves powerless to lend any fundamental assistance to valued colleagues, except to voice advocacy, sympathy, and understanding. Survivor’s guilt may accompany powerlessness for tenured faculty. Administrators, most of whom serve at the pleasure of a president, must dutifully supply the lists of those who stay and those who go. Collegiality and personal friendships become collateral damage and some contingent faculty simply resign and withdraw their many contributions from the community. No matter how administrators respond to a budget crisis, no one will be happy. Budgets drive decisions that no one wants to make and inevitably the “instructional budgets” — our friends and colleagues — pay more than their share. A shock to the system like the COVID-19 crisis devastates college communities, and in turn the human beings who work together collegially on every campus.

The allure of the academy is seductive and membership in an academic community is a powerful motivator for the graduate students and doctoral candidates steeped in the ethos of teaching and mentoring. Doctoral programs cannot sufficiently prepare students for the uncertainties of the employment market they will likely face. Childress (2019) warns, “Adjuncting can be pretty awful work. Low pay, no benefits, no security, no intellectual freedom. Why would anybody ever do it? Where do all the serfs come from to work their overlords’ estate?” (p. 51). The simple and partial answer is that the faculty labor market is flooded

with new, highly qualified candidates for whom tenure-track jobs are in short supply. As an example, citing The National Science Foundation’s Survey of Earned Doctorates, Childress reports the creation of “3,765 new Ph.D.s in psychology in 2014. These people entered a hiring pool that *The Chronicle of Higher Education’s* JobTracker research project estimated at 326 tenure-track positions at four-year schools for the 2013-14 academic year. That’s one faculty job for every eleven and a half new scholars” (p. 52). The structural glut in newly minted Ph.D.s can be traced to the abundance of Ph.D.-granting programs and Ph.D.-granting institutions that continue to churn out many more qualified candidates than the market for tenure-track faculty can ever absorb.

Ironically, universities create the flooded academic job market and are complicit in the frustrations and human suffering that are so central to Childress’s arguments. In 1973, there were 286 Ph.D.-granting institutions with 33,755 degrees awarded. By 2018, with declining demand for college faculty, 431 Ph.D.-granting institutions turned out 55,195 new Ph.D.s. (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2019). This is the fundamental explanation for the creation of the adjunct underclass and the business model that has emerged in higher education. “But some people do get jobs, after all. Some people win the lottery, too, which is what keeps us in line at the mini-mart” (Childress, 2019, p. 53). The particularly American myth that with hard work anything can be achieved, especially when combined with a university system that overproduces faculty reserve labor, perpetuates a dynamic that ends for too many in frustration and broken promises.

Many contingent faculty depend completely on the income from college teaching, and some, driven by the economic realities of their lives and the work they are educated to do, teach at multiple colleges and may never be fully included in the life of

any one campus community. Those contingent faculty who work on annual contracts and whose positions are stable under normal budget conditions become as vulnerable as adjuncts at times of budgetary crisis. Tenured and tenure-track faculty may also become responsible for taking on additional sections and extend their normal teaching loads beyond negotiated levels. Budget cuts are alienating and dehumanizing for everyone in the institution, including the administrators charged with identifying which faculty colleagues stay and which ones go. In 2020, a year like no other, the COVID-19 health crisis cascaded through the global economy and higher education could not escape. It is not yet entirely clear how higher education will emerge from the crisis and whether COVID-19-driven broad changes will permanently transform higher education and the faculty employment system now in existence. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the pandemic will lead to a more stable, more secure college employment system for contingent faculty. More likely, colleges will become reluctant and less able to increase the numbers of tenure-track hires as the global and national economies begin recovery from the health crisis. From everything I have

“The particularly American myth that with hard work anything can be achieved, especially when combined with a university system that overproduces faculty reserve labor, perpetuates a dynamic that ends for too many in frustration and broken promises.”

seen to date, adjunct, part-timers, and other contingent faculty have been harmed or are at risk due to COVID-19-related cuts or the threat thereof. "Since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic, the U.S. Labor Department estimates that American academic institutions have shed a net total of at least 650,000 workers, according to preliminary, seasonally adjusted figures. ... Put another way, for every eight workers employed in academe in February 2020, at least one had lost or left that job 10 months later" (Bauman, 2021, para. 2). Whether the increase in the use of adjuncts and part-timers continues in the next decade remains to be seen, but if I were wagering, I'd say the higher education "industry" will seize the opportunity to hire and further exploit nontenured faculty. Higher education is, after all, big business.

Because public colleges are critically dependent on government funding, their financial stability is directly tied to the fortunes of their states. Difficult decisions forced on college administrators become resource-driven, and if cuts are deep enough, the human resources essential to fulfill a college's mission may be sacrificed. Budget cuts destroy the morale of the entire campus community when contingent colleagues face unemployment and the loss of membership in the collective effort to serve students. Adjunct lecturers tend to be "on call" to cover sections when demand dictates, and may find themselves waiting by the phone when enrollments decline. In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis set in motion a widespread economic retraction across all sectors of the economy, including higher education. Elite private institutions, as well as community colleges and everything in between, have been shocked by a health crisis completely out of their control. The largest comprehensive public university system in the country, the State University of New York (SUNY), is facing up to 25% cuts in state contributions to operating budgets, throwing SUNY campuses into

budgetary crisis mode (Vielkind, 2020). The loss of on-campus housing revenues places residential campuses at especially high risk, as does a common decision of students to extend gap years beyond a single year before returning to residency on campus.

Budgets in public higher education have declined over the course of the last decade while costs have risen, forcing institutions to reduce the numbers of tenure-track lines in favor of hiring more contingent faculty and adjuncts. College administrators are not to blame for budget cuts as potentially devastating as those caused by the COVID-19 crisis, but they are responsible for the emotional well-being and treatment of valued and loyal colleagues who hold contingent appointments. Budget deficiencies are cold, hard facts that administrators must manage, but they must also remain cognizant of and sensitive to the emotional consequences of their decisions and the human costs of employment uncertainty.

In Childress's (2019) tone throughout the book, there is no small degree of bitterness about the system that deprived him of his appointment to a tenure-track teaching position, but it is not until after the final chapter that the reader learns of the professional frustration and emotional resignation of the author.

But the grief of not finding a home in higher ed — of having done everything as well as I was capable of doing, and having it not pan out ... of being told over and over how well I was doing and how much my contributions mattered, even as the prize was withheld — consumed more than a decade. It affected my mental health. It ended my first marriage. It reopened all my fears from childhood about abandonment and rejection. It was a chasm into which I fell during the job search of 1996-97, and from which I didn't fully emerge until I left higher ed altogether in 2013. (pp. 158-159)

Despite the personal pain and suffering, Childress does not make this book about his personal disappointment, but rather, about the countless contingent faculty who live in the limbo of uncertain employment and unfulfilled promises.

There is more to his career path than Childress divulges in the book. In a 2019 *Inside Higher Ed* interview, Childress bared his soul about his personal journey inside and outside of higher education. For Childress and for others who have been denied the fulfillment of the coveted tenure-track appointment, there is hope and opportunity. Though he never landed the tenure-track job in architecture for which he was educated and of which he dreamed, he has built an impressive academic career as a writer and scholar and is now at peace with his semi-departure from higher education. It is difficult to determine if the story told in *The Adjunct Underclass* will change the minds of students and professionals pursuing the college faculty career path, but his plea for change in the ways in which academic institutions treat their striving contingent faculty members rings true. Childress attempts to remind interested parties that everyone in the higher education system must become more sensitive and compassionate toward contingent colleagues.

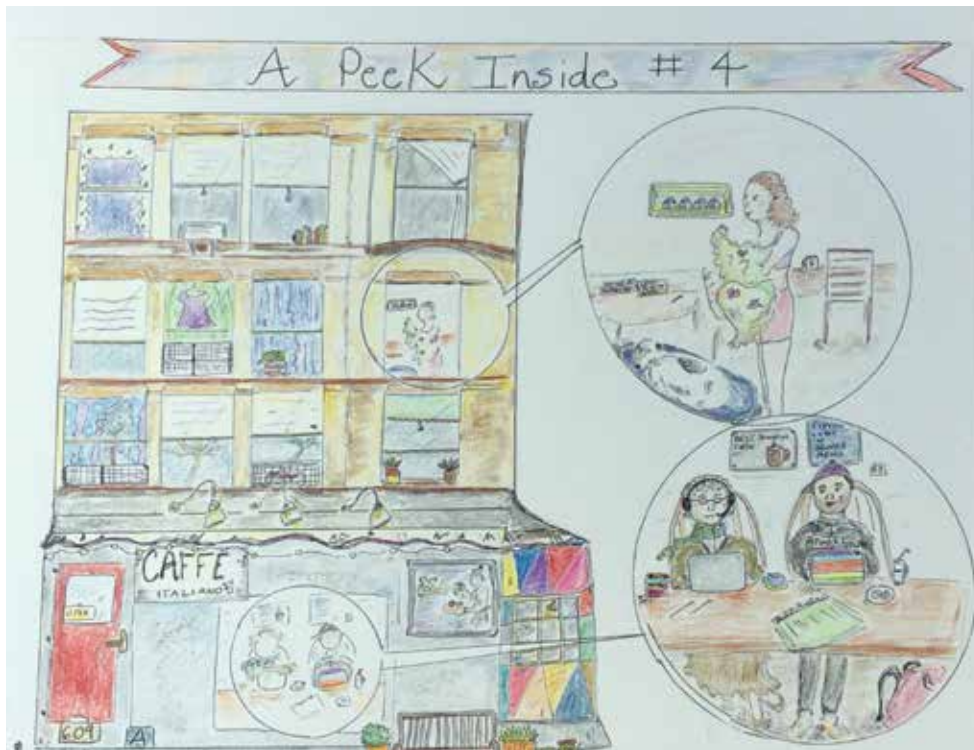
We have to think of higher ed as a community to which we belong and to which we welcome others. We need to stop treating any of our members as expendable. ... We are not business products with an expected amount of process waste: we are whole, beloved, intelligent people invested with every possibility. Our society is adrift in a cynical and angry sea, and higher ed needs to be a counterforce, enabling a return to earnest, generous care. (Flaherty, 2019, para. 20)

While we remain hopeful that a kinder, gentler, more compassionate higher education system will emerge from the crisis of pandemic, not much will likely

change. Contingent faculty everywhere will continue their kind philanthropy to the institutions they are enlisted to serve, just as Tressell's "ragged trousered" philanthropists persisted in their choiceless generosity to the firms that employed them.

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A Peek Inside #4
Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

Found Things

“Imagine One ESC” by MaryNell Morgan (1996)

MaryNell Morgan, mentor emerita, shared the following words to a song she performed on September 27, 1996, at the Arts Celebration for the college's 25th anniversary. The event was held at the Northeast Center, then located at 845 Central Avenue in Albany. The song was sung to the tune of “Imagine” by John Lennon.

Imagine there's no classrooms
It's easy if you try
No dorms or student unions
And no limits but the sky
Imagine all the students
Learning at ESC

*You ... you may say I'm a Dreamer
But I'm not the only one
We hope some day you'll join us
And Empire State will live as One.

Imagine there's no Faculty Senate,
It isn't hard to do,
No need for governance meetings,
And no committees too,
Imagine all the Mentors
Sharing all their workloads ... *

Imagine no Assessment,
I wonder if you can,
No need for Rationale Essays,
All DPPs would be canned,
Imagine all the Tutors,
Earning decent pay ... *

Imagine there's no Centers
And no limits too
No need for Regions or Programs
And all super deans were through
Imagine all the students
Learning at a Distance online

Found Things

“Long Island Regional Center, Graduation Ceremony: Empire State College: Our 20th Anniversary” by Rhoads Wald (June 23, 1991)

Rhoads Wald, mentor emerita, provided the following graduation speech that she presented to Long Island's Class of 1991.

To The Graduates:

Today, it is our pleasure to celebrate your graduation from the Long Island Regional Learning Center of Empire State College. This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the College as a whole. Today, in the context of your graduation and this 20th anniversary celebration, I will talk about how and why we began as a college, what we became, and what some of the ideas are from this experience you can take with you into your life after graduation.

The Long Island Regional Center opened its doors in September 1972, one year after the College officially opened. Our first graduation was in May 1973, thirty-seven people were in that first graduation. Last year, 1990, two hundred and nine people were graduated. This year we have two hundred and ninety graduates, the largest graduating group at the Long Island Center since we began. As of May 1, 1991, two thousand nine hundred and thirty-three people have graduated from the Long Island Center. This number represents the highest number of any center in the College.

Preparing for the first orientation of new students at the Long Island Learning Center in 1972 was an awesome task. None of us had ever before worked in a setting quite like Empire State College. We did not know who the students were, who you and your early counterparts were. We knew you were not the traditional college age individuals; we could read your

admissions materials. But who were you really? And, why were you coming back to college at this stage of life?

The students who were attracted to Empire State College turned out to be a new clientele, a student constituency unique in the annals of the history of higher education. You were unique because you were coming back to college at a later stage in life and you were adding education to an already full life of responsibility to work and family. You were unique in your interests and unique in terms of what you accomplished before you came.

You turned out to be what we now call the adult learner, individuals who, for one reason or another, would not accept the traditional clocks of the life cycle, that this is the stage for doing this or that. Colleges all over the country are now recruiting adults. They found out what we learned long ago, that you are interesting students, that you are creative, resourceful, and motivated. Today there are articles, books, and research programs geared to the adult learner. You should be proud because it is you and all the adult students who came before you who paved the way for this new direction.

What was the mandate for this new college? Essentially, the mandate was to provide new and flexible approaches to higher education in New York State. In addition to the concept of the nontraditional learner, several other key ideas framed our work.

We would design a college environment organized around one-to-one study. The traditional concept of learning in a group or in a classroom was not the way we would begin. We would begin

with two people, a student and a faculty member, who would, together, organize the learning experience.

The dyad of student and teacher is still the heart of Empire State College. Learning begins with the student. Student purpose is the key to the learning experience. It is not accidental that all contracts begin with student purpose. For it is the individual that is central, not the body of knowledge, or the discipline, or the faculty member, but the student.

Secondly, college credits could be awarded for valid learning accruing from work and life experience both before and during the student's college matriculation. It is difficult to convey to you, and for me to remember, what a new concept this was just twenty years ago, we take it so for granted today. The notion that college credit could be earned in a place other than a classroom was tantamount to revolution.

A third idea is related to curriculum. Curriculum would not be set, but would be designed in relation to each student. There would not be a core curriculum or series of subjects that were required by all. And often, the content of this curriculum would not mirror the expertise of the mentor. The mentor would be a facilitator rather than a teacher and each student would individually engage with the faculty in designing her or his degree program.

Another revolutionary idea was that the complexity of learning would not be reflected in grades, some other strategy was needed to capture the learning and growth of individuals. I randomly selected three folders of graduates here today and would like to share with

you comments from the many contract evaluations to illustrate this idea. I believe they speak for themselves.

Douglas Kozlik studied the theme of dying in literature. His mentor wrote, "On this, his first college literature contract, Mr. Kozlik was interested in learning how to analyze literature and how literature illuminates the human experience and reactions to dying. He gained confidence and skill in interpretation. He strengthened his writing and developed a renewed appetite for Hemingway and Steinbeck."

Doris Gannon completed a contract on racism and ethnicity. "Her paper clearly demonstrated that she gained an understanding of the broad issues and analysis of the problem of racism. She was able to discuss strategies, tactics, and general ways in which one can begin to think about changes at an individual, institutional and societal level."

Mary Ann Murray studied human biology in one contract. The following comments are drawn from the contract evaluation. "Ms. Murray was able to visualize physiological processes at all levels from molecules to organ systems and articulate them clearly in her own words. Best of all, she was intrigued by the understanding that she was gaining and this fascination and wonder at the complexity of biological functioning was enthusiastically conveyed."

So sometimes, if in your heart of hearts, you yearned for closure, for the notion that a grade will tell all, remember that the evaluation process at Empire State College is rich, valid, and a real reflection of learning and growth.

These were the basic ideas of the College, the basic ideas for designing learning experiences, the basic ideas for fulfilling individual goals.

The celebration of your graduation combined with the 20th anniversary of the College is also an appropriate

time for reflecting on the impressions, reactions, and ideas that the faculty have gleaned from working here.

To be a member of the faculty at Empire State College means to have reaffirmed every working day of your life the notion of individual differences, to perceive on a daily basis, the strengths, the vulnerabilities, the anxieties that people face, to learn again each day, that individuals are different, they are different in different ways, they have different needs, interests, and learning styles.

For me, a member of the faculty, the experience of mentoring changed forever my view of how people grow, change and provide meaning to their lives. I have been here for twenty years but not a week passes without someone coming into my office and adding to my conception of how people learn, think, and experience their unique life histories.

To be a mentor at Empire State College means to always be aware of the complexity of the human experience, the issues related to the various stages of the life cycle, the joys, the satisfactions, the triumphs represented today, and also the difficulties, the tragedies, and the abilities to overcome these misfortunes, to witness human resiliency and human dignity.

"So sometimes, if in your heart of hearts, you yearned for closure, for the notion that a grade will tell all, remember that the evaluation process at Empire State College is rich, valid, and a real reflection of learning and growth."

The final theme of Empire State College relates to life after graduation, the concept of life-long learning. Learning is a life-long process for all of us as mentors and for you as students, and we hope as you leave Empire State College that you will continue to seek new experiences for learning. We learned together that learning is a life-long process not restricted to time or place or a specific body of knowledge. Graduation is an accomplishment, but it is also a transition. One person who is here today said to me, "Empire State College has given me the understanding that I will be a student all my life, that learning is part of the life force."

Sometimes the learning comes from planning, from putting yourself into a particular situation for a particular reason. But sometimes it is difficult to forecast what will be significant, what will change one's view of the world. I am reminded of that idea by something that happened to me several months ago. I was in a restaurant one evening when a woman in her forties greeted me. Carol graduated from Empire State College in 1983 and I was delighted to know that she was teaching fourth grade in an excellent school district.

I remembered her very well because when she was a student she expressed fixed ideas about gender, about the roles of men and women in society. She joined us at the table and said, "You know Rhoads, it was that last contract that really changed me." The contract focused on children's literature. It was in the context of that study as she read stories about family life portrayed in children's literature, some wonderful, some terrible, that she began to perceive for the first time the meaning of gender equity, of the feminist movement, of her own roles as a woman, mother, teacher and wife.

I did not know that would happen as we planned the contract. In that restaurant, I learned that sometimes learning is mysterious, you cannot always predict what will happen,

or what you think might happen. To be a life-long learner means to be open to such possibilities, to take a chance, to not let new opportunities go by. As the faculty person, you have to be comfortable with the possibilities of ambiguity and unexpected outcomes.

What then have we learned at Empire State College that can be transferred to life after graduation? The search for new purposes, personal as well as professional, and the conventional and unconventional resources for fulfilling those purposes, seems tailored-made for people invested in life-long learning. The world is rich with the possibility of new mentors and, even, the possibility of becoming a mentor yourself because much can be learned through facilitating the learning of others. And finally, although the tangible rewards for learning are satisfying such as a promotion or an A in a course, the internal rewards from new learning are the most rewarding.

One student told me recently that this model of education was a valuable experience for her, much more difficult

than she had anticipated but very compelling. "I feel that if I can do this thing, this thing called getting a degree from Empire State College, I can do anything, now I can go out and conquer the world."

We urge you as educated citizens to go out to your communities, local, state, and national, to activate for what you believe is important. The challenge facing undergraduate education today is multicultural diversity, how to organize the curriculum to include the range of perspectives inherent in the pluralistic fabric of American society, how to design educational resources that relate to differences in race, gender, class, ethnic background, and religion. Not an easy task.

We are trying to take on that task in higher education, but it must also be addressed in the communities in which we live and work. We urge you to join us as we try to forge some changes in the social fabric of all of our lives, for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren.

Usually at graduation, the graduate thanks his or her parents. And we certainly wish to do that today, to all the parents of our graduates, thank you for helping. But in the context of the adult learner, we also wish to thank the immediate families, the spouses and the children. On a daily basis you helped forge the commitment, the success, the opportunities for taking time to study. You are indeed partly responsible for your graduate's accomplishments.

As you leave today, on behalf of the administration, faculty and staff, I wish to thank you, the graduates, for expanding our horizons, for teaching us the value of differences, for helping us find ways to help you.

On behalf of all of us, I congratulate you on this important achievement. We hope you will use the ideas you have learned at Empire State College in new and unexpected ways. Good luck. You have expanded and enriched our lives. Thank you.

From the Archives

An Introduction to Self-Directed Learning by George Moberg and Beverly Smirni, edited by Frederic Mayo and Mary S. Mooney (n.d.)

Mentors at SUNY Empire State College have always grappled with the best ways to support our students. An Introduction to Self-Directed Learning was developed in the late 1980s to help students think about what it means to be an independent learner. This manual was often given to students during their orientation sessions and referred to throughout the educational planning process in many of our learning centers and locations. The front cover reads: "Support for this manual was provided by a grant from the Lilly Foundation for the Religion in the City Program, Urban Study Center, Center for Statewide Programs, Empire State College." Pages 9 through 11 are reproduced here, thanks to the assistance of Janay Jackson. Thank you to Anastasia Pratt, SUNY Empire archivist, for the selection of this text.

V. PURPOSEFUL READING

A. Since the time it will take you to successfully complete the self-directed study has definite limits, and you have already blocked out completion dates for each of the learning activities, you may have to develop new ways of reading, and note-taking in order to make the most efficient use of your time for self-directed study. Students often complain about the amount of books they have to read and the amount of time spent in reading books for a study. Some students may view this problem as a mechanical one and decide to increase their reading speed. While it may not hurt to spend two dollars on a paperback to increase your reading speed, the issue is one of learning how to read with a purpose, not learning to read faster.

The purpose behind reading a text or an article from a journal is to extract the one or two main ideas in the text. It may come as a surprise to learn that books and articles contain at the most one or two central ideas and the rest of the book or article consists of elaboration of, evidence for, and implications of, these central ideas. Your task is to identify* these central ideas and decide if the source is an appropriate one for your study. You can begin by asking questions which will help to identify the appropriateness of the source for your study:

Why am I reading this manual, text, or article? Do I hope that it will become a major source of information for my self-directed study? What is the author's background? Is it a popular or scholarly text? To answer these questions, use the survey method of reading.

1. Survey Method

- a. *Titles and subtitles* of texts, articles in journals should be read to give you your first hint about the appropriateness of the content. For example, on the study of children's environmental health, our student identified this text: *Living in the Environment — Concepts, Problems and Alternatives*.
- b. *Jacket blurbs* are often written to sell the books, but they can also give you much factual information in a short space

of time. Quotes from book reviews can be especially informative, depending on the reviewer of the magazine.

- c. *Table of Contents* — glance at the contents. You might be disappointed or you might find a couple of chapter headings that seem appropriate to your learning objectives.
- d. *Introductions and conclusions* should be read. If they are long read the first and last paragraphs and skim the middle. You should be warned however, that this method works only when the author of the text or article is highly organized. The system of reading the first and last paragraphs of chapters or articles is a cornerstone of the *survey method* of reading.

2. Identifying the Main Point

The survey method depends upon your ability to identify the central idea. Any main point — whether actually stated in a topic sentence or not — is supported by specific or particular details. You should approach all your readings with the intent of identifying or uncovering the *main point* as quickly as possible. (It often appears first or last in any text passage) and then the supporting details. Training in reading involves comprehending the material read. Plain understanding, simply "getting

the point," however, is not the same as critical reading and understanding. For example,

"Children have also suffered the direct effects of lead poisoning as a result of their parents' bringing home lead-contaminated clothes. This phenomenon had earlier been seen following exposure to asbestos and beryllium transported from factory to home on work clothing. Children who develop lead poisoning are more likely to be left with permanent brain damage. Chronic effects of lead poisoning in children can often show up as "hyperactivity" in school — children have short attention spans, don't do very well in school, or are easily distracted, among other more severe disturbances."**

What is the central idea in this paragraph?

Children suffer lead poisoning through the contaminated clothing of their parents.

Understanding this paragraph and identifying the central idea is essential to the next step criticizing it.

VI. CRITICAL READING

Critical reading as the most advanced type of reading is the most appropriate one for self-directed studies on the college level. A consciously critical approach to thinking, listening and reading can be a crucial matter in daily life

for it influences your beliefs and actions. There are several tools of critical reading:

1. *Examine the Source and Check for Bias*

For example, in a news article on the emission of dangerous levels of*** lead oxide into the atmosphere of a residential section of Brooklyn, the owner of the smelting plant was quoted in a television newscast as saying "that they had had a great deal of difficulty in installing a pollution control device in the plant." Since the emissions of lead oxide have been released into the atmosphere for the past eleven years, the owner's explanation for the lack of a pollution control device stems from his basic position which is to save his money interests. The job of a critical reader is to identify the people who give information and the basic position they have taken. It's not paranoia to search for potential bias, it's merely a healthy critical stance.

2. *Look for Assumptions in the Material*

In the same news article on the Metal Plant emitting dangerous doses of lead oxide, the news reporter writes that "Although 3,000 adults live within the half-mile radius, they will not be screened unless the children's lead levels indicate a need." The assumption is that adults are less susceptible to lead poisoning than children.

3. *Check Conclusions*

Be alert against misguided deductions and false conclusions. For example, the owner's explanation for not having any pollution control device in his smelting plant was to point out the difficulties he had had in installing such a device. Does this explanation adequately explain the basic reasons for the absence of a pollution control device which was in violation of the standards set by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency?

To summarize, there are three keys to becoming a professional and critical reader:

1. You must know the reason for your reading and then select the appropriate reading technique.
2. The purpose of reading comprehension is to capture *main ideas* in the text.
3. College level reading means *critical reading* which means that you should figure out what the author wants you to believe, and how the case is made, and then take your own stand on the ideas in the text.

* Graham Gibbs, *Learning To Study Social Science* (London, 1978), p. 22.

** Andrea Hricko and Melanie Brunt, *Working for Your Life: A Woman's Guide to Job Health Hazards* (Berkley, 1976), p. C.9.

*** Laurie Johnson, "Greenpoint Children to Get Lead Tests," *The New York Times*, August 18, 1980, p. 42.

Remembering Our Colleagues and Friends of the College

Richard L. Burden

Richard L. Burden died on February 1, 2021. Richard taught for almost four decades at Youngstown State University (Ohio) where he co-founded the computer science program and became chair of the department of mathematics and computer science. He co-authored the text *Numerical Analysis* (1978, Prindle, Weber & Schmidt; now in its 10th edition). After he retired from YSU, Richard came to SUNY Empire State College where, for more than 10 years, he created and taught online mathematics and statistics courses. As former dean of the Center for Distance Learning (and current program coordinator for Master of Arts in Adult Learning), Meg Benke noted: Richard and his wife Annette (who remains an active and important instructor in mathematics at SUNY Empire) “were instrumental in building our advanced math curricula.” And Mathematics Department Chair Lynae Warren commented: “The importance of Richard’s involvement in the math department was critical throughout his time with us.”

Bruce L. Fassett

A graduate of SUNY Plattsburgh, Bruce L. Fassett, who died on September 20, 2020, was a high school math teacher at Indian Lake Central School for 35 years, a deputy sheriff, a Saratoga Race Course security official, and a mentor for online studies at SUNY Empire, especially in algebra. Mentor Emerita Betty Hurley noted: “Bruce’s enthusiasm rang through his online entries. His announcements and feedback to students were always full of encouragement. He called

the students ‘math heroes.’ I believe he attended every CDL [Center for Distance Learning] Conference, where his commitment to our students was always apparent. Bruce impressed all of us with his positive energy.” As Mathematics Department Chair Lynae Warren described: “Bruce had a really good rapport with his students; he interacted to support their success and got *really* good results. Bruce was always supportive of his students and was a valuable and positive team member for our other math department adjuncts. He was working with those students who may not have made it, if not for him. We already miss Bruce. We missed him from the moment we lost him and will continue to miss him.”

Victor Friedman

Victor Friedman passed away on February 14, 2021. Vic served as the assistant director of information systems for the Center for Environmental Health at the New York State Department of Health and was active in local theater, music, and other organizations. He began more than 15 years ago as an instructor in the college’s then-Center for Distance Learning. He taught Database Systems, Management Information Systems, and Business Continuity Planning. Mentor Emerita Betty Hurley described Vic Friedman as “very devoted to his teaching,” and Computer Science and Technology Associate Department Chair Diane Shichtman noted that Vic’s “concern for the students was wonderful and appreciated (as was his sense of humor). One memory I keep coming back to is the time he’d landed in the hospital. He spoke with

me from the hospital, and all I kept thinking was that he should be saving his energy to get well, and we’d figure things out, but he wanted to be sure I knew what was coming up next for the class he was teaching at the time. It was important to him that his students were well taken care of. He really cared.” As Tracy Shannon, coordinator of online operations, Empire Online, reported: “Vic was a gem! His dedication is hard to match.”

Arthur E. Imperatore

Arthur E. Imperatore Sr., an entrepreneur who, with his brothers, began an interstate freight trucking company and later invented the modern commuter ferry system, died on November 18, 2020. Arthur Imperatore received three honorary degrees, including one from SUNY Empire; the Horatio Alger Award; and the first U.S. Senate Productivity Award, presented by former New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley. In 1990, Arthur Imperatore generously endowed to the college a “community forum fellowship” that has supported the scholarship and community outreach of 24 SUNY Empire colleagues (from former mentor Bob Seidel’s work on neighborhoods in the Rochester area [1990-1991] to mentor Heather Reynolds’ current Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship studying school safety in the Capital Region).

Retired mentor Susan McConaughy, an Imperatore fellow in 2017-2018, used her Imperatore award to focus on how parents can help their children heal from trauma: “I was able to pull together what is known about parent interventions and draw lessons from

clinical work that parents could adapt. I also got training in a cutting-edge trauma treatment method [and] designed an online and in-person course on childhood trauma.” Mentor Elaine Handley, 2019-2020 Imperatore fellow, reported that the award gave her “the opportunity to work in the community to support people who unexpectedly find themselves in a caregiver role and show them how to use writing as a tool for wellness and resiliency.” Mentor Rebecca Bonanno, Imperatore fellow in 2016-2017, commented that the fellowship “was an amazing opportunity to learn more about my community, both as a researcher and as a citizen. My yearlong project helped start off my work as a community-engaged scholar. The connections that I made during that year have led to new projects in my community that are making a real impact.” Mentor Eric Ball, who received an Imperatore award in 2020-2021 and whose project focused on music organizations in the Glens Falls-Lake George region, commented: “The award proved especially valuable in 2020-2021, and in unexpected ways, as local music and arts organizations found themselves scrambling to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and all my original Imperatore plans for collaborations with these organizations had to be scrapped. Even so, it remained possible to devise an entirely new ‘pandemic-proof’ plan, resulting in an edited collection developed in collaboration with an even greater number of these organizations and their leaders.”

Former SUNY Empire State College President Jim Hall commented: “Arthur Imperatore was a generous and engaged, larger than life individual. On many occasions over his long life, he was honored for his humanitarianism. His whole life experience — one of nine children of Italian immigrants, an army veteran, a successful entrepreneur,

and a business visionary — gave him a special ability to understand why Empire State College was important.”

Rhoda Miller

Mentor Emerita Rhoda Miller, a longtime, spirited, and dedicated SUNY Empire State College colleague, died on October 15, 2020. Rhoda joined the college in 1974 and retired as a full-time mentor in 2000. She was the Community and Human Services mentor in the New Models for Career Education program that was housed in the basement of the library at Rockland Community College, which became the basis for the Lower Hudson Unit and later the Hudson Valley Center of SUNY Empire. Over many years in the college, she served as the mentor-coordinator for the Middletown Unit and later, as the director of the NYNEX Corporate College Program (later known as Verizon Corporate College) in New York City. Rhoda Miller was trained as a community organizer at the Columbia University School of Social Work, and before coming to SUNY Empire, served as director of social services at Planned Parenthood of New York City, and as a Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia.

Mentor Emerita Miriam Tatzel, in consultation with Mentor Emerita Lois Muzio, offered these reflections: “I see Rhoda in the basement of the library at Rockland Community College, where she was the mentor in Community and Human Services, and I was the Human Development newbie. She and I shared a cubicle(!) — not a bad way to learn mentoring. I came to see Rhoda as the consummate social worker. Social work was her identity, her values, and what she passed on to her mentees. I see her in the Middletown Unit where, as coordinator and assisted by Rosemary Kearns, they ran a busy unit together with the other mentors. While I didn’t see her when she moved to the innovative Verizon Corporate College

program as associate dean, I heard again how she joined forces in friendly cooperation with the others there. Well known throughout the college and easy to talk to, many of us shared with Rhoda the things that were on our minds. She was (excuse the jargon) a sociometric star.”

Michele D. Ogle

Michele D. Ogle, retired part-time instructor in computer science and mathematics and divisional operational coordinator in the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences for a dozen years, passed away on October 14, 2020. Michele had a more than three-decade career in the research and development department at General Electric (with 30 patents to her name!) before coming to SUNY Empire and beginning her second career. Computer Science and Technology Associate Department Chair Diane Shichtman commented: “Michele created the online Human-Computer Interaction course, as well as the online Software Engineering course. In both courses, her concern for making the workload reasonable for students while ensuring they had the opportunity to engage and learn was evident. While the academic side beyond direct teaching wasn’t Michele’s responsibility, she was dedicated to helping us serve our students. She met with the faculty to talk about guidelines and other matters for computer science. Beyond the concrete tasks she took on, she worked well with many different people and handled change calmly. I remember often thinking about how Michele understood organizations in a way that gave her a very valuable sense of perspective. She contributed to the college in many tangible and intangible ways.”

Frank Vander Valk, dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, recalled that: “Michele was incredibly knowledgeable, patient, and kind. She

played a crucial role in setting up the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, drawing on her deep understanding of the college and her expertise developed in previous phases of her career. I knew, as did the rest of our school, that if Michele was involved in something it would be OK; even in the chaotic days of setting up ESC 2.0, Michele's professionalism and good nature provided a bedrock of calm and stability. In a very literal sense, we could not have done it without her. Her

contributions were highly valued at the time and will be long remembered." As Mentor Emerita Betty Hurley described: "Through her years with Empire State, we experienced Michele's many gifts. She possessed an unusual combination of analytical and administrative skills. Few demonstrated the combination of skills to both teach and develop courses that she did on a regular basis. Blend those with a positive outlook and a dry sense of humor and you have some sense of what made Michele so special.

She often had visitors to her office and was always generous with her expertise and stories. I especially loved her stories of her sons and their achievements. When she was diagnosed, I marveled at how she faced her treatments with determination and optimism mixed with a pragmatic approach. Through her actions, she showed us a way to live when faced with a disease that eventually claimed her life, but not her spirit."

"To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself."

— Hannah Arendt, 1958
The Human Condition
The University of Chicago Press, p. 58

Core Values of SUNY Empire State College

SUNY Empire State College has had two statements of “core values.”

The first was presented by a group of faculty and administrators including Keith Elkins, Walt Frykholm, Bob Carey, and Jim Case at the 1993 All College Conference and published in All About Mentoring, issue 1, September 1993; the second (that we have included in each issue of this publication since 2005) grew out of the work of a task force made up of Marianne Arieux, Eric Ball, Joyce Elliott, Leslie Ellis, Cathy Leaker, and Alan Mandell and was endorsed by the college senate in 2005.

During this season of our 50th anniversary celebration, we present both of these documents as one way to honor the college’s ongoing commitment to a set of “core values.”

Core Values of the College, 1993

1. The student is at the center of all educational decisions.
2. Mentoring is the best way to implement these decisions.
3. The quality of the mentor/student relationship largely determines the quality of the student’s education.
4. We believe in making ourselves and the College accessible to students in terms of place, time and programming.

5. The College works collaboratively with students in a variety of programs and studies and on a number of levels: we believe in serving individual students in a manner appropriate to their needs.
6. Our goal is to foster the development of self-directed learners who are intellectually curious, open to new ideas, own their own learning, and have the academic skills to continue learning beyond college.
7. The College should be a diverse academic community which serves a diversity of students.
8. We believe in the mentor as an adult learner, in collaborative learning, in collegiality and mutual support.
We need to be reflective practitioners.
9. We believe in recognizing learning wherever it occurs and however it is acquired, and in the community as a learning resource.
10. The College should serve the community and the broader society both directly and, through its graduates, indirectly.
11. We should be open to new ways of learning and teaching, and innovative in pursuit of achieving these core values.

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 life-long 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 and/or Karen.LaBarge@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are between 1,500 to 3,500 words but no longer than 5,000 words.) Materials should be emailed as Microsoft Word attachments. In terms of writing style and referencing, *All About Mentoring* follows the *Associated Press Stylebook*, 55th ed. (2020, AP) and the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th ed. (2020, APA).

All About Mentoring is published twice a year. Our next issue, #56, will be available in 2022. Please submit all materials by January 17, 2022. Please turn to Alan Mandell if you have a suggestion for or would like to have a discussion about a possible AAM submission.



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