

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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“To exist as subject therefore means that we engage with the question of whether what we desire is desirable, not only for our own lives, but also for the lives we try to live with others on a planet that has limited capacity for fulfilling all the desires projected onto it.”

– Gert J.J. Biesta
The Rediscovery of Teaching
New York, NY: Routledge, 2017, p. 4

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MENTORING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial – Against the Odds 2 Alan Mandell	Excerpts From “How SUNY ESC Works: Student Perspectives” 59 Dee Britton, Syracuse
History Intervened Once Again 4 Tanweer Ali, International Education, Prague	I Dream in Rhyme 65 Heidi Nightengale, Auburn
Canon Battles: Libretto for a “Field Recording” Vignette 7 Eric L. Ball, Saratoga Springs	Embedding Case Studies in Coursework: A Strategy for Building Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills 68 Heather M. Reynolds, Saratoga Springs
Learning From Disaster 9 Anna Bates, Newburgh	Notes From Ukraine, 2017 72 Victoria Vernon, Manhattan
Fostering Creativity and Encouraging Students to Embrace Scary Things 11 Rebecca Eliseo-Arras, Buffalo	Going to College is <i>Not</i> Like Going to The Home Depot 75 Janet Kaplan-Bucciarelli, The Threshold Strategist
Gift From The Cosmos 13 Robert Congemi, Latham	The Perils of Separating Immigrant Families: A Perspective 82 Lear Matthews, Manhattan
The Promises of SUNY Empire State College: An Interview With Richard Bonnabeau 16 Alan Mandell, Manhattan and Saratoga Springs	A Poem 84 Thomas Kerr, Manhattan
Becoming the Architect of Your Own Learning: Finding the Right Balance 20 Alan T. Belasen, Saratoga Springs	Effectively Facilitating Cross-Cultural Learning: Lessons From the Buffalo Project 85 Rhianna C. Rogers, Buffalo; Students Dominique M. Murawski and Halee C. Potter
Connecting the Missing Link: Does Spirituality Matter in Academic and Professional Lives? 23 Anant Deshpande, Saratoga Springs	Report on “Life’s Decisions” Forum 88 Rosalind October, Brooklyn; David Gechlik, Manhattan
The Citizens’ Re-Entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline: An Opportunity for All Initiative – An Overview 26 David Anthony Fullard, Manhattan	To Our Colleagues 90 April Simmons, Manhattan
IMTL Project Summaries 35 Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Fellows, 2017-2018	First Noodle Under the Sun 91 Deborah J. Smith, Saratoga Springs
Two Poems 37 Mindy Kronenberg, Hauppauge	The Impact of Media: A New Model for Understanding Parasocial Experiences 93 Gayle Stever, Rochester
Sabbatical Report: The Importance of Place 38 Lorraine Lander, Canandaigua	The Case for (At Least Some) Traditional Research at SUNY Empire State College 96 A. Jordan Wright, New York University
Exploring How Higher Education Can Meet the Needs of Third-Age Students 43 Joanne Levine, Saratoga Springs; Michele A. Cooper, Syracuse	Found Things “From Traditional Students to Adult Learners” 99 Arthur W. Chickering and Associates, <i>Cool Passion: Challenging Higher Education</i> (2014)
A Fulbrighter at SUNY Empire State College: A Letter from Timișoara 52 Loredana-Florentina Bercuci, Fulbright Student Researcher, West University of Timișoara, Romania	Found Things “Thanks for the Memory” 101
Playing With Fire 55 Alan Stankiewicz, Syracuse	Remembering Our Colleagues 102 Core Values of Empire State College (2005) 104

EDITORIAL



Photo credit: Janay Jackson

Against the Odds

*"It is an ocean of watery images
And shapes of fire, and wind that bears them down.
Perhaps these forms are seeking to escape. . . ."*

– Wallace Stevens, "Two Versions
of the Same Poem" (1947)

Years ago, during Joe Moore's SUNY Empire State College presidency (2000-2007), he and one of our colleagues, Sylvain Nagler, used a concurrent session at the All College Conference to square off in debate. Joe seemed to love the opportunity to go toe-to-toe with an equally accomplished word-man. For me, the two of them always hit the right tone: as serious as it could get and great fun. And each time this event took place, I bet, too, that we took a kind of democratic pride in the fact that the president of our institution was sharing the floor with a fellow mentor. Rank (almost!) flew away. The ideas were what mattered.

On one such occasion, however, Joe truly pissed me off. Who knows how they got into it, but Joe started arguing that, whether we admitted it or not, mentoring at ESC valued *process* more than *content*. It was the mentor-student relationship, the give-and-take of dialogue that, he claimed, we most cherished. More than learning this or that, more than being able to claim knowledge of some bundle of stuff, what mentors relished, and what Sylvain's deft and deep questioning-mode championed, were little Socratic dramas. In my memory of that moment, I thought that

Joe wanted us to recognize that we had gone too far. Infatuated with process, we neglected content at our academic peril.

Sitting there, or trying to, I could barely contain myself. For me, Joe's claim seemed totally off base: probably exaggerated, missing the heart of our mentoring efforts and wedded to some outdated notion of learning that, in many ways, ESC was created to upend. Of course, I thought, we cared about the process, the mutuality, the back-and-forth of mentoring and of students and faculty creating knowledge together. That's what made the ESC experiment (and the experiments of others, too) so radical. But this mentoring mode didn't sacrifice content; it imagined the emergence of a new kind of content: richer, more authentic, and, most importantly, more meaningful to a student who could see her/himself as co-creator.

Yet, yes, even then, but maybe for only a flash, I felt the poke of a problematic idealization of "mentoring" that Joe wanted us to face straight on. I knew, first, that not all ESC faculty shared what for many of us was at the heart of our work – the beauty of trying with everything we had to nurture a particular quality of student-mentor relationships and the learning that we believed grew out of it. And second, I also knew that with the press of time, the weight of workload, the fear of losing our grip on academic quality, and the greater reliance on conventional academic ways, a focus on content was already gaining momentum and legitimacy. Who could even begin to argue for the dialogic process when students and mentors connected less often; when mentors were juggling too many

responsibilities and just trying to stay afloat; when students were quicker to ask what had to be done and what grade they had earned; and when a national "outcomes" movement hit us like a brick and elevated content above almost anything else?

This was years ago, but it's amazing how many times I've wondered what Joe was provoking, what Sylvain represented, and still represents, and how I, and perhaps some others in that room, were feeling. Was this process/content division a complete fabrication? Was the dichotomy a creation of those who wanted to push us back to an understanding of learning as the ability to reproduce reams of disciplinary knowledge? Why was mentoring, at least for some, suspiciously intertwined with a silly fantasy of two people sitting on a rock (or hanging out in the *agora*) with little else to do and thinking deeply together and loving the interaction for itself? Had we slowly but surely absorbed the critique of a mentoring mode that hoped for a very different experience of teaching and learning?

Of course, I don't completely know, but I've come to think that a preoccupation with content, with crafting tightly-bound courses, with gaining bodies of knowledge, and with rubrics that try to measure every nuance of its acquisition, have become something of a compensatory strategy. We are, I believe, trying to make up for the lack of meaningful interaction. I wonder if some of us, mourning that loss, pile on the content, believing that such a strategy will fill in the relational gap that we feel, and, in doing so, will also give us back our lost academic expertise. And could it

be, that in making that move, we have oddly, ironically, reproduced an understanding of learning that ESC was designed to question?

In the end, this is not about resuscitating some romance with so-called process. It is about continuing to remind ourselves of the principles of this college that, as our 2005 core values statement (<https://www.esc.edu/corevalues>) describes: “emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study; support critical exploration of knowledge and experience; and provide opportunities for active, reflective and creative academic engagement.” Those remain *really* difficult goals that are *really* hard to achieve. I say it’s worth continuing to try, even against the odds.

Alan Mandell

Alan Mandell

“Mistakes are marvelous. Oh yes, it shows you something you don’t know.”

– Nancy Dalva, “Merce’s Way: Centennial Notes”

(On conversations with Merce Cunningham, choreographer)

The Brooklyn Rail

<https://brooklynrail.org/2019/04/dance/MERCES-WAY>

2019, Author’s Note section, para. 13

History Intervened Once Again

Tanweer Ali, International Education, Prague

Tanweer Ali was awarded the Jane and Wally Altes Prize for Community Service at the All College Conference in March 2018. Ali, who is a mentor in Business, Management and Economics in International Education, Prague, was recognized for his work with organizations providing aid to refugees, his support for participation of women in Czech politics through the organization, Fórum 50%, and for his contribution to Insaan, a Czech-Arab Center for Cultural Dialogue (which was founded by his former mentee, Sadi Shanaah). In what follows, Tanweer Ali introduces some of the people who have inspired him in his work with the community in the Czech Republic.

Every achievement that I have been involved in has been possible only because of the dedication and commitment of groups of people, many of whom have overcome huge obstacles just to be where they are. I have tried to introduce just a small selection of the people I feel privileged to have worked with.



Photo credit: Tanweer Ali

Anna Grušová

I got to know Anna Grušová in the early years of the 21st century, when we were both working with refugee-assisting organizations.

She was the director of the Counselling Centre for Refugees, which she joined as a social worker in 1993. The early years of this work were dominated by the influx of refugees fleeing the catastrophic breakup of Yugoslavia. Just emerging from decades of totalitarian rule, the Czechs were barely prepared for this new role and the non-profit sector was in its infancy. Anna's own experience as a refugee and her family history were strong motivations for her new career.

The course of Anna Grušová's life has followed the ups and downs in the history of the Czech Republic. Anna was born during World War II, a refugee in Oxford, England. Her family had fled Hitler's approaching army. Not long after the end of the war, Anna's father, Eduard Goldstücker, became Czechoslovakia's first ambassador to Israel; his family had perished in the Holocaust. Anna has vivid memories of the train ride across Italy, the boat trip to Haifa and then the journey on to Tel Aviv, Israel. Goldstücker's diplomatic career proved to be a short one – a renowned Kafka scholar, he soon returned to academia.

Then in late 1951, her father was arrested during a purge within the communist regime. A number of senior Jewish members of the party were arrested on trumped-up charges of treason and were forced into making confessions. Luckily, Goldstücker's show trial came after Stalin had died, and he escaped the death penalty. After some years of forced labor in the uranium mines, he was released and returned home.

By 1968, the year of the Prague Spring, a time of relative liberalization, Goldstücker had been "rehabilitated" and was a vice-dean at Prague's Charles University and chairman of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union. Anna had completed her degree in English and was doing a job that she enjoyed, in a publishing house. These were exhilarating times – during this short period, Anna and her colleagues could bring to the market books from Western



Tanweer Ali

countries as well as the Soviet bloc. She also accompanied her father on a lecture tour of Oxford and Cambridge, England.

This brief glimpse of freedom ended in August 1968, with Soviet tanks rolling into the country. Anna's parents were stripped of their citizenship and went into exile in England for a second time. Anna lost her job and ended up doing menial work for 20 years. During the 1970s, Anna became involved in the dissident movement. Though not herself a signatory, her husband and son both signed Charter 77, which brought persecution by the regime. Anna did some translation work for underground "samizdat" publications, and was very much part of the close-knit but diverse circle of dissidents and their family members.

History intervened in Anna's life once again in late 1989, when the communist regime collapsed and the dissident playwright Václav Havel was installed as Czechoslovakia's new president. Anna was able to start her first graduate job in two decades, and her parents returned home. A few years after the fall of communism, Czechoslovakia peacefully divided into two new countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

What I value the most about Anna is the level of positive energy she exudes. To have one's prospects and dreams suddenly shut off at a young age must have been utterly devastating. The Czechoslovakia of the 1970s, whilst not nearly as brutal as the 1950s, was a terribly depressing place, a huge prison, occupied by foreign armies. This nurtured a sense of bitterness that was hard to shake off for many. To be able to embark on a new career as Anna did in the 1990s must have taken a huge dose of courage and optimism.

Anna contributed vitally to building civil society in her country and remained true to her values at a time when many others, after the gray and dreary years of totalitarian rule sought material success and embraced consumerism with a vengeance.



Photo credit: Tanweer Ali

Radek Hábl

Radek Hábl, at 38, belongs to a different generation. Yet, he too came to reject material success. Radek recalled to me how one Christmas he came across a homeless man sheltering from the cold inside a busy shopping mall. The clash of the two worlds struck him then – the man trying desperately to keep warm, and the oblivious crowds of shoppers who were stressed because they hadn't bought enough Christmas presents. After graduating, Radek rose quickly in the corporate world, first at Prague's Staropramen brewery and then at IBM. At a relatively young age, he was already a senior financial manager, with a good income and a car. But it was a life that had lost its meaning for him – a world of

16-hour days, PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets. He left his job at IBM and became the financial manager of Open Society, a think tank established at the end of the 1990s by the Soros foundations.

At the same time, Radek started to work with victims of loan sharking and other dubious financial practices. This started when a desperate relative approached him. A fairly small debt had multiplied sevenfold when Radek started looking into her problems. She had ended up with 32 different loans. The experience was an eye-opener – Radek had never realized quite how dirty this whole business was, and how what had become a big business was destroying lives. He started to learn more and more about this issue, and began to spend a lot of time counseling and giving public lectures.

There are about a million people in the Czech Republic who are subject to debt collection proceedings (out of a population of 10 million), many of whom have multiple debts. There are thousands of loan providers, both official and unofficial, frequently offering extortionate conditions; the most egregious loans involve interest rates of several thousand percent.

Radek and I worked together on a project during 2016 aimed at researching the debt problem, funded by the Milwaukee-based Isabel & Alfred Bader Foundation. Thanks to the project, Radek created a massive online map of debt collection proceedings.¹ Click on any town or village in the Czech Republic, and

you can see the number of debt proceedings in that community, the number of people affected and the sums of money involved. The map received huge media coverage, and helped to transform the public debate on debt and draw attention to this huge social problem. All of a sudden, a neglected problem had become headline news.

Besides his work with Open Society, Radek has also been advising the government on new personal bankruptcy legislation. The proposed law will have been watered down by amendments by the time it reaches the statute books, and is only one step in what will need to be a root-and-branch systemic reform, but it will improve the lives of thousands of people.

I was happy to nominate Radek for an Ashoka Fellowship late last year. The Ashoka organization, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, gives fellows financial support to continue their work – and they join a growing international network. Recently, the excellent news came through that Radek had been awarded an Ashoka Fellowship. This means he will have independent funding to carry on his work for the next few years.



Photo credit: Tanweer Ali

Karolína Silná

Since 2008, Karolína Silná has been involved in a wide range of projects, in different fields. We first met when I was on the board of Fórum 50%, an NGO (nongovernmental organization) dedicated to increasing the participation of women in politics in the Czech Republic, and which I had helped to found. Karolína was running training courses for employees of Fórum 50% and for women politicians.

Karolína heads up the Ecumenical Academy, which provided the overall institutional support for Radek's debt project. Partly a think tank, partly a campaigning organization, the Ecumenical Academy is not, strictly speaking, a religious organization, though it was founded by a Protestant priest, Karolína's father, Jiří Silný.

Karolína has also worked with a consortium of nonprofits, including Fórum 50%, on the production of the Social Watch Report,² an annual report on poverty and gender justice. Though the Czech Republic has the lowest

rate of relative poverty in the European Union, this headline statistic does not take into account the large group of vulnerable people who are at risk of falling into poverty. The Social Watch Report highlights problems that are largely hidden from view. Besides domestic issues, Karolína has campaigned on developing country debt, and on climate change, especially relating to food production and consumption.

Karolína's work has also involved an entrepreneurial dimension. The Ecumenical Academy is part of the consortium that brought the fair trade concept to the Czech Republic, and still runs a shop in Prague. Karolína has also done her fair share of hands-on work, helping out in the restaurant business. For some time, she worked on a part-time basis with a vegetarian restaurant that was partly owned by Green Doors, a charity working with mentally ill people. Green

Doors offers its clients jobs in the restaurant, helping them back into daily life and the wider community. Karolína helped run the catering side of the restaurant's business.

Karolína sought work that made sense to her. She studied sociology in the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University in Prague. Karolína was also inspired by the Ecumenical Academy's values of justice, emancipation and building an alternative world, as well as the work of her father. Importantly, the variety of her work has enabled her to see connections between different social issues and problems. For instance, the work on the developing country debt connects with her work on gender, and has helped her to see more clearly the gender aspects of development. Indeed, Karolína sees connections everywhere, with all of her work.

I also see connections everywhere. One of the things that I have learned with civil society is that there is rarely one silver bullet for social problems. Poverty, migration, gender empowerment and environmental protection are all intricately related to each other, and it is impossible to solve any one problem in isolation. The issues that I have worked with in the community are also related to my work as a business researcher and educator. Just as issues cannot be isolated from each other, neither can individuals.

Notes

- ¹ This map can be viewed at <http://mapaexekuci.cz/index.php/mapa-2/>.
- ² The Social Watch Report may be accessed at <http://www.socialwatch.org/annualreport>.

Canon Battles: Libretto for a “Field Recording” Vignette

Eric L. Ball, Saratoga Springs

Somewhere in New Hollandia, a priest, a professor and a friend walk into a coffee bar. They take turns ordering and then sit down at the bar with their beverages. The priest and professor begin reading. Every so often, one or the other looks up pensively, apparently reflecting on what they are reading. To pass the time, the barista pulls out a musical instrument and starts playing. Sure enough, the friend – inspired by the music – sings a night-rhyme.

Fr.

It stirs my spirit, makes me think, and fills me with emotion

To see the man who contemplates a book with such devotion.

Pr.

Devotion is the only way to meet our obligation

As readers – to make sure we’ve got the best interpretation.

Pr.

I’ll tell you where devotion lies – in reading and re-reading

Enshrined as rites and rituals we never stop repeating.

Pr.

I’ll tell you where devotion lies – in words, pressed into verse

And gathered up in hand-stitched books, that loving tongues rehearse.

Oohs and ahs followed by some chatter reveal how impressed they are with the last rhyme. The barista changes the music and prods everyone to continue rhyming by singing a rhyme of his own.

Bar.

Who ought to have the authority to choose which books we read ...

An uncommitted freethinker or someone with a creed?

Fr.

Why must there be authorities who choose which books we read?

Why can’t we just consult with friends who want us to succeed?

Pr.

Get up, go out, and look around – the world out there is rough,

Advice on life’s curriculum from friends is not enough.

Pr.

Considering the mess we’re in, our friends will not suffice,

We must consult authorities or else we’ll pay the price.

Pr.

This world is tough – we need advice from those who make their mission

Devotion to a common cause, commitment to tradition.

Fr.

If every individual would see their inner light,

We’d never need authorities to teach us wrong from right.

Pr.

I’m certain that to some extent enlightenment depends

On guidance from authorities and help from faithful friends.

Fr.

We don’t need help from lecturers to see what’s out of sight!

Give in, let go, release yourself – surrender to the light!

Bar.

Authority, enlightenment – the chicken and the egg – The answer that we’re looking for, the question that we beg.

They’re all somewhat taken aback by the rhyme from the barista. No one is responding. The barista changes the music.

Pr.

A library’s a labyrinth whose references are crossed,

Without a good librarian, it’s easy to get lost.

Fr.

Encyclopedists take a vow to downplay the reminders

That life’s encyclopedias are really three-ring binders.

Bar.

When spirit’s lexicographers compile words of wisdom,

Is it to help us find our voice or bind us in a system?

The barista changes the music again.

Fr.

When repertoire repeats itself and turns into tradition,

And then tradition brands itself a duty and a mission.

Pr.

We need a standard repertoire, but also just as needful

Are efforts aimed at making sure its standards serve the people.

Pr.

The movements on the podium, the markings on the score –

And whether they're attentive to the mission on the floor.

Fr.

I wonder how an orchestra is able to catch on to whether or not it's being led astray by the baton.

Bar.

I wonder how the strings decide it's time to hedge their bets,

And drop out of the orchestra to form their own quartets.

Pr.

What might it take for orchestras to know that they can trust

Conductors who impose on them the discipline they must?

The music changes.

Bar.

When jam sessions repeat themselves and turn into a band.

When dedication to the group starts getting out of hand.

Fr.

When jam sessions repeat themselves and turn into a band.

When dedication to the group turns into a command.

The music changes again. The friend gets up and starts dancing while the others clap him on. The friend belts out a rhyme.

Fr.

I'd rather be a dancing fool responding to the groove

Than join a club that disciplines a body's every move!

Pr.

I wonder ... do you really think devotion to a dance

Is worse than getting hooked on beats that put you in a trance?

Fr.

To force ourselves to dance a dance that hasn't caught our soul

Is yet another exercise in needless self-control.

Pr.

Sometimes, when you don't want to dance, you ought to move your feet

And trust your heart will follow suit and start to feel the beat.

Fr.

Why force ourselves to dance to songs to which we can't relate?

Unless we feel the beat within, it's better just to wait!

Pr.

Some rhythms feel instinctual but some take dedication

Before they can reveal to us their deeper syncopation.

Pr.

The dancer who won't condescend to exercise and train

Will lack the choreography to reach a higher plane.

Fr.

To heck with choreographers – the steps are in our feet!

Give in, let go, release yourself – surrender to the beat!

The friend tires and stops dancing. The music changes.

Bar.

If school is like a radio, which DJ is the best –

The one who knows just what to play or one who takes requests?

Fr.

When learning that repeats itself is turned into a school.

When schools of thought are codified and made into a rule.

The music changes again.

Pr.

With so much time and effort spent devoted to a calling,

We sometimes fail to notice that we might, in fact, be stalling.

Pr.

Progress is slow and difficult, we have to be persistent,

Our dedication. ...

A bell rings in the distance. The priest and the professor realize that they are late and scramble to leave the coffee shop. The music-making stops for the time being.

Learning From Disaster

Anna Bates, Newburgh

Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 Atlantic storm, made landfall near Rockport, Texas on August 25, 2017. Winds and storm surge damaged many towns along the Texas/Louisiana Gulf Coast. Ensuing floods impacted areas farther inland, including my hometown of Conroe, Texas, near Houston. I had anxiously watched news about Harvey for many days. When I saw the homes of several of my high school classmates and some of my relatives in peril, my heart grew fearful. Suburbs surrounding Houston, including Conroe, experienced record-breaking floods. I saw Allen Parkway, the route I drove along to work each day during the 1970s, covered with water. I feared for my friends and family. I sat glued to the television, watching The Weather Channel's coverage of the events, and staying connected to social media such as Facebook, hoping to hear news from my acquaintances in Texas. I wept. I prayed. I wanted to do more. I eagerly searched for my United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Early Response Team (ERT) badge, scanned it and proudly posted on Facebook that I would go to Texas. Later, I formally applied to UMCOR and asked to participate on a Hurricane Harvey Early Response Team.

UMCOR is a nonprofit humanitarian agency of the United Methodist Church whose purpose is to provide emergency relief and relief supplies to those in need. It is highly effective, but not as well-known as relief organizations such as the Red Cross. This is the result of UMCOR's policy of channeling 100 percent of its donations directly to designated relief projects, and none to advertising or administration. UMCOR is managed and supported entirely by the United Methodist Church, and its volunteers.

Disaster relief is perhaps the most important task of UMCOR. The organization trains early responders to provide physical, emotional and spiritual aid to victims of disasters and others

such as refugees. Trainees attend workshops to get "ERT" certifications. The workshops include training in early response skills such as tarping roofs and removing mold from flooded houses, as well as how to counsel people impacted by disasters.

I first obtained an ERT certification in 2012, and worked on day trip relief teams in New York following Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. I renewed my three-year certification in 2015, so was ready to deploy to Texas as soon as ERTs from New York were invited.

The following comments are parsed from the journal I kept during the weeklong trip to Texas.

On Wednesday, October 4, our nine-person team flew via JetBlue from New York City to Austin, Texas, and then drove to the First United Methodist Church in Corpus Christi, Texas. This is a large church with more than 6,000 members. Its building has a gymnasium and a large education wing, all of which were dedicated to UMCOR's Early Response Teams. We arrived at the church around 10 p.m. on October 4, after a very long and wearing day of travel. We were instructed to bring air mattresses and pumps on the trip, but learned that the church had Red Cross cots and pillows available for team members. The men on our team were directed to the gymnasium, and the women to Sunday School rooms, which had been converted to dorms. This would be our home for the next six nights. Men's and women's locker rooms were available, but the water in the showers was always frightfully cold. The conditions reminded me that evacuees and refugees tolerate much discomfort in the shelters that house them.

Our mornings were busy. We started with coffee and breakfast, provided by church volunteers. At 7:30 each morning, the teams met with coordinators managing lists of homes needing relief. Each of the five to six teams



Photo credit: Leanne Summers

A sign of "hope" hanging in a devastated neighborhood in Bayside, Texas.

present every day received assignments. We then loaded our equipment, including saws, drills, personal items such as hammers and dust masks and our packed lunches, and drove to towns on the Texas coast where Hurricane Harvey came aground.

Our team's first assignment was to the town of Bayside, where we met a couple in their 60s whose ranch-style house was badly damaged. The house was uninhabitable, with much wind and water damage to the roof and walls. An accumulation of cooking utensils, personal items and Texas-themed knick-knacks that took decades to collect sat in plastic containers stacked on the porch and in a storage pod on the lawn. The team went to work retarping the roof and demolishing moldy walls in the flooded areas of the house.

On this day, I realized that I could not do some of the team's heavier work. Asthmatic responses to the mold meant that I needed to stay outside the house. Fortunately, the homeowners enjoyed my company. I learned about their extended family, and interesting



Anna Bates (top right) with the UMCOR team and a family they assisted in Texas.

things about their culture and history, and petted their cat, who weathered the storm in the couple's pickup truck. I also learned that I could drive a wheelbarrow effectively. At this and two other houses where our team worked, I stood outside windows with a blue Husky wheelbarrow, collected debris handed through the window, and hauled it to one of the hundreds of piles of debris on the street side.

Bayside, Port Aransas and other towns that we visited had much damage. Large trees lay uprooted. Entire homes were reduced to piles of rubble. Displaced pets roamed the streets and beaches. Team member Leanne Summers and I befriended two dogs that we hope have homes. Businesses were closed, and their doors and windows were boarded. It had been five weeks since the storm hit, and some much-needed businesses such as Lowe's and The Home Depot were partially open. The scenes on the streets and highways were surreal. Large trucks with draglines roamed the streets, picking up piles of rubble and carrying them to the median of Interstate 37. The snake-like pile of rubble stretched for miles, as far as the eye could see. We saw that much more work would be needed before these towns settled into their "new normal" situations.

Friday, October 6 started with frustration. Our team deployed to two houses that we were not able to work on because the people

who owned them had no pace to go, and were living in the badly storm damaged houses. We completed paperwork that we hoped would help them find places, and moved on. We traveled to a large relief center where we saw long lines of people applying for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) relief, some for the third and fourth times. We distributed some of the cleaning buckets we brought. At the center, we met a young woman carrying an infant in her arms who came to get food for her family. We learned that she was living with five small children in a badly damaged mobile home, and needed help. We contacted our dispatcher, and this woman's house became our assignment for the next two days. We repaired the leaking tarps on her roof and tore out some dangerously moldy walls. She thanked us, explaining that she was not on any of our requested relief lists because she, being an undocumented resident, was afraid to ask for help.

We worked on five different houses during our week in Texas. The families we helped were all very gracious, and most posed for photos with us at the end of our work. One family cooked a barbecue lunch for us.

Overall, this was a most rewarding experience for all nine members of our team. Besides new skills, such as how to remove construction



Anna Bates (center) and members of the UMCOR team remove debris from a home damaged by Hurricane Harvey.

adhesive with a reciprocating saw, we learned that some people just need someone to hear their stories, and find ways to adjust to their new realities. It was, perhaps, the most physically demanding work that I have done in my 64 years, and the most satisfying. I learned much about peoples' needs following a disaster, and more than a little about my own physical capabilities and limitations.

It was reported that Hurricane Harvey left at least 68 direct and about 35 indirect deaths in its wake, and caused more than \$125 billion worth of damage. Relief efforts continue. It will be months, possibly years, before Texas and Louisiana (where the storm also made landfall) recover.

It is my sincere hope that UMCOR will thrive for many years and continue efforts like this one. As of this writing, Early Response Teams were preparing to go to Puerto Rico, Florida, Louisiana and other locations in the Caribbean. Teams and supplies are also going to mudslide victims in Sierra Leone, West Africa, and earthquake victims in Mexico. It seems that human suffering caused by disasters may never end, but this trip showed me that disasters present opportunities for people to show their best with compassion, love and hard work.

Fostering Creativity and Encouraging Students to Embrace Scary Things

Rebecca Eliseo-Arras, Buffalo

In the fall of 2017, I was working on the final stages of my content analysis project in which I was examining the frequency and content of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) related posts on the social networking site, Tumblr. This was the first part of a multistage project aimed at exploring the use of social media platforms by those who engage in NSSI. Within that study, I encountered a disturbing trend of cyberbullying instances aimed at those already suffering from mental health issues and/or maladaptive coping behaviors. Out of this research finding, I developed two courses for the spring 2018 Community and Human Services residency at the Cheektowaga location. Cyberbullying, Suicide Risk, and Youth was the first course to be developed and was well received. The second course developed, Addictions in the 21st Century, involved an assignment at the end of the course that is the focus of this article.

This course examined issues of 1) internet addiction, 2) gaming addiction and 3) online gambling. During the residency, we explored topics such as the progression from “normalized” forms of gambling such as office sports pools and bingo, to more pathologized forms of gambling where the effects are often harmful to gamblers and their families on physical, emotional and/or financial levels. We also discussed issues related to how we as a society are so “connected” to our electronic devices and how people can often miss events surrounding them in the present moment because they are glued to their mobile phones. The final assignment for this course required students to create and present either an intervention and/or a prevention program exploring one of the three main issues in this course referred to earlier. Students were encouraged to be creative about their approach, design and delivery of their presentation. Five of the students decided to group together on their project to create a comprehensive

program designed to educate, inform and bring awareness to internet addiction. Their project entailed a dramatic play disguised by a PowerPoint presentation aimed at demonstrating the hold our electronic devices have on us. The presentation was designed to inform the audience about the prevalence, frequency and effects of internet addiction. A comprehensive website that incorporates information on cyberbullying was also included in their presentation. Within this website, they included a section that encourages visitors to “Take the Pledge” and decrease their dependence on their electronic devices, as well as topics involving cyberbullying. These students truly showed the spirit of SUNY Empire State College: creativity, thinking outside the box, exploring problems from different perspectives, and nontraditional ways of problem-solving. Their tenacity, dedication, and work ethic were truly commendable.

These students met on a weekly basis, dividing the tasks involved in the project, creating their own goals, and seeking out my input when needed. Their project was so inspiring and novel that I encouraged them to think beyond this course and possibly present their work and additional findings at the Student Academic Conference in the fall, and possibly write up their work for a manuscript for publication. Planting this seed encouraged them to think about how their project can benefit others and how they can possibly build community connections. Four of these students continued their work over this past summer to draft up an IRB (Institutional Review Board) proposal that we are planning to submit in the fall 2018 term to collect data on demographics, internet use, family structure and dynamics, how teachers use electronic media in the classroom, other forms of maladaptive coping (e.g., alcohol and drug use), and how individuals interact with their respective communities. We have approached this from



Rebecca Eliseo-Arras

Photo credit: Onion Studio, Inc.

a team perspective, with me as their leader and faculty sponsor. Students will be getting course credit for their work and will benefit from learning about the entire research process, from problem formulation to dissemination of results. All four of them have been directed to create a research question, and are responsible for locating or creating appropriate survey questions to obtain data to answer their individual questions. I have encouraged each of them to work together and rotate authorship depending on the idea generator and the order of who has done the most work. They loved the idea of potentially having four publications on their resume, especially those looking to apply to graduate school.

As a new full-time mentor, learning about the mentoring process was a special challenge for me. However, while some of the students involved in this project are not my primary mentees, I have learned that mentoring can take multiple forms. Encouraging students to take risks on a project, to embrace creativity, and take a giant leap on a project to do something they never thought they could do

is incredibly important to do with all students, not just your mentees. Ideally, we are all learners, and as educators, we are passionate about sharing our knowledge and expertise with our students, thus allowing them to grow and share their newly found knowledge with others. Like the research-to-practice cycle, I believe that the learning process is cyclical, as well. I also believe that sharing my knowledge and passion for research will encourage students to forge new paths, uncover new phenomena and ways of solving problems that they will then share with others. Sometimes this process is challenging, and other times terrifying, but taking a chance to learn new things is always rewarding. Embrace your creative side when teaching and working with students. I guarantee it will be a worthwhile experience!

“Suppose we stop blaming students if they drop out and instead begin to focus on ourselves and our structures as the problem. Suppose we frame the problem in terms of developing a welcoming structure in the university ... for persons who don’t look like us. What would such a structure look like?”

“We would be keepers of the dream, not keepers of the gate. We would see to it that our faculty and staff looked like our citizenry because we would think that of all institutions, school is about developing citizen scholars to serve society. There would be competing knowledges in the curriculum. We would have staff persons who would not look puzzled or askance at a non-Anglo-Saxon name, and would have an international curriculum because we would know that we must think globally. We would not tolerate suppression of ideas covertly through a managed curriculum any more than we would overtly deny freedom of speech. We would have staff development seminars to encourage faculty/staff to be inclusive, not exclusive, and to challenge persons who exercise their privilege by oppressing others.”

*– Phyllis Cunningham, “Let’s Get Real”
Adult Learning Unleashed blog*

*<http://www.alu-c.com/blog/2014/7/12/lets-get-real>
July 12, 2014, Possible Solutions section, paras. 11–12*

Gift From The Cosmos

Robert Congemi, Latham

Before Kate saw Bonnie walking – better, trudging – toward her on the street holding the kid by the hand, Kate hadn't had the best kind of day, either. The apartment she now was in was her worst so far.

"It's a hell hole," her neighbor had said. Mrs. Flanagan, obscenely overweight and looking like the 70-year-old derelict that she was, had stopped Kate in the dark, narrow hallway. "Every apartment in this building is. If you can still call it a building."

Of course, the hallway had a broken staircase and the walls had big patches of peeling paint and crumbling plaster. Kate's apartment couldn't have been much more than 10 feet square, overloaded with all her wretched stuff, plus a kitchen you could hardly walk in and big water spots on the ceiling.

"It's a good thing I'm only acrophobic, not claustrophobic," was Kate's comment.

But drinking a lot more than she should, to deaden all the pain of living, at least of living her life, apparently was Kate's fate for the time being.

"You're going through a stage," her father had told her. "I was drunk for 20 years when I was your age. Kate's father was a big man, a hard-working, hard-drinking, hard-living free spirit pretty much his whole life. His minimalist sculptures, which one critic called abstract-expressionism expressed in iron, were in museums all around the world. "What are you, about 30 now? You got 10 more years to go."

Bonnie was only 19, maybe 20, but most days she looked 100.

"Now she's got a hard life," Kate told Monica, her one good female friend, who lived in a big house in the suburbs, but hated her husband. He was this guy who owned a pretty high-end restaurant and betrayed Monica with his waitresses, or any other female who was

willing. Monica sold real estate and once told Kate that she was the smartest person she'd ever met.

"If you're talking educated," Monica clarified. They were sipping wine, a lot of wine, in one of those popular bars they had in downtown Albany, on Broadway. Kate's last three apartments had been in North Albany, a working-class to a nearly-slum neighborhood.

"Say something educated," Monica had challenged. "None of that Shakespeare or Monet stuff, but something about real estate, say, like economics."

Monica was starting to get really drunk, even starting to have trouble checking out the young male waiters.

"Maynard Keynes is irrelevant today," Kate obliged, playful. "Given the state of the world economy. But he was damn good in his time. Got us started. Kept us all in jobs."

Monica almost dropped her glass of wine by that last part.

"Kept us all in jobs? When was the last time you held down a job, my dear?"

"Only a year or two ago."

Bonnie was in far worse shape, in Kate's opinion, which she felt was an empirical fact. For one thing, there was the condition of Bonnie's mental health. They had been on a street corner, just as they were now.

Bonnie looked lost, vacant, overwhelmed, unbelievably tired.

"Kate, why is my life in the toilet bowl?" Bonnie felt she could talk intimacies with Kate. "I can't even think straight." Her little boy Fenton, filthy-looking, in clothes that looked as if they'd come from the dump, waited dutifully at her side. Kate wondered if he wasn't already badly damaged, even at this point. Such a pretty little boy, too.



Robert Congemi

Photo credit: Lana Ortiz

"Why can't you even think straight, Bonnie?" Kate answered, "Because everything *is* wrong. How can you make anything better, like plan for the future or change your life a little, when you can't even deal with the day? The next hour? The next minute?"

A car came by with a couple of guys in it, probably pimps, and beeped. Both she and Bonnie were still sexy enough. Kate had long, reddish hair and a full figure. Bonnie was the waif with the face of an angel.

"To say nothing of that jerk that you love."

Kate didn't mind saying it. It was the truth, and they had talked about it plenty before. Damien was one of those handsome, worthless guys lots of women were crazy about. He dug graves for a living – very symbolic. One day, Kate had seen Damien beating Bonnie right in the street. It looked like Bonnie had stopped him from going wherever he was going. Damien's hair was in a long ponytail and he was leaning down to hear what she had to say. Suddenly, he hit her with the back of his hand. Bonnie spun around and fell on the ground.

“Bitch. Always asking for money,” he told her as she sobbed and quavered on the sidewalk. “What the hell do you think; I’m made of money?”

“I almost never ask you for money,” Bonnie whimpered, frightened out of her mind. “Almost never.”

Kate thought Bonnie was such an already worn-out little soul.

“Why don’t you leave her alone?” Kate didn’t mind saying to him, though she kept her distance.

Damien looked at Kate with menacing eyes, though he had looked at her in the past with plenty of desire. He didn’t care to hide it. Once, he said to her, “Any time, woman.”

Kate wondered if the creep had the requisite Harley somewhere.

She didn’t even bother to answer him, except to say, “I’ve known men who could buy you with their pocket change.”

That had cooled his jets. Talk about life imitating art, or life imitating movies filled with bad-boy clichés.

So now when Bonnie saw Kate coming toward her, Bonnie was probably capable of doing anything for her. Especially since Kate was feeling as good about herself as she had in a long time. She had been helping out up front in a building parts warehouse owned by an old guy named Charley she’d met one afternoon in a neighborhood bar, which it turned out he also owned. Not that the old guy was coming on to her or anything. They’d just talked for a few weeks, sitting bar stool to bar stool in the afternoon. She didn’t even think it was a good bet he owned anything more than the clothes he had on his back. He just liked to be in her company, he told her later.

“Brains and beauty, miss,” he explained. He shook his head. His hair was white and longish and combed back straight like a style from the 1940s or ’50s.

“Just good karma,” she had said, making fun of herself. If she was going to be anything, she’d decided it was a Buddhist. No sin, no eternal damnation, pain, fire, etc. With Buddhism, you

were either on the path or off the path. And it was a lot easier, especially on your nerves, to be on the path, rather than off it.

“Nothing Abrahamic for me.”

She didn’t think Charley knew what she was talking about, but that was OK between them, apparently. She could say whatever she wanted, whatever came into her head, and he would chuckle over it.

“Kate, if I was as smart as you, I’d be livin’ in someplace wonderful right now. Like Paris or the South Seas or China maybe.”

Why, Charley couldn’t even do it! Later, she found out he had prostate cancer. He just wanted to be held once in a while. Or, even better, when she got to know him and got drunk one night, to be in bed with a pretty woman, just holding her.

“Ah, this is heaven,” he told the dark air. “Heavenly.”

Which was why she was feeling so good at the moment. Inevitably, Charley had lent her some money. Kate guessed he would have liked nothing better than to be sharing a place together, though he never proposed that to her. He was probably too shy. But he had given her 300 bucks once – to pay her rent. She didn’t have a dime that time, and she had agreed to the money, only after saying no a thousand times, with the absolute proviso that she would pay Charley back as soon as she could.

“I’m not going to screw up this relationship, Charley, as I have everything else. I’m smart enough to know that.” It was about 4:30, maybe 5 o’clock on a Friday afternoon, an almost poetic time of the day and week for her, everything being over, everything quiet, nothing started for the weekend yet. She was downing merlots, and he was sipping a local beer.

And she had paid him back, or was going to. She had saved up and was walking to the warehouse and his little office there. She was going to push all his paperwork aside, plop the money right on his desk, beam beatifically, and he would love her forever.

“Hey, your boy’s getting taller,” she told Bonnie as they came up next to each other.

It was a lie. The little kid looked worse than ever – scrawny, sick, whatever.

Bonnie didn’t know what to say.

Kate was on a roll. “And good-looking, too. Like his mom.”

Bonnie started to cry.

“OK, and like his daddy, too.”

There, that might make Bonnie feel better. After all, Damien was Bonnie’s choice, or something like that, and maybe it had to be said he had something going for him.

Kate didn’t want to know what was going on, exactly. It really didn’t matter. It was probably one kind of catastrophe or another. Damien had beat Bonnie again, or maybe beat the kid, or brought some woman home and messed with her right in front of Bonnie, or said he was going to leave her, or had lost his job, or they were getting evicted, or ... or ... or ...

Which was why the impulse came upon Kate. Or the idea, or the instinct, or the gesture. It didn’t come from nowhere – though maybe it did, maybe just from the universe, from the cosmos. After all, Kate did believe there was a principle of goodness alive and active in the universe somewhere. At least as alive and active as a principle of evil or whatever was the opposite of goodness in Buddhism. Most everybody who thought about this kind of thing agreed. And maybe it was even finally, at the last, in the end, more alive and active.

“I’ll tell you what,” Kate said, reaching out and taking Bonnie’s hand who was crying that soft, low sob even worse now. “I’ve got myself some money ... that ... that I’m going to give you, Bonnie. Just give you. I can’t stand it that life is this way for you.”

Kate took the \$300 in cash out of her pocketbook.

Bonnie looked confused and unbelieving, horrified, and joyous all at the same time.

Now she was saying “no” a thousand times.

“Yes, I’m just going to give it to you,” Kate repeated.

“But ... but ... how could I ever pay you back?” Bonnie asked, the little boy still hanging on at her side. “Why would you do this? I don’t even know you that well.”

“I know you,” Kate tried to explain.

"I'll pay you back, though, Kate," Bonnie swore. "I'll pay you back." It was as if she again didn't know what else to say. "I'd rather die than not pay you back."

Kate didn't think there was a permutation in the universe that would allow that to happen. Or a permutation in a dimension in a multiverse. But it didn't matter. Kate felt transformed, suffused in light, radiating light.

"Don't bother, Bonnie," she revealed. "Just consider it a gift from the cosmos, from the universe or whatever, or from what is or can be."

"To affirm our capacity as a people is not to deny the obvious variability among us. Nor is it to retreat to some softhearted notion of mind. We mistake narrowness for rigor, but actually we are not rigorous enough. To acknowledge our collective capacity is to take the concept of variability seriously. Not as a neat binary distinction or as slots along a simplified cognitive continuum, but as a bountiful and layered field, where many processes and domains of knowledge interact."

– Mike Rose, *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*
New York, NY: New Age Press, 2009, pp. 86–87

The Promises of SUNY Empire State College: An Interview With Richard Bonnabeau

Alan Mandell, Manhattan and Saratoga Springs

Richard Bonnabeau, former mentor in Historical Studies, college historian and keeper of its archives, fully retired from SUNY Empire State College in the spring of 2017, and since that time has served the archival needs of the college as a volunteer. Author of the college's only written history to date, The Promise Continues: Empire State College – The First Twenty-Five Years (The Donning Co. Publishers, 1996), Richard has helped us keep track of our legacy. We spoke in August 2018; what follows is an edited version of that conversation. Thanks to Richard for his time, patience and work in helping to create this print version of our talk.

Alan Mandell: Richard, you have done many interviews with key people in the college for so many years through your oral history projects that it's important that we have a chance to hear from you about your experiences. Here might be a way to begin: I wonder what SUNY Empire State College looked like when you came to the college?

Richard Bonnabeau: I had the good fortune of starting in the Buffalo Center in December of 1974. The center itself had just begun operations that September. The name was changed to the Niagara Frontier Regional Learning Center in 1975 to reflect its regional thrust. I took on a full load of students, instead of just a few required as a Lilly Foundation mentor intern.

A.M.: You were one of the Lilly Foundation people that included mentors Wayne Willis and Thelma Jurgrau.

R.B.: Yes, it was a wonderful group to work with, all incredibly talented people. Many of them were older than I was at the time. I really looked upon them as being my seniors, and I've never really lost that feeling. This was true with the Buffalo Center mentors, as well.

A.M.: How did you make the connection with ESC?

R.B.: I originally interviewed with the Albany Learning Center. At the time, Tom Clark was the dean who later became the director of the college's Center for Individualized Education (CIE). I didn't get the postdoc internship, but Tom asked whether I'd be interested in applying for the Lilly fellowship as a mentor-intern at the newly launched Buffalo Center. So he got me a plane ticket and I was off! It's interesting: I was fresh out of grad school and desperate for employment. They wanted me to come on a Tuesday for the interview, but I said I couldn't because I had to vote! Maybe that impressed them? By that time, I had already served the college as a tutor in Spanish.

A.M.: You had studied in Latin America.

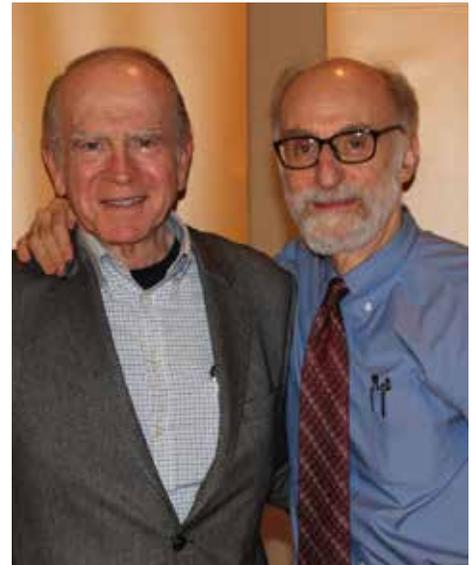
R.B.: I had attended three universities in Latin America where Spanish was the language of instruction, plus I had been tested by the chair of the Spanish department at Indiana University (IU), where I was doing my graduate work, to see if I could teach with them. But since I wasn't taking Spanish literature as one of my fields of graduate study, he said that even though my Spanish was really very good, they gave their own students priority. But I have used my Spanish, and it's been very helpful over the years at ESC.

A.M.: You had a Fulbright Scholar opportunity in Peru as part of your studies.

R.B.: I had a Fulbright right after I finished my bachelor's degree. By that time, I had already studied in Chile as part of my undergraduate studies through a program coordinated by Fordham University. I wanted to learn more about the culture and history of another Latin American country, one very different from the other.

A.M.: What was your dissertation work on?

R.B.: You would think I would either do my work on Chile or on Peru, but actually I did it on international relations, the reason being that I had access to a wonderful collection, IU's Eli



(l-r) Richard Bonnabeau and Alan Mandell

Lilly Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. It included the diplomatic papers of an English ambassador who served as a plenipotentiary for Portugal and Brazil in negotiating the treaty for Brazilian independence. I was able to combine that with going to various physical archives in the United States, England and France. I also had access to microfilm collections. Having access to so much material in the U.S. saved me a lot of money, and I didn't have to uproot my entire family and spend an extended period in Latin America.

A.M.: Wasn't it odd that in those days, ESC had such a fantastic group of Latin American historians?

R.B.: We had the largest "department" so to speak in SUNY! Bob Seidel, Chris Rounds, Nick Cushner and others were on the faculty; I can't name them all, but it was amazing that they found their way to ESC. ESC attracted very talented people. I was developing a special outreach program with the Buffalo Latino community, the majority of whom were Puerto Ricans, when I got

recruited to come to Saratoga Springs. I recommended Nick Cushner as a possible replacement for the Buffalo Latino initiative, which made it possible for me to join George Bragle, coordinator of the Utica Satellite of Statewide Programs, in developing what was called “extended programs.” I had known Nick through our connection with Charles R. Boxer, one of the notable historians of the 20th century. Boxer divided his time between Yale and Indiana University. Over the years, I got to know him really well. Boxer helped me with my dissertation research and eventually shared some harrowing accounts of being a high-level prisoner of the Japanese Imperial Army. Extended programs was an alternative to individual face-to-face contract learning at a center or unit by working with students at a distance. This focused on students who for one reason or another could not meet with mentors at learning centers or units. They included individual students overseas, inmates at correctional facilities, physically disabled and psychologically challenged individuals, students in the armed services, students whose employment made it impossible to plan regular face-to-face meetings with mentors, etc.

A.M.: It’s interesting to me that your work in history led you to write *The Promise Continues*.

R.B.: I think my studies as a historian put me in a good position to write that early history of the college. I wanted to provide a kind of global view. I love the good story; that’s what I love about history – storytelling that has a lot of value. You can read the work of Tacitus on the history of the Roman Empire. There’s nothing that seems arcane about it; it’s interesting because it’s about human behavior and the forces that are affecting people that make either good decisions or bad decisions. From my view, the human psyche is pretty much a constant in history.

A.M.: Can we go back to your move to Saratoga Springs and “extended programs.” Why were you interested in extended programs? Didn’t it run counter to the spirit of individualization of the college that was at its core?

R.B.: While I was in Buffalo, my family was still in the Capital District: my wife, my son and my mother-in-law were in Clifton Park, and I was commuting about every other

weekend or so. Personally, the move was really helpful in keeping my family together. I also thought the college needed this kind of program, so when I was offered the opportunity, I took it. And I think that worked out pretty well; eventually, extended programs evolved into the Center for Independent Study, and then into the Center for Distance Learning (CDL). I was lucky to be able to make some contributions along the way, and I learned a great deal from all of this and got to work with talented people.

A.M.: You’ve often referred to the importance – to you and to the college – of those involved in this work.

R.B.: George Bragle had already run a unit at Utica, so he knew how to use existing materials – mostly popular learning modules – to work with students. From George, I learned how to combine resources that had been already created with individual contracts. It wasn’t either/or. And so that worked out well and the program expanded. Eventually, the college decided to merge Bob Hassenger’s independent study program with extended programs, which he was recruited to start working on when he was associate dean in Buffalo. You know, initially I felt a little bit like an ESC outlaw, but I came to realize that what we were doing with distance learning was completely in line with the core principles and mission as set out by SUNY Chancellor Ernest Boyer’s task force in the college’s “A Prospectus for a New University College.” We had a whole kaleidoscope, a whole spectrum of ways to try to satisfy student needs using various resources and modalities to do it. That dimension, that goal, was sometimes lost in how we thought about ESC. It’s not only a question of providing access; it’s about the imaginative use of different forms and different resources with a student’s interests and needs being the governing principle.

A.M.: I know that you were very interested and involved in connections between ESC and The Open University (OU) in the U.K. The similarities and differences between the two institutions are fascinating. I always thought of them as basically emerging as alternatives at the same time.

“It’s not only a question of providing access; it’s about the imaginative use of different forms and different resources with a student’s interests and needs being the governing principle.”

R.B.: There were important similarities between the two. Both institutions served adult students and believed in the importance of the liberal arts for a college education. The majority of OU students those first years were teachers seeking bachelor’s degrees. They were already primed to do well in terms of having the study skills necessary to get through these OU distance learning courses developed by instructors from Oxford, Cambridge, the London School of Economics, etc. Our students came from all sorts of backgrounds – a major difference. We knew that we had to rework the course materials, which came in huge blocks of credit. We did have a significant measure of success. The courses also enhanced our academic standing within SUNY [the State University of New York].

A.M.: Wasn’t there also a divide and some serious debate about whether Empire State College was moving in the right direction?

R.B.: Some people defined distance learning as the antithesis of individualized learning. Yet, there were, and there are, faculty who came from the world of individual learning contracts and still found this direction to be rich and fruitful and valuable for our students, especially when we were creating our own materials and when we were acquiring resources developed in the United States. But this was also at a time of budgetary stringency, which made this foray somewhat threatening to established programs.

A.M.: Was your experience with these distance learning students different from what you knew in Buffalo?

R.B.: These were adult students. When I came to the college, most of my students were older than I was! They really wanted to know what

they should do – what they should study. And I would initiate a conversation with them and try to find out more about who they were and their backgrounds in terms of work experience and whatever college-level education they had. And we talked about what we then called CBE (credit by evaluation; now iPLA or individualized prior learning assessment). I think I was pretty good at helping them design programs that would make sense and build on what they knew and what they had done. But I want to say that there was real continuity between that early Buffalo experience and what I did later in the college, including work that we did in International Education. When I read Ernest Boyer's task force report, "A Prospectus for a New University College," I was even more convinced.

A.M.: It's that combination of "access" and "experimentation." I see that you saw yourself as doing both.

R.B.: I saw this as a spectrum. I thought we needed to be able to serve more students and could; and mentors also needed relief from the heavy labor of doing one contract after another and avoiding what were disparagingly called "boiler plates," obstacles for reappointment, etc. Having CDL do some of this work for them was positive in many ways, and we wanted to make this happen. Certainly, there was a collegewide impact at CDL from "you can enroll any day of the year other than during one month of the reading period," to providing fixed terms of eight to 16 weeks. I started the open learning alternative that offered monthly enrollment between terms to enhance CDL's service to our own students as well as those of other centers. The faculty in the early years were really killing themselves, and still are, but there was also a spirit of working together – an incredible comradeship. We knew that we couldn't succeed without each other, and that's a great feeling. It really brings people together. No one came to Empire State College knowing exactly what Empire State College was going to be like. We really needed each other in a shared process of discovery, even rediscovery, about mentoring. CDL was established in 1979 and that same spirit existed among its clerical staff, faculty and administrators. In regard to the latter, Scheff Pierce provided key guidance as its first director. He was followed by Dan Granger

and Meg Benke as subsequent administrators who led the transition to online learning for ESC and SUNY, a transition that was accelerated by Jim Hall serving in the dual role of ESC's president and spearheading SUNY's development of its online learning network.

A.M.: How did this transformation take place? We all had to be transformed into playing a very different faculty role than anything we had experienced in the past, whether as teachers or students.

R.B.: In my own case, I relied on my newfound colleagues at the Buffalo Center – for example, for me, Tom Dehner, Reuben Garner, Keith Elkins; and there were others. Although we didn't call it this, we had something like a "buddy system" in Buffalo, and it was tried around the college, too. And so we learned by watching our colleagues, by getting advice from them, by having them serve as instructors for contracts and seeing what people did. The physical space was so tight that you could literally *hear* people working with students. You never really felt isolated.

A.M.: What you are describing is very much how we all learned at what was then the Lower Hudson Unit in our basement space in the Rockland Community College library: no doors; there were no floor to ceiling walls, so you heard everything that was going on with a colleague who was literally 2 feet away. It was an unbelievable learning experience.

R.B.: There also were more organized efforts. The Center for Individualized Education was a really important component of the college in those early years. And we were lucky: just about anyone, any foundation that had funds and was interested in alternative education, was ready to invest in us. We were also blessed at ESC in the early years by having the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). For any funds that we received, there was always a study of how those funds were used and their impacts. The report was sent to the funding organization; as a consequence, we have a large number of studies preserved in our archives. This also helped us develop a very good national reputation early on. Tom Clark's and Art Chickering's [ESC's founding academic vice president] work was crucial. Important studies were generated by many others,

including, a bit later, work on the mentor role by mentor Carolyn Broadaway. Many people benefited from this and from the regular workshops that Tom organized not only with Empire faculty but with other colleges around the United States; so you can imagine what kind of major impact we were having in higher education. We were really becoming known. Moreover, our faculty were presenting papers at national and regional conferences. Jim Hall was very active within SUNY and nationally in promoting the unique contributions ESC was making to nontraditional education. In fact, he and Don Nolan, the director of Regents College, now Excelsior College, traveled statewide promoting both institutions, not as competing but complementary, innovative entities serving the higher education needs of the state.

A.M.: What struck me about all of those ORE "white papers" that were generated was that they reflected real interest in the relationship between people learning and people systematically reflecting on that learning.

R.B.: The work was so crucial to creating a college culture. When we moved into data crunching, one didn't get the full qualitative sense of what was happening with students and mentors around the college, and I think the administration also lost its ability to use the Office of Research and Evaluation to study how new programs – like the Lower East Side (NYC) program, and a report was written on that – were operating and developing. All of it proved that we were really trying to be reflective practitioners.

A.M.: And, of course, our ESC colleague, Tim Lehmann's work as director of The National Council on Adult Learning (NCAL) was part of this larger ESC effort to encourage scholarship on teaching and learning. Tim brought in the most important people in adult education in the country every year and sponsored a fellowship program, too.

R.B.: One thing about our success is that it was embedded, it *is* embedded, in this community of scholars and practitioners and administrators who really want to make a difference, and they – and we! – have supported each other in really unique ways. This mutual support was a real benefit.

A.M.: I asked you before about your move to extended programs and to CDL; I also wonder about your interest in and commitment – over many years – to International Education at ESC.

R.B.: Well, you know I grew up in New York City – in Brooklyn and Queens – and I always lived in a multiethnic neighborhood and it fascinated me and it made me think about a world beyond the neighborhoods of New York. And as I mentioned, I had strong ties to Latin America through my college and graduate studies. And so I think that was a major draw. I also believe deeply that international programming, especially bringing ESC faculty face-to-face with our students overseas, helps to build bridges of understanding among individuals and nations.

A.M.: Obviously, you understood this international thrust to be consistent with ESC's mission.

R.B.: I thought this was really part of what the college might be able to offer. And it was present from the start. Ken Abrams, who later became dean of the Metropolitan Center and then headed the Center for International Programs, initiated our first unit overseas in London; it was early on – in 1971. Ken had amazing energy. He was able to do so many things. He knew how to make connections with different organizations to find places for students to learn. I remember that he got some students – only undergraduates – into programs like The Tavistock Institute that was focused on professionals! Ken ran the program in London for about three years before budget cuts forced its closing. Madeline, his spouse, devoted a significant amount of her own time making the program a success.

A.M.: Am I right that many of these students were not international students, like the ones ESC now serves, but Americans – younger students, who were going to Europe or spending time in London?

R.B.: Yes, the program was really designed not only to serve Empire students, but all of SUNY. The London program was an important inauguration of international programs at ESC.

“I’m concerned that we will reach a point where students will lack that ability to go off in different directions, to follow their intellectual inclinations. . . .”

A.M.: Can I go back to your role as college historian? How did this happen?

R.B.: Once upon a time, the area of study (AOS) groups did really interesting things – activities beyond administrative and curricular tasks. The history group that I was part of had, for example, one meeting in New York City at Columbia University with the head of oral history division. Because of that meeting, I got very interested in oral history. That’s how it started. Plattsburgh-based mentor Anastasia Pratt is now going to take responsibility for the college’s archive work. That’s exciting.

A.M.: Richard, you wrote this about Empire State College in *The Promise Continues*: “Creating a student-centered college, one that would fill a wide range of educational needs while preserving academic rigor, called for unbridled imagination, sober pragmatism and a degree of fearlessness.” You offered these words in regard to the college’s first 25 years; we’re now at twice that. Do you think there is, right now, the “imagination” and “pragmatism” and “fearlessness” that you thought was so crucial to the founding of this institution?

R.B.: I think we have become constrained, more bureaucratic. Creativity is compacted in a way by all kinds of restraints. I’m concerned that we will reach a point where students will lack that ability to go off in different directions, to follow their intellectual inclinations, because there will be someone or something saying “stop!” because of the need to have uniformity throughout SUNY about course content and outcomes. They will be stopped in their tracks and mentors, too. We had much more freedom in the early years of the college. I’m not as optimistic as I would have been 10 years ago.

A.M.: Do you ever think about what a new experimental college designed in 2019 would look like?

R.B.: The important thing is we have the elements. I think we have to remember the soul and spirit of Empire State College. It’s still within us. We shouldn’t lose sight of that. We have to think about the one thing that separates us from American alternative higher education. We shouldn’t forget that today when people talk about individualized education, what they really mean is competency-based education where, basically, everyone’s doing the same thing, maybe even working in isolation and even in different timeframes separating them from other students. I believe this has psychological and pedagogical implications. Students need socialization; it’s critical. Let’s not forget what ESC can still do best. By the way, ESC’s graduate program in business administration appears to nicely integrate the competency-based dimensions with the rest of a student’s studies. Jim Hall warned many years ago about not becoming a “monomodal” institution when he expressed concern regarding the heavy emphasis on individualized contract learning over structured alternatives. This concern should work in both directions and help us avoid the pitfalls of having one approach to the exclusion of others.

Becoming the Architect of Your Own Learning: Finding the Right Balance

Alan T. Belasen, Saratoga Springs

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

—John F. Kennedy

When I first told my father about my plan to complete a Ph.D. in the United States, I also shared with him my anxiety about trading the security of home, family, friends, culture and history with an unfamiliar environment across the ocean. In retrospect, I could have never imagined that one day, the dynamic interplay of stability and change, the inherent tension of competing goals, and balancing work-life goals would eventually become the hallmark of my scholarly work.

Those of you who are familiar with my research will recall that Talcott Parsons' social action theory and structural functionalism; Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan's four paradigms: radical humanist, radical structuralist, functionalist and interpretive; and, Robert Quinn's competing values framework (CVF), which challenge researchers and practitioners to shift from the binary "either/or" to the holistic "both/and" have significantly influenced my thinking and scholarly work.

As a holistic framework, the CVF helps capture the richness, complexity and interdependence of organizational life. Researchers and practitioners alike use the CVF to articulate a systematic framework to group and differentiate functions, roles and practices of management and leadership according to common principles and criteria. These ideas are explored in my books: *Dyad Leadership and Clinical Integration: Driving Change, Aligning Strategies* (Health Administration Press, 2019); *Women in Management: A Framework for Sustainable Work-Life Integration* (Routledge, 2017); and *The Theory and Practice of Corporate Communication: A Competing Values Perspective* (SAGE, 2008).

My father was a war veteran who fought along with Charles de Gaulle and the French Foreign Legion during WWII, and later left France in 1948 to join Machal, a group of overseas volunteers in Israel's War of Independence. He epitomized the paradox of "to be and to do," famously articulated by Benjamin Franklin who said, "Either write something worth reading, or do something worth writing." My father encouraged me to pursue my academic aspirations with courage and determination; he inspired me to be mindful while recognizing the value of what I want to contribute to the world; and he pushed me to seek out my passion in life and share it with others. A meaningful life, he reminded me, is the integration between the two. He said in his native language of French, "*Aller et réussir dans ce que vous êtes passionné, apprendre de nouvelles choses, conduire les autres, et rappeler toujours votre histoire et vos valeurs*" (meaning, "Go and succeed in what you are passionate about, learn new things, lead others, and always remember your history and values"). And so I did. It should come as no surprise that I dedicated my first book, *Leading the Learning Organization: Communication and Competencies for Managing Change* (SUNY Press, 2000), to my father.

Inspired by my four daughters' educational goals and professional endeavors,¹ I expanded the scope of my research interests to examine women's leadership styles, demonstrate women's aptness for senior management positions, and explain the ways in which employers can and should embrace women in leadership roles and improve the diversity of top management teams and boards of directors. After testing my ideas through several articles and conference papers, I published *Developing Women Leaders in Corporate America: Balancing Competing Demands, Transcending Traditional Boundaries* (Praeger, 2012). The book's CVF acts as an organizing model that aligns personal competency with



Alan T. Belasen

organizational capability and challenges readers to: (1) identify important leadership roles and competencies; (2) break societal barriers; and, (3) select a right set of behaviors that fits their personal and professional goals.

Throughout this time, I have also managed to infuse the development and implementation of Master of Business Administration programs with curricula that balance soft and hard skills and that focus on relevance and accountability. Between 2001 and 2002, mentor Michael Fortunato and I redesigned the MBA in business management from 60 to 48 credits. In 2003, we created the first MBA partnership with Anadolu University, Turkey. This also was the impetus for developing the MBA in global leadership several years later. During 2008–2009, we initiated the accreditation of the MBA by the IACBE (International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education). In 2010–2012, facilitating the outcomes assessment plan and writing the self-study became my top priority. Shortly afterward, our MBA Veteran and Military Pathway program, with its mission to support the transition of veterans

from military to civilian life funded by the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) grant, was born. Around the same time, in anticipation of the growth in health care systems and high need for executive and leadership capacity, we initiated the search for health care faculty and the proposal for the health care MBA. My collaboration with mentor Barry Eisenberg, a newly hired MBA faculty member in 2010, resulted in two new programs: the MBA in healthcare leadership, funded by the SUNY High Needs Grant; and the Advanced Certificate in Optometry Business Management, a partnership between SUNY College of Optometry and SUNY Empire State College. In addition to many conference papers and publications between 2012 and 2015, Barry and I also co-authored (with John W. Huppertz) *Mastering Leadership: A Vital Resource for Healthcare Organizations* (Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2015).

Program development and scholarly projects provide opportunities for collaborative research among willing faculty. When this happens, a powerful bond is created that is fueled by energy, commitment, collegiality and mutual support. Through the long years of chairing the MBA and the Business, Management and Leadership (BML) division, and my five years serving as the School for Graduate Studies (SGS) faculty chair, I led meaningful collaborations with and among my colleagues. The results exceeded my expectations. I initiated many certificate programs with ESC, SGS and BML faculty participating in curriculum development. Joining forces on the development of the certificates yielded a parallel stream of interdisciplinary research, with ESC faculty working together on multiple research projects that I either initiated as lead author or co-led between 2007 and 2017. Perhaps the best example is *Confronting Corruption in Business: Trusted Leadership, Civic Engagement* (Routledge, 2016), which I co-edited with mentor Roxana Toma. Twelve faculty from ESC and other universities contributed sections and chapters to this book project.

Recently, I also began to collaborate with my son on multiple research projects. Ari is an econometrician by training, and associate professor of economics and finance at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Collaborating

with Ari is a satisfying and an intellectually stimulating experience. For the past decade, he has been conducting research on human development and anti-corruption endeavors, as well as on disaster recovery efforts. He has contributed dozens of conference papers, book chapters and journal articles published in the *American Economic Review*, *The Journal of Human Resources*, *Economic Modelling*, and *Intelligence*, among others. Ari is frequently sought for interviews as the subject matter expert on national policy, crisis communication, natural disasters and labor economics. Ari has been featured in news media including *The Michael Smerconish Program*, *All Things Considered* (NPR), and the *Huffington Post*. From 2016 to 2019, we co-authored 10 research articles and conference papers. Our most recent research paper on doctor-patient communication appears in the *Journal of Health Organization and Management* (2018).

Before stepping down as BML chair in the fall of 2015, I made sure that the proposed doctorate in business administration (DBA) and the proposed 36-credit MBA in business management with dual tracks of international business and management, were well articulated and made it through the governance pipeline fully supported. The cohesive design of the shorter MBA paved the way for my successor, mentor Betul Lus, to transition from the 48-credit to the 36-credit MBA almost seamlessly. Leading the BML faculty, Betul has demonstrated leadership qualities that have made a positive impact on the direction of BML.

My work and accomplishments at SUNY ESC were also recognized publicly in 2015, when I was honored to receive the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities. In 2017, I received the John L. Green Award for Excellence in Business Education by IACBE.

What are the takeaway points that are worth sharing with ESC faculty who work balancing their aspirations on the research/publication front with effective teaching and development?

One key for a successful and enriching academic experience lies in the synergistic effects of goals and activities. Focus on your research agenda and areas of interest, and at the same time, develop a course or initiate a

program with common themes and interests. When I conducted my research on women's leadership, I also developed the Advanced Certificate in Women and Corporate Leadership. When Barry Eisenberg and I designed the MBA in healthcare leadership, we also co-authored the *Mastering Leadership* book. And when Sylwia Starnawska (MBA faculty) and I co-designed the M.S. in finance and the Advanced Certificate in Global Finance and Investment, I was engaged in an interdisciplinary research project on financial markets with two non-ESC colleagues, leading to a publication in the high-impact journal *Economic Modelling*. You get the idea.

Time is a scarce resource. Carve out the time needed for your continuing growth. Take this as a non-negotiable commitment, a personal charge, a responsibility to yourself in which you are the cause and consequence of your professional experience. Become the lifelong learner that we, at ESC, expect our students to be. Why not apply the same principle to yourself? Heed the advice of lifelong scholars: Trigger the personal qualities that can further develop your self-efficacy, strong intellectual interests, good communication and interpersonal skills. Boost your self-esteem and self-confidence by reminding yourself that perfection is not your goal, integration is. Focus on what you can change and if it's too challenging, find a colleague with complementary skills with whom you can collaborate.

Manage your time efficiently by finding synergy among your activities and by multitasking. Be creative in identifying effective solutions to problems. Ask yourself, "How can I improve my teaching with my research?" Engage your students in discussing thought-provoking ideas. Get them to apply

"Learning from everyone and expanding your intellectual horizons are important for your continuing growth in a world where we constantly lag behind. ..."

systems thinking by using multiple frames to discuss issues or figure out solutions to problems. Then you can start to learn from *them*. Learning from everyone and expanding your intellectual horizons are important for your continuing growth in a world where we constantly lag behind technological advances and new knowledge.

Here is something that I did well and that you can do, too: become an external reviewer. Peer-reviewed journal editors will be happy to add your name and areas of specialty to their lists. I know this as a reviewer (referee) for multiple academic journals and as the founding editor of *Management Development Forum*, a journal that I created at ESC many years ago. The rewards from reviewing are great. You get to read new articles with breakthrough thinking, review methodology, reflect on limitations and future research, write thoughtful reviews, support your colleagues, and perhaps most importantly, gain access to additional sources. Publishers will appreciate your contributions by giving you free access to full-text articles. Editors will acknowledge you, often publicly. Others will make the selection of reviewers a more prestigious process by

making it competitive and by rewarding high-quality, excellent reviews. Between 2000 and 2018, I received the Outstanding Reviewer Award seven times from the Academy of Management. I have been a referee (external reviewer) for over a dozen peer-reviewed journals. You are already qualified to become an external reviewer, too!

Another useful idea that benefited my scholarly work has been engagement in meaningful extracurricular activities. Become a coach, trainer, tutor or consultant. Combine your teaching with your conversations with different audiences, and exploit the synergies that are created across your professional activities. Consistent with the idea of learning from everything, I often test new theories in my work with executives and then take their ideas of what works or doesn't work to my classes, asking students to interpret and synthesize ideas and propositions. *Become the architect of your own learning*. I hope this will help you to integrate your research, teaching and development to see your own professional goals come to fruition. Learning is a race without a finish line.

Note

- ¹ My four daughters from oldest to youngest: Amy is an accomplished author, entrepreneur, and founder of ABD Creative, a web-based marketing firm, and restaurant owner in Bend, Oregon. Anat is completing her Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and has been awarded a Smith postdoctoral research fellowship, which she will carry out in collaboration with Cornell University; Amanda completed her M.A. in communication at the University at Albany and is currently employed by Wolters Kluwer Lien Solutions. Abby completed her M.D. at Albany Medical College and is now with the Internal Medicine Residency Program at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. Modeling the way for my daughters is their mom, my wife, Susan Katz Belasen, a clinical psychologist by training, who provided us with guidance, encouragement and inspiration.

Connecting the Missing Link: Does Spirituality Matter in Academic and Professional Lives?

Anant Deshpande, Saratoga Springs

Introduction and Motivation for the Project

This project was conducted as part of the 2016 Keep-Mills Research Grant.

First and foremost, we are most thankful to the Keep-Mills Research Grant Committee and to Stephen Keep-Mills for funding the application. The project sought to investigate ways in which spirituality impacts our academic and professional lives, and whether spirituality has a role to play in the SUNY Empire State College (ESC) business curriculum. This work was exciting on two levels. First, this project provided me with an opportunity to build on my previous work in spirituality; and second, this project offered me an opportunity to collaborate with one of ESC's students (at the time), James Kelly.

I have been with the college for nine years. As a mentor, I have had the pleasure of working with many adult learners. In my conversations with them, many have highlighted the importance of their emotional and spiritual growth. Many learners have indicated to me that they want to pursue higher education not only for the growth in their jobs, but also to enhance their personal, spiritual and moral development. As a business educator, I wanted to challenge myself to help provide more opportunities such as these to our students, and particularly help them explore meaning and purpose in what they do at the college and in their professional lives. As a consultant with industry and in the management world, I have seen that inner development prepares individuals to assume leadership roles and meet many professional challenges. Since coming to ESC, I have investigated the impact of spirituality on learning capabilities and operations management processes such as mass customization. As a part of that project, I conducted many community-based and industrial interviews that helped me understand the importance of spirituality

in the context of personal and professional lives. Since that time, my research has moved to a more technical focus, and has looked at how various organizational processes such as concurrent engineering impact manufacturing and organizational performance. Many recent conversations with my mentees and practitioners have again rekindled the idea to investigate this topic from a learner and faculty standpoint.

Background and Research Questions

Spirituality means different things to different individuals, and yet it impacts our ways of knowing in many ways. For instance, some consider spirituality as the basis of their actions, while some others consider spirituality as leading to inner connectedness and helping them make sense of complex and compelling issues. In the real world, many organizations have started understanding the importance of spirituality and have included the notion of spirituality in how they conduct their businesses. Specifically, spirituality is associated with attaining connection with oneself, others and the workplace environment. Workplace spirituality is further related to self-actualization. Tischler, Biberman and Altman (2007) considered Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs model and identified the highest need – self-actualization – as connected to spirituality. Butts (1999) mentioned that the idea of spirituality in the workplace is important, and identified dimensions of spirituality such as optimal human development, the art of transcendence and spiritual psychologies. Burack (1999), with the help of different case studies of companies such as Tom's of Maine, Hewlett-Packard Co., and Ford Motor Co., highlighted the importance of workplace spirituality as one of the important themes in the development of any organization.



Anant Deshpande

There is also management literature that highlights the importance of spirituality from an organizational performance standpoint. For instance, as pointed out by Krishnakumar and Neck (2002), organizations that help employees, or that are willing to provide “individual encouragement” and assist the employee in achieving spirituality, gain better performance. Another interpretation would be that “spiritual employees” lead to better organizational performance. Albuquerque, Cunha, Martins and Sá (2014) found that spirituality was important in enhancing the performance in primary health care services. Management researchers have also linked spirituality with innovative work behavior (Afsar & Rehman, 2015) and job involvement (Van der Walt & Swanepoel, 2015).

James and I felt that it was important to acknowledge the value of spirituality in our overall lives and also in the ESC business curriculum. This fact has been further strengthened by our interactions with colleagues and students within and outside the college. Despite the importance of spirituality in our personal and professional lives, it is very rare to see the inclusion of concepts of

spirituality in traditional business courses. Many adult learners at ESC serve as leaders and followers at various organizations. Today's workplace is intercultural, and it is important to be able to help learners understand how values and beliefs impact various actions at the workplace. The specific research questions for the project were as follows:

- *RQ 1. Does spirituality play a role in the inner development of students?*
- *RQ 2: How do learners foresee the role of spiritual topics in the business curriculum?*

Activities During the Project

First, we reviewed the literature and held informal conversations with mentors, learners and industry professionals related with this topic. We used an existing survey instrument for the purposes of the research. Secondly, before collecting any data, we sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from ESC. After receiving IRB approval, an invitation email with the survey link was sent to a random sample of 1,000 matriculated undergraduate adult students registered in the area of study Business, Management and Economics (BME) at SUNY Empire State College. This invitation email included the purpose of the study, what we wished to accomplish, and the reasons for selecting undergraduate students as potential participants of the study. Also, it was clearly mentioned that student participation was voluntary and that the students could choose to withdraw any time. It was also indicated that student nonparticipation did not have any impact on their ability to complete the activities of the courses in which they were currently enrolled.

Findings

The survey received a total of 208 completed responses. This resulted in the response rate of approximately 21 percent. The following presents some findings from questionnaires obtained from participants:

- When asked if spirituality played an important role in the inner development of students, the vast majority of respondents (approximately 62 percent) strongly agreed that spirituality did play an important role.

- When asked if spiritual topics should be included as part of undergraduate management-related courses, the vast majority of the respondents (approximately 65 percent) indicated that spiritual topics should be included, whereas approximately 22 percent disagreed with the idea of the inclusion of spiritual topics, and the remaining were undecided. Seventy-two percent disagreed with the view that discussions of spirituality in a management or leadership class would result in too much tension and negative emotion.

The questions also asked respondents to identify the benefits and concerns toward the inclusion of spirituality-related topics, and ways in which instructors can promote the inclusion of spirituality-related topics in management-related online classes.

The most frequently perceived benefit of the inclusion of spirituality-related topics was the recognition that a variety of situations arise in the workplace that necessitate the need to be mindful of the influence of spirituality on the followers and leaders. For instance, one of the comments received was as follows:

Spirituality and religion are at the forefront of many issues in the world today, I believe that learning about others' beliefs will make for a more well rounded leader with better management skills.

The second most perceived benefit was that the inclusion of spirituality would help students broaden their perspectives beyond their individual beliefs. Specifically, one of the comments received was as follows:

The benefit of including sections on spiritual topics is that it will cause other students to see outside the box of their own beliefs.

The third perceived benefit was that such topics would lead to ethical business practices, enhancing the skills of leaders and helping in building better team working relationships. One of the comments received was as follows:

There is a strong intersection between spirituality/philosophy and philosophy/economics and philosophy/ethics. Economics and ethics are critical to business.

The most frequently perceived concerns about the inclusion of spirituality-related topics was the potential role of the instructor. For instance, one of the comments received indicated that:

I would be concerned that the instructor would push his/her views onto the students and would be biased toward their own viewpoint.

The second most frequently perceived concern was about the indifference shown by students toward spirituality-related topics and to people's belief in general. For instance, one of the comments received indicated that:

Students can be quite intolerant of others at times and in particular during the online discussion areas.

The third most perceived concern was the need to make spirituality-related topics as elective instead of forcing students to select for them. For instance, one of the comments received indicated that:

It is one thing to promote being on good terms with all people, another to suggest treating people of different religions differently, and another to invite an instructor, guest speaker, or fellow students to preach their views in class. This is an intensely personal matter, I don't want to hear preaching in my management courses, and I don't want to write a paper on how I apply my spiritual views in the workplace. An elective course on spirituality in the life and role of a manager would be fine with me, for those who are interested. Otherwise, this subject belongs in a John Maxwell "Maximum Impact" seminar (which I have attended and enjoyed), or you can enroll at Liberty University for a more spiritual atmosphere.

The fourth most perceived concern was the perception that spirituality may not be an appropriate/relevant topic altogether for business schools. For instance, one comment received indicated that:

Spirituality is intensely personal and should not be part of a college course in a business school.

Conclusion

Overall, the project has informed several different aspects of my ongoing work with students. This project has provided us with an opportunity to understand whether spirituality matters in the development of our learners. A vast majority of the students indicated that they were comfortable with the inclusion of topics of spirituality, and in fact felt that such topics could only enrich the curriculum. Importantly, the vast majority of the respondents felt that spirituality-related topics are connected with contemporary issues and problems. Respondents also indicated that spirituality-related topics would help them in their professional lives and are important for their overall development.

As a mentor, I have always felt that ESC students have tremendous research potential and there is a need to harness that. I feel that there is a need to go beyond the regular undergraduate degree planning process and cater to the professional as well as research growth of our students. Such a mentor-student collaboration was truly a rewarding experience, as this further encouraged James to actively engage in research and question his own views about spirituality. For James, the topic of spirituality in the business and educational environment was one of motivation and inner development. The project results helped James understand what prompts the individual desire to succeed, and what stimulates the quest for improvement of the individual during various life stages that would typically involve periods of stagnation or less desire to seek out new opportunities. It was a rewarding process for me as well, as my mastery of business, and of spirituality as it relates to business education, increased.

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The Citizens' Re-Entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline: An Opportunity for All Initiative – An Overview

David Anthony Fullard, Manhattan

Introduction

The Citizens' Re-entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline program provides college access and opportunity to returning citizens with prior criminal justice system involvement. A 15-week, 30-hour, noncredit, exploratory college experience sponsored by the SUNY Empire State College (ESC) Black Male Initiative (BMI), the program offers exposure to college-level coursework while helping incarcerated students develop a college-ready skill set, to prepare and apply for college admission, employment or both. Systematic research is being developed to track student performance, retention and graduation rates to determine the effectiveness of the programming. This program is supported by ESC's long history and tradition of serving place-bound persons, including incarcerated persons, ex-offenders and corrections officers. Access to the proven services provided by the BMI, including the Fortified/Enriched Classroom and master's-level weekend coaches available by appointment or on a walk-in basis, further ensures a successful introduction to the college experience.

Reversing the Tide

For far too long, young black men have had a higher chance of incarceration than of completing college degrees. The legacy of slavery, the 13th Amendment, Jim Crow, the Black Codes, lynching, and backlash against the fight for civil rights and equal justice have led to abuses throughout the criminal justice system, with excessive policing of minority neighborhoods, unequal sentencing and the current crisis of mass imprisonment. The statistics are grim on both sides of the equation. Likelihood of incarceration is one in 17 for white men, one in six for Hispanic men, and one in three for African-American men; although African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the general population, they

comprise 40 percent of all prisoners (Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015). They are more likely to be arrested, charged and more severely sentenced than their white counterparts. Youth of color are disproportionately detained at higher rates than whites, even when they engage in delinquent behavior at the same rates (Holman & Zeidenberg, 2006).

On the other hand, low college retention and graduation rates have become a crisis of its own among black male students, who graduate at almost half the rate of white students. As noted by Shaun R. Harper (2012), director of the Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education: "Black men's dismal college enrollments, disengagement and underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education" (p. 1). The Black Male Initiative and other similar support programs at schools around the country were developed specifically to address these issues in the educational community. Research has shown that students who participate in these programs graduate at significantly higher rates than those who do not have access to such programs.

Reductions in funding for public education have had a significant impact. As noted in the report "Better by Half," which focused on New York's success in amending, repealing and reversing policies and practices which led to mass incarceration, "State and City University of New York students marched in 1997 on the State Capitol carrying banners that featured a graph depicting a nearly dollar-for-dollar shift in state spending from higher education to prisons" (Greene & Schiraldi, 2016, p. 25). If funding for public education is at an all-time low, it is even lower for those behind bars who have already fallen victim to the crisis of mass incarceration.



David Anthony Fullard

Now, Empire State College in the Metropolitan New York Region, through its robust BMI program (which has grown from a peer mentoring group into a full-fledged student organization), has developed a new initiative to begin to turn the tide. This is the Citizens' Re-entry Program, creating a reverse pipeline: Instead of running from poor neighborhoods (with underperforming schools, poor health care, excessive policing and lack of economic opportunity) straight to prison, this pipeline runs inmates who were caught up in the mass imprisonment crisis from the prison into college, and back into society as productive citizens.

And these are truly returning citizens: While incarcerated, they have limited access to physical and mental health care, education or vocational training, work opportunities, even the news media, social media, new technology, civic participation and more. They may have been exposed to abuse and violence while behind bars, or prior to their incarceration, which may leave lasting emotional and

psychological scars. They may never have had exposure to a college atmosphere or college-level coursework, and may never have had encouragement or expectations that they would attend college or obtain a degree; indeed, they may never have known anyone or had anyone in their family who had any education beyond high school.

The Citizens' Re-entry Program, together with the support of the Black Male Initiative, provides these incoming students with an introduction to college life and higher education, preparing them to enter the work world and return to society as a positive force in the community. As part of one of the social justice and social responsibility initiatives of BMI, the program utilizes BMI mentors and Metropolitan New York Region faculty to work with students at the Lincoln Correctional Facility (Lincoln CF) in Manhattan. All of the men housed in this location are nonviolent, work-release students in a community correctional center.

The Black Male Initiative at SUNY Empire State College

BMI offers a range of academic and social support programs to all students at ESC's New York City Hudson Street location. BMI focuses on the needs of students of African heritage from everywhere in the world (hence the use of "black" versus "African-American," since many students from the Caribbean, Europe and Latin America do not identify as African-American). However, while targeting African-American, black, Caribbean and Latino/Hispanic men in particular, due to their underrepresentation in higher education, all programs, services and activities of ESC's BMI are open and available to the entire college community. Everyone is welcome to participate, without regard to race, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, national origin, language or other demographic characteristics. SUNY ESC BMI projects do not discriminate, and serve as models to develop best practices for improving educational outcomes of all students (Fullard, 2015).

In addition to the returning citizens' pipeline program, BMI has developed the Fortified/Enriched Classroom protocol, where new students are provided with an in-class coach

to assist with absorbing complex college-level material, writing and math assignments, time management, work planning and more. Master's-level Weekend Coaching is also offered to help students with writing and math, research and study skills, and ensures that students feel supported and achieve success.

All of this has been developed in response to research that shows that students who complete all their courses in their first term and first year are nearly *10 times* more likely to graduate or complete their degree than students who do not. Other services provided by BMI to the college community include the Black Male Initiative Scholarship, and advising on applying for other relevant scholarships for students; identification of at-risk students and outreach to help them stay enrolled and achieve their educational goals; social and cultural events, including panel discussions, poetry readings, musical concerts, networking sessions, and community service opportunities such as working with adolescents and young adults.

These BMI services comprise what we consider an educational social justice-in-action protocol, helping to even the educational playing field. It achieves this through embedded academic support services in the Fortified/Enriched Classroom, and by providing social support through its other programs and activities. All of BMI's programs and services are available to students coming in through the Citizens' Re-entry educational opportunity initiative, and serve to help them adapt to and succeed in the college environment.

Staffing for the Citizens' Re-entry Program

The ESC and BMI staff and faculty who are involved in the exploratory phase of this program have included: Frances Boyce, Elliott Dawes, Dave Fullard, Cory Kallet, Debra Kram-Fernandez, Raúl Manzano, Lear Matthews, Vanessa Moore, Bhuwan Onta, Dianne Ramdeholl, Omar Richards, Beverly Smirni, Steve Tischler, Barbara L. Tischler, Amy Ruth Tobol, Chris Whann, Nadine Wedderburn and Lisa Whiteside.

As part of the overall BMI program at ESC, BMI mentors and coaches work with students at the Lincoln Correctional Facility. Prospective students receive a welcome letter describing the program fully.

Ideally, faculty or other educators who are involved in the Citizens' Re-entry educational opportunity initiative (including mentors and coaches) have: (1) knowledge and thorough command of the content area (critical reading, writing and math); (2) proven teaching skills and abilities; (3) the ability to form a strong working relationship with the returning citizen student; and (4) the temperament, demeanor and presentation skills to work with this population effectively.

Classroom Topics and Goals

Students receive exposure to college-level, noncredit courses on topics including (but not limited to) the following: African-American history, basic college math, creative writing, writing to prove your point, literature, art, acting/theater, music/entertainment/film industry, business administration, public administration, criminology, substance abuse and people of color, disease and people of color – autobiography, the function and dysfunction of jails and prisons.

The development of a college-level skill set by these students is accomplished via participation in the topics mentioned. As part of that participation, students practice speaking, writing, critically reading, researching, note taking, and basic college-level math in a noncredit, stress-free, "no pressure" environment. Students may take advantage of BMI coaches, as well.



Lear Matthews (far right) with program participants.

Schedule and Programming

This educational opportunity covers five modules over 15 weeks (three weeks for each module) of culturally sensitive, college preparatory, adult educational material, preceded by a one-week orientation session. The first week of each module is comprised of content area work with the instructor. The second week of each module allows students to review the assignment with the BMI coach, and rewrite or correct their work as needed. The third week of each module allows the edited work and study area content to be reviewed with the professor (or other educator) and the coach.

For example, our most recent, fall 2018, sessions were as follows: Orientation: Learn about Program, ESC/BMI Services, Complete Paperwork, with David Fullard/Lisa Whiteside; Module #1: Black Voting Rights and the 15th Amendment, with Barbara L. Tischler/Steve Tischler; Module #2: Scripting New Narratives of and for Myself, with Dianne Ramdeholl; Module #3: Introduction to College, with Elliott Dawes; Module #4: Spoken Word, with Omar Richardson; and Module #5: Water Color Resist, with Vanessa Moore. All classes were held on Fridays from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., at ESC's Hudson Street location.

Post-Program Evaluation and Other Services

In keeping with Empire State College's mission and core values, the Citizens' Re-entry Program is extremely student-centric. This academic, college exploratory program is focused on student success through exposure to college-level coursework in a no-pressure environment, plus assistance with developing a college-ready skill set. After the 15-week program, students are evaluated for college readiness. Those with college-ready skill sets will be invited to further their studies at Empire State College, and to participate in the BMI Support Network. Those students who are not yet college ready may continue to work with a coach to develop college-level skills; they may also continue to participate in the BMI Support Network.

Special seminars for students are conducted on how to apply for city employment via the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). Given the challenge for those with a history of criminal justice system involvement, practical assistance with job applications and job placement is critical to the success of this program. All students are encouraged to obtain their GED diploma or high school diploma if they have not already done so. They are provided with assistance to pursue a college degree if they are interested, whether they will be attending college for the first time, or if they have prior college credit and want to continue with their studies. In addition to the regular Friday sessions, special programs and other classes at ESC are made available for interested Lincoln Correctional Facility students to participate in (as an integral aspect of the Citizens' Re-entry Program), in order to assist them achieve their educational and career goals.

Students receive a special certificate of attendance with the BMI logo from Empire State College, showing their participation in the Citizens' Re-entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline Program, with their name, the courses they attended, and the dates of the program.

BMI/ESC's Involvement with the Citizens' Re-entry Program and Scalability

Every student who is part of the Citizens' Re-entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline has access to *all* programs offered by the Black Male Initiative, including the Saturday general membership meeting.

We are currently examining new and innovative ways to enroll members of the Citizens'-Re-entry-to-ESC/BMI Pipeline Program. The goal is to eventually have these students participate in our associate, bachelor's and master's degree programs by helping them develop college-ready skill sets, become familiar with the college environment and receive support from the BMI program. Ease of transfer for nontraditional students, from entry-level programs to full degree programs, is, of course, part of ESC's original master plan.

Research on the effectiveness of the Citizens' Re-entry Program will be designed and conducted by Joe King in ESC's Office of

Decision Support. He is developing research protocols that will track the process and document the outcome(s) of this unique BMI social responsibility initiative. In collaboration with me, an in-depth research protocol is in development to assess a range of outcomes.

Our overall goal is to scale up this program to accommodate more returning citizens over time, both from the Lincoln CF and other locations. Scalability will occur once new teaching modalities and educational content materials are developed to serve this population, based on research outcomes that will be gathered during the trial period.

The History of ESC's Involvement With Incarcerated and Place-Bound Persons

It is important to recognize that Empire State College has been providing services to incarcerated persons since its founding in the early 1970s, as well as building on qualitative and quantitative research regarding successful programs. The founding documents for ESC noted that it was "an institution which transcends constraints of space, place and time ... [serving] the variety of individuals of all ages throughout society ... [with] the central focus upon the individual student learning at his own pace ..." (State University of New York, 1971, p. 2). The "Extended Program" was specifically designed for "students who find it difficult or impossible to relate to learning centers ... because of distance or other circumstances," and specifically listed "Prisoners, hospital- and home-bound people, [and] people living in isolated rural areas" (Empire State College of State University of New York, 1976, p. 49; J. W. Hall, personal communication, November 4, 1976). The master plan for the college focused on diversifying the student body, giving "special attention to place-bound and prisoners" (Empire State College, personal communication, February 20, 1976).

The goal was for these students to transfer into more traditional degree programs as circumstances would permit. The university president, James Hall, clarified that the mission of ESC is "to meet the needs of those persons who require alternatives to the traditional ... form of higher education," noting the importance of "a systematic program of research ... with special attention to the



Student Omar Rodriguez proudly displays his certificate of attendance.

relative effectiveness of various approaches to learning and what kinds of student can best be served through each different alternative,” including “young people, retired people, home-bound, incarcerated, or handicapped people; ghetto-dwelling people – indeed, all people whose situations or preferences lead them to seek alternative means to higher education ...” (J. W. Hall, personal communication, November 4, 1976). Via special grants from the state crime control board, ESC mentors worked with 25 students, both prisoners and correctional officers, at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, and with over 50 prisoners from Auburn, Attica and Albion at the Genesee Valley and Niagara Frontier Learning Centers, including outreach work at a local drug rehabilitation center. Statewide, the North Country Unit and Greenhaven had counselors on staff to coordinate work between student and mentor, while at Fishkill and Walkill, mentors worked with each student individually (Empire State College, personal communication, February 20, 1976).

It is thus clear that this *new* Citizens’ Re-entry initiative is part of a long, strong institutional history at Empire State College (DeCoster, 2017). An early document regarding “Student Diversity and Admissions Recommendations” shows that ESC has focused on providing access to higher education for a diverse population, noting that “Prisoners, patients, and others in confined or remote places deserve priority ... [especially those with] need for a college degree to improve employment opportunities, desire to change careers or occupation, [and lack of] availability of educational opportunities other than Empire State College ...” (J. Hall et al., personal

communication, May 7, 1976). Referring to the master plan’s revision of the college’s mission statement, this document described the development process very clearly, including improving services to all students and raising retention and graduate rates, through research on what works with each group: “This task requires attention to student *access* to higher education; to *content* responsive to emerging social needs and individual purposes; to *methods* that serve diverse students with varied needs; and to *program effectiveness* ... the key task is to formulate general conceptions concerning the needs of a clearly defined constituency, then to develop resources and processes that respond to individual differences within that general group; and then to repeat this process for another significant constituency, building on the experiences and research accumulated with each different group of students” (J. Hall et al., personal communication, May 7, 1976).

Surely, no population better qualifies for support in all of these areas than those held in jails and prisons in New York City or around New York state, particularly those caught up in the explosion of mass incarceration of black and brown youth over the past 40 years – and now being released into the community under new programs of diversion, decarceration, parole and probation, albeit without adequate support and re-entry programming in place. It is our hope that ESC is providing a valuable social service through this program, and indeed, contributing to public safety. As noted in the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review, “Most of those incarcerated are released. The unprecedented number of people being released from prison, and the rate at which the release is occurring, makes re-entry a pressing contemporary social problem. At least 95% of all people incarcerated in state facilities return to the community. ... The condition of people returning to their communities should be of great public concern because the environment in which people are confined affects the psychological condition in which they return” (DeVeaux, 2013, p. 264). It is our goal that the Citizens’ Re-entry Program will help contribute to these returning citizens becoming educated, employed, healthy and productive members of their communities.

Reports from the Front Line: Testimonials From Faculty in the First Cohort of ESC’s Citizens’ Re-entry Program

The following are edited statements from faculty who participated in the inaugural roll-out of the Citizens’ Re-entry Program at ESC in the fall of 2017 and spring of 2018. Their experience-based insights and observations have already helped us develop and enhance the program going forward. They show how both students and instructors benefit from the experience. They taught the following courses, and provided additional support as needed: Module 1: Scripting New Narratives of and for Myself, with Dianne Ramdeholl; Module 2: Medical v. Recovery Perspective in Treatment of Mental Illness, with Debra Kram-Fernandez; Module 3: Coffee and African Business, with Chris Whann; Module 4: Economic Value of a College Education, with Frances A. Boyce and Samantha James; and Module 5: Black Voting Rights and the 15th Amendment, with Barbara L. Tischler. As you will see, other faculty provided additional learning opportunities for our students.

Frances A. Boyce

This is one of the most rewarding projects I’ve engaged in at ESC. The participants were looking for different options for their lives. One man said: “I never want to go back to jail,” because it had hurt his whole family. Another said he hadn’t planned his family on the “minimal wage” he was now earning.

As I showed them the data on graduation rates and earnings by race, they were surprised that government data demonstrated the gaps between races. The participants expressed admiration and support for the data showing African-American women had the greatest gains in earning degrees. They commented on what this could mean for their wives and daughters.

Society has pejorative views of people who have been to prison, which does not allow for the individuality of the person re-entering society. These men self-selected to join this program. They are family men making a commitment to themselves and

their future. It was gratifying that I could contribute to a project that would help them achieve their goals.

Cory Kallet

This is a great program. I really enjoyed the experience. We are giving back to society by helping those who have done their time – making an effort to get them/keep them on the right track. It was very rewarding for me personally. Overall these seem to be good guys who want to get back into society and hopefully live a normal life. They have professional aspirations (construction, real estate, community work, etc.), and when I asked them if any were interested in going to college, at least 75 percent said yes. I know this might be unrealistic and just easy to say in the moment, but I was pleasantly surprised that such a large percentage even acknowledged the possibility.

About 50 percent of the attendees were engaged. Just like any group of students, getting them all to participate is tough, especially with what they've gone through. During the first session, I talked about how to write a resume, how to do an honest personal self-evaluation (SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats] analysis), and the importance of building a career plan. I think that many of them understood the importance of doing these things, but only time will tell.

I adjusted in the second class. I got more “real” with them in terms of actions they can take. They gave me a rundown of what they do daily in terms of the need to get a job, the restrictions they encounter and other issues they face. This is where they seemed to come to life. I had them talk about places that exist to help them, i.e., organizations focused on second chance opportunities, companies/fields that they should avoid or focus on because of their inclination to help/restrict interaction with ex-cons. We talked about real-life strategies that can help them get to the next level. A lot of sharing went on and hopefully they will continue to do so when they return to the halfway house. This was really good stuff.

I would suggest that some of the course materials or subjects could be more real-life in terms of learnings that can help them make the successful transition from penal to general society. Some suggestions: finding a job and a career, financial literacy, successful communications, the value of furthering your education.

Debra Kram-Fernandez

I offered a three-week workshop on the recovery perspective in mental health and mental illness. This topic seems relevant because like people with a history of incarceration, people with serious mental illness also face stigma-related barriers to re-entry in numerous capacities (career, vocational, residential, and social opportunities).

Initially it seemed clear that the human service perspective of “use of self” in learning about ways of helping was going to be a rather foreign concept. The men were cordial but seemed very guarded. Therefore, it was amazing how quickly the participants warmed up to the idea of open conversation and critical thinking. We started with an activity often utilized for generating honest dialogue about power and privilege in the United States. The activity calls for participants to state how they identify in terms of a number of attributes/characteristics, (e.g., race, gender, able bodied, sound mind, primary language, etc.). Next, we ask participants what identities comprise the power attributes, what are the nondominant attributes in this culture, and further, what they personally feel in terms of power attributes when it comes to their own identity.

I did not have the opportunity to gauge reading and writing skills in terms of college readiness, but I certainly was able to gauge college readiness in terms of curiosity, critical thinking, and openness to learn and participate. These young men, who initially appeared so guarded and formal upon entering the classroom, became quickly engaged in discussions about complex issues: What defines mental illness? What is the impact of stigma? How much risk is appropriate or not appropriate when a person reclaims his or her life? Who gets to

make that decision about risk? These men were easily able to transfer relevant questions to their own life experiences.

One thing that was remarkable was that in addition to being able to see parallels and recognize some of these questions in terms of their own experiences, these men were also very able to maintain a focus on the topic at hand. With all that is going on in their lives at this time, the abilities to suspend concerns about other aspects of their futures and engage in discussions about social justice in an academic setting were simply impressive.

Empire State College emphasizes providing education to the adult learner. We offer flexible learning modes, but above that, we offer mentoring – one person who can follow each student through his or her journey to graduation. Life happens while adults pursue college degrees. Babies are born, triggers for issues that were thought to be resolved are re-triggered, family members are ill or die, children need special services and attention at school and at home, jobs end, promotions occur, and people re-enter society after bouts with mental illness, substance abuse, trauma, and incarceration. All of these can pose obstacles to completing a degree. ESC mentors can help students troubleshoot and find ways to stay on track when this is feasible.

The supports these students need seem not much different from others in our student population. Based on my experience of this three-week workshop, the benefits of identifying any added supports needed and providing these supports far outweigh the risks. I met and worked with young men who were easy to engage in academic discussion and able to contribute their own perspectives to the classroom that were: a) focused, b) reflective, c) diverse, and d) relevant.

Raúl Manzano

I gave three lectures, the focus of which was to interpret works of art in order to encourage attendees to think critically and formulate answers based on the visual images displayed. The works of minority artists were analyzed, and I introduced the artists with a brief bio of their careers

to provide a background and acquaint the class with the topic. I hoped to show that artists work in different mediums, since I wanted to emphasize that art can be created using a variety of materials and tools.

Images were projected on a large screen to allow closer examination and a better viewing experience. The artists discussed at each session were: 1) Jacob Lawrence, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kehinde Wiley; 2) Banksy, Michelle Myles and Natural Langdon; and 3) the 59 Rivoli art collective, Anthony Smith and Raul Manzano.

The audience consisted of six to 11 participants. Not all participants stayed for the duration of the sessions, which lasted about 75 minutes. During introductions at the first session, three participants expressed having done some art during their early school years but having no formal training or other type of art instruction; the rest indicated that they had none. In the next two sessions, I reviewed what we covered in the previous session to refresh their memory of what we were discussing before introducing the new topic and artists. We discussed in depth the paintings (including the presidential portrait of Barack Obama by Kehinde Wiley), tattoo art, graffiti, photography and more. Students seemed proud when we discussed work by Natural Langdon, a graduate of ESC who is now in the master's program at the School of Visual Arts [in New York City], and they were surprised and pleased and shared insightful viewpoints when I presented my own artwork, as they felt the work connected to them.

For an audience with no previous art background, participants tried hard to interpret the images and answer the questions posed to them. I focused on breaking the ice to discuss art and gain their confidence, which I did by encouraging them to say whatever they perceived about the artworks; I emphasized that there is no right or wrong answers. This process helped them relax, and, slowly over time, the participants loosened up as we looked at the images. The discussion improved at the second meeting where they felt more comfortable, and during the last meeting

I was impressed with the level of responses and the interest they put into figuring out what the images were about.

Lear Matthews

I was honored to be part of a cohort of SUNY Empire State College mentors to lead a study group for the Citizen Re-entry Program, sponsored by the Black Male Initiative (BMI). Armed with confidence and knowledge of group dynamics, particularly as a group study mentor and clinical social worker, my initial meeting with the group of inmates was both delightful and frustrating – delightful because I am always interested in being a part of facilitating opportunities for the underserved; and frustrating to see lives of talented young men interrupted because of unfortunate life circumstances.

I had placed a hold on my expectation as to how intense or relaxed the three meetings I was asked to conduct would progress. Although I had prepared a lesson plan and topics, I was prepared to modify my planned curriculum, based on my preconceived notions of the group. Indeed, I was pleasantly surprised. The young men were courteous, attentive, and demonstrated an avid interest in being in the classroom. Of course, as with any group, there were variations in active verbal participation.

Overall, I found these students to display good insight and critical reflection and thinking skills. They were open to connecting the concepts discussed with their own real-life situations. Many of them expressed an appreciation for the opportunity afforded them by this innovative ESC program. I strongly recommend the sustaining and funding of this program.

Dianne Ramdeholl

The first module on Scripting New Narratives of and for Myself focused on reading excerpts of narratives that reflected themes from the lives of students. We read *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas, and, drawing on their own experiences, students discussed the motivations of the main character who was incarcerated. We also read James Baldwin's

"Letter to My Nephew" and connected that text to the larger context of that time and also this current moment.

It is very clear when listening to these students speak, how truly precarious their lives are, how little support they have, and how much less [support] many will have upon release. They recognize how essential a college education is to becoming true citizens.

I experienced the students I worked with as being incredibly motivated, with profound and powerful things to say, both about the world and their roles in it. I was particularly struck by the ways in which they represent and embody a less visible yet deeply toxic history of this country that informs the present where race and class intersect.

Barbara L. Tischler

In February of 2018, I taught three classes to participants in the Citizens' Re-entry Program, working with as many as 10 men in the program. My course [Black Voting Rights and the 15th Amendment] provided them with an example of college-level lessons on Africa, the Middle Passage, and slavery; resistance to slavery; and the Reconstruction period that featured the formalizing of white supremacy and the maintenance of "slavery by another name."

Through lectures, conversations, and video presentations, I challenged students to think about the nature of slavery and its effects on the humanity of enslaved people. I also asked them to think about the qualities of freed slaves and their descendants that made it possible for them to resist dehumanization to emerge as creative, passionate, and accomplished citizens.

The students in the program were extremely receptive to relating the experience of people in the past to their own lives. They made connections between the United States in the 1840s through 1900 and the society in which they live in the second decade of the 21st century. When asked to respond to readings and videos, the students were eager to try to imagine the context in which various historical actors lived.



(l-r) Student Darryll Jennings, mentor Nadine Wedderburn and student Ellier Acevedo

Discussions were lively, and the students were definitely engaged, even with difficult and painful concepts such as the idea that one human being could own another. The concept of human beings as property and the importance of the government's role in protecting property were particularly difficult. At the same time, these ideas resonated with the students because of their own experiences with incarceration. They also examined the role of slavery as an influence on the writing of the United States Constitution. At the end of each class, I was really pleased that some students had questions and were eager to learn more.

Steve Tischler

The Lincoln CF students in attendance were as eager to learn as any Empire State College student. They followed the narrative and raised good questions, which often anticipated the next topic of the lesson. The academic engagement that the participants demonstrated augurs well for successful undergraduate careers. You can't "teach" motivation – you either have it or you don't, and these men have intellectual curiosity as well as a palpable desire to move forward in their lives. Each recognizes that earning a college degree would help them materially, but they also seemed to relish challenging discussions.

While none contemplated Historical Studies as an area of study at the first of three sessions, as an historian, I wondered if a few might consider that field if they were to formally enroll. It was obvious that most had little exposure to this discipline. Most recognized that they had been denied a critical view of slavery when they were

in high school, and their questions and comments reflected a strong desire to learn more. They were extremely attentive and responsive.

Many participants in the Citizens' Re-entry Program audited a regular group study at the Brooklyn Unit as well. Those who gathered for Friday night Hudson Street meetings were invited to attend an actual course scheduled for another evening, and between 10–15 consistently attended African-American History 1861 to 1941 during the spring 2018 term. While most were reluctant to contribute to the group discussions led by matriculated students, several spoke energetically with me about the course content once the "formal" meetings concluded. They demonstrated a clear desire to learn and an eagerness to share ideas.

By presenting material that was relevant and accessible, members of this group had an opportunity to make connections between what they once might have perceived as the "distant past" and their own society and their own circumstances. Many expressed an interest in enrolling at Empire State College when they were eligible.

Nadine Wedderburn

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this program. I believe that my time was well-spent; time in which a fundamental value of teaching – listening to others – was reinforced to me.

During my sessions, I sought to engage the men in discussions and writing exercises centered on topical issues relating to race and justice in today's society. In each session, the attendees were very keen and actively participated in the activities assigned. From the first night, it quickly became evident to me that the opportunity to reflect on salient issues and openly share their viewpoints in a dynamic, yet serious, environment was deeply appreciated by those present.

While some of the men expressed that obtaining and maintaining employment is their top priority, I was encouraged to learn that a number of the participants in the program have college credit and are eligible for admission to an undergraduate program, if they choose to obtain a degree.

I trust that, in some way, their time in the Citizen's Re-entry Program has inspired them to seriously consider higher education as a viable option at this point in their lives. It is clear that, given the appropriate guidance and support, they have the potential to succeed academically.

Christopher Whann

Many years ago (in the 1990s), I had the opportunity to teach in an Inmate Higher Education Program at an upstate New York correctional facility. It was among the most rewarding teaching I had ever done, since I could witness firsthand the impact of education on men who were trying to remake their lives as they were preparing to be released.

Sadly, funding was eliminated for those programs, and I was unable to continue teaching in the facilities, but I have long advocated for more chances for citizens returning from the corrections system to have maximum chances to participate fully in their communities.

I was delighted when I was presented with the chance to teach a unit for the returning citizens' project. We agreed I would deliver a module on "Coffee and African Business." I was fascinated by the enthusiasm the students who came had for the material, especially enhancing their understanding of African history. Coffee provides an interesting entrée into the scholarship about the continent, about globalization, and about the modern world economy.

All in all, this was a great experience for me, and I hope for them, too. I look forward to participating again.

Future Endeavors of the BMI Citizens' Re-Entry Program

In the near future, the BMI Citizens' Re-entry initiative will begin to work with a group of men who were formerly incarcerated and are now under the supervision of the Department of Probation. These men will attend five modules of noncredit-bearing college courses on a variety of subjects. The purpose of this is to expose them to college coursework and the college environment, and give them a "feel" for what it means to be a college student.

The next phase of this new program will have the men who participated in the noncredit courses apply to ESC as full-time students, working toward earning a degree or certificate. Once they matriculate, their first two terms will be spent in the Fortified Classroom, studying general education subjects. These students will have access to the BMI Weekend Coaching program. Further, they will have access to all of BMI's programs, and support from BMI club members.

As noted earlier, the Fortified Classroom provides in-class coaching and support for new students, as research has shown that those who succeed in their first term and first year are nearly *10 times* more likely to persist through to graduation. By providing resources within the classroom setting – rather than through outside tutoring or advising, which may carry a stigma or require an excessive time or financial commitment – the Fortified Classroom ensures that no one “falls through the cracks.” Indeed, the program tracks students to make sure that they keep up with their assignments and attend classes, rather than waiting until it is too late, and they are in serious danger of failing or dropping out.

The Weekend Coaching program offers peer tutoring for those who want or need extra support, beyond what is offered in the classroom sessions in the Fortified Classroom. Students may receive additional assistance on starting, finishing, or editing written assignments, completing math homework, performing academic research, and learning time management and other important study skills. While many who have good quality primary school and high school backgrounds already have these abilities, for students who come from communities with underfunded schools, uncaring or overburdened teachers, and crowded classrooms with no supplies, these are new lessons. Providing this assistance, without any stigma of “pull-out” resource rooms or the expense of private tutoring, is critical.

Furthermore, members of the Citizens' Re-entry Program will have access to all of the programs and services offered by the Black Male Initiative at ESC. Beyond identification of at-risk students, the Fortified Classroom and Weekend Coaching, BMI provides support groups, peer counseling and referrals, a

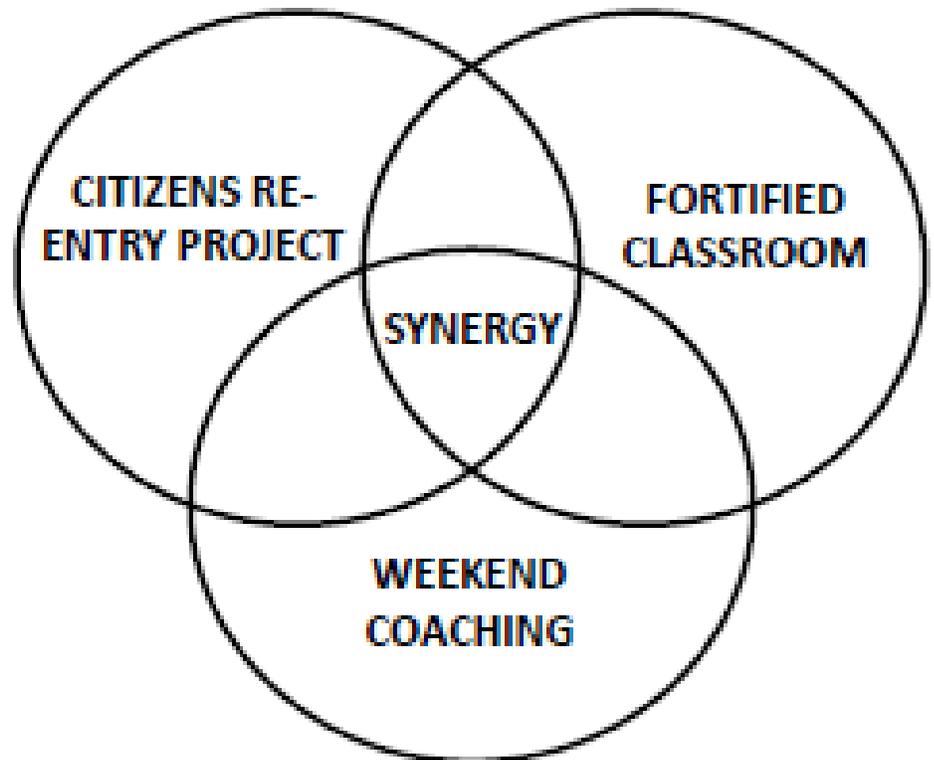
student club, student and alumni networking, community events, social responsibility and social justice initiatives, and access to the BMI-sponsored scholarship fund, as well as guidance on how to apply for other relevant educational grants and loans. The student club, social events, networking opportunities and community service opportunities create a cultural safe space and a sense of community, so the new members learn that they have support from other students, helping them to accomplish their academic goals and to overcome the challenges that everyone has in life.

Involvement in the Citizens' Re-entry Project, the Fortified Classroom, and Weekend Coaching will create a synergistic effect, enabling these students to perform at a very high level. Reinforcement of skills and engagement will occur as each of these initiatives supports the work of the other, especially in the context of the BMI community. We look forward to students developing a positive belief in their own abilities, and a positive view of and attachment

to Empire State College and BMI for supporting them in creating and achieving their goals.

The Office of Decision Support will develop ways to monitor and measure outcomes of this expansion of the Citizens' Re-entry Project. Results-based research will demonstrate the program's value, and serve as a basis for ongoing funding and extension of these services to more facilities, and more individuals with prior criminal justice system involvement. ESC and BMI are truly taking the lead in creating positive social change by sharing their wealth of knowledge, information and experience with those who often had no prior access to the world of higher education. The potential impact on reducing recidivism and improving community safety, as well as turning around the lives of those who participate, is profound.

For additional information, please contact Dave Fullard at: David.Fullard@esc.edu or 917-468-9840. (Note: This BMI Social Justice/Social Responsibility Initiative is still in development, so stay tuned for future updates.)



Acknowledgements

Very special thanks go out to the retired superintendent of the Lincoln Correctional Facility, Ronald Brereton, who is now part of the BMI Re-entry Project work group. He is truly an ingenious person who is able to think outside of the box, and by doing so, is able to provide the residents of his facility with educational services that may have changed the course of their lives.

I would also like to recognize Obafemi Wright, supervisor of volunteer services at Queensboro Correctional Facility, Lincoln Correctional Facility and Edgecombe Correctional Facility. Mr. Wright made it possible for us to deliver high-quality educational services to this overlooked population. Like Superintendent Brereton, Mr. Wright is a forward-thinking correctional professional who has come to understand the importance of a solid education for citizens who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

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IMTL Project Summaries

Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning Fellows, 2017-2018

A program of the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI), the Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL) provides time and support to those who mentor, teach or are involved in research relevant to teaching and learning, for pursuing projects that further their development and enhance their mentoring and teaching practice, and for getting input from colleagues. In addition, college librarians, educational technologists and instructional designers support the participants during the summer residency and throughout the year. The 2017–2018 cohort was asked to provide project summaries to share with the college community; edited versions of their responses are included here. In addition to the participants and summaries listed here, the following were also IMTL fellows in 2017–2018: Ajay Das, Patricia Isaac, JoAnn Kingsley, Marie Pennucci, Patricia Pillsworth, Nan Travers, Amanda Treadwell, Bernard Smith and Leslie Ellis. More information about these projects and the IMTL program can be found on the CMLAI website www.esc.edu/cmlai/ (click on CMLAI's SharePoint site, go to Programs and Services, and then Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning).

Gennaro Bonfiglio “Counterterrorism in a Changing World”

My project commenced with the intention to utilize Moodle and other resources available at SUNY Empire State College to offer the study, Counterterrorism in a Changing World, collegewide. With the help of college librarians, technical staff and faculty, I learned much about these tools and have been able to offer the study to anyone in the ESC system. I am hoping that in the future, my work location, Staten Island, will be able to transmit live group meetings statewide. As of now, we only have the ability to receive live feeds from other locations. So, there is more to be accomplished.

Nadine Fernandez and Anamaria Ross “Gamifying Educational Planning”

“Gamification” is using game-based elements in nongame settings. We explored developing gamification elements for use in Educational Planning, the course required of all ESC undergraduates. We identified tasks that could be “gamified” to increase student engagement/motivation, facilitating completion, retention and success. The technology skills and time resources to create original computer games were not available to us. However, interactive games like card sorting and online tools like the story-making software Twine can be used creatively, with narrative elements (mapping/visualizing Ed Planning as a transformative quest), insights from software development (fuzzy goals and feedback loops) and “level up” metrics that quantify student progress/outcomes.

Himanee Gupta-Carlson “Doing Hip-Hop Through Food and Farming”

This project is ongoing. Over the past year, I interviewed several farmers, expanded a food pantry community garden, wrote numerous short articles about the Saratoga food and farming scene, and began sharing the evolving work across the college community. I also delved deeply into the meaning of two phrases, one from hip-hop and one from farming. From hip-hop, “Build, destroy, build”; from farming, “Where there’s livestock, there’s death stock.”

Thomas Kerr “Leveraging Knowledge in Labor Leader Learning Requests for iPLA”

Originally, the “leverage” proposed in this project envisioned tooling Bloom’s taxonomy (followed by Kolb’s learning theory) upon a fulcrum of several years of work I have been doing with labor leaders in the building trades

and other union leaders. The project changed midyear, as a new idea – the Threshold Learning Project (with a unique iPLA [individualized prior learning assessment] “model”) – was developed. I got the idea from novelist Peter Handke’s work, *Across* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2000). I believe this iPLA model has potential around the college. Students distinctly document their “experience” in a topic; then their “learning” through that “experience”; then, referencing the online Global Learning Qualifications Framework (GLQF), they identify college-level learning. The GLQF then influences their thinking of their own “learning” and further reflections of their “experiences.” So the growth in past and present are further developed through the practice of reflection and passing across these thresholds of knowledge.

Renata Kochut “Teaching Economics to Adult Students”

The goal of my project was to investigate and understand how teaching economics to adult students can be more engaging, interesting and less stressful. I have analyzed the current state of literature and used my teaching experience to formulate the most important elements of engaging and motivating assignments. I have also listed examples of such assignments that can be used in the classroom. My work was presented during the 13th Annual Economics Teaching Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Maureen Kravec “Why do adult students change their areas of study/concentrations?”

When students return to college as adults, they often do so with specific interests and goals, yet their goals sometimes change as they encounter both barriers and possibilities. Changing academic focus can be discouraging or energizing. I believe it would be helpful for

us to know more about why students change their academic direction so that we may help them to see this as a positive, not a negative experience. I had collected some anecdotes, but would like to have a broader perspective. A good suggestion was for me to narrow my sample to a particular group of students, such as veterans, prospective teachers or some other group. I hope to plan a sound research proposal for the IRB (Institutional Review Board), and I hope to pursue the project in the future.

**Seana Logsdon and Brett Sherman
“Collegewide First-Year
Learning Community”**

The goal of this project was to design a collegewide, first-year learning community targeted at students who have little to no prior higher education experience. We developed a cohort model based on research-supported retention programs and strategies designed to increase persistence beyond the first term. Program components include scaffolded and coordinated courses and learning activities, providing an opportunity for faculty to collaborate between divisions. The model offers structured support, including embedded digital literacy and “college know-how” skills, and intentional creation of social networks. We presented the proposal to the Provost’s Council and at the Fall Academic Conference, and hope to pilot it in the near future.

**Michael Nastacio
“Teaching Everyday Mathematics
to Developmentally
Disabled Adults”**

In an effort to continue the current partnership between Empire State College and the local Staten Island community organization, Lifestyles for the Disabled, I wished to explore the possibility of developing a mathematics study for our ESC students working with this group of adults. My desire was to help the Lifestyles students acquire everyday math skills and obtain knowledge needed to assist them with their financial challenges. This study was launched during the fall 2017 term. Our ESC students devised and learned how to teach budgeting, saving and borrowing money – money management. Each Empire student was paired with a member from Lifestyles, thus creating a mutual cooperative connection.

The term culminated with a “MATH SLAM” project on the Lifestyles campus as our students and their “buddies” proudly made their budget presentations to both family and friends. This study in applied learning integrated meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen our local communities.

**Jennifer Nettleton, Jacqueline
Michaels, Lynn McNall and
Kim Stote
“School of Nursing and Allied
Health (SONAH) Online
Resource Repository”**

We developed a SONAH adjunct and faculty repository, which is housed in Moodlerooms and contains five modules with materials related to SUNY Empire State College and SONAH. These modules contain a wide array of pertinent information such as the ESC 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 SONAH such as policies and procedures, course design and layout, technology tips, and grading procedures (rubrics, incompletes, etc.).

**Diane Perilli and Carolina Kim
“Supporting the Nontraditional
Student’s Independent
Learning with Remote
Synchronous Sessions”**

We sought to find ways that educational technology (Carolina’s area of expertise), with strategic support, could address the issues of learning, engagement and retention for Introductory Accounting 1 students in Diane’s collegewide independent study. The two key aspects of our collaboration were creating opportunities to enhance the students’ experience and embedding a strategic support plan that would cater to the flexible nature of independent studies. More specifically, Diane’s goals were to deliver instruction and clarify the foundational course material in real time, provide an opportunity for students to connect with her and each other, and reduce the redundancy of instruction. In parallel, Carolina’s goals were to display

how educational technology can address specific experiences of a nontraditional learner, demonstrate the impact of a strategic support plan, and find ways to scale this model to benefit the faculty collegewide. We implemented the plan and we observed an immediate appreciation for the voluntary sessions and the emergence of a distance learning community. The students expressed gratitude for the meetings, found them integral to their learning and their pacing, and felt better connected to Diane and to the other Introductory Accounting 1 students.

**Gina C. Torino
“Microaggressions in
Clinical Supervision”**

During the summer of 2017, I attended the IMTL residency. During that time, I wrote a draft of a solicited book chapter titled, “Addressing Microaggressions in Clinical Supervision.” In addition, I worked on my co-edited book (published 2019 by John Wiley & Sons) titled, *Microaggression Theory: Influence and Implications*. I appreciated IMTL’s support and I look forward to participating again in the future.

**Mary V. Zanfini
“Internships and Certificate for
Lifestyles for the Disabled”**

I intended to develop several internships for the students in the Metropolitan area. One internship is to assist special educators who are tasked in delivering hippotherapy to disabled children. Hippotherapy is used to help these children develop fine and gross motor skills and also social skills while they are seated on the back of a horse. Our students are to assist in all aspects of this therapy, especially the social side of it. The second internship is to assist me in my classroom while I am teaching literature to intellectually disabled adults from Lifestyles for the Disabled. This is a class that includes numerous ESC students and participants from Lifestyles. They will also serve as tutors to these participants. The certificate of completion program will acknowledge students who have completed four courses at ESC. The Lifestyles students will be awarded a special certificate acknowledging their time spent with us.

Two Poems

Mindy Kronenberg, Hauppauge

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, *petit fours*
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.

North Shore Reverie

I picture Walt and Neil,
the wizened long-bearded poet
under the wide-brimmed hat,
the astronomer adorned
in a vest of suns and stars,
walking the shore at dusk,
relishing the percussion of
shards and pebbles underfoot,
consonants of the sea's unfolding song
embedded between ribbons
of seaweed snapping on the surf's tongue.

Glaciers, says the astronomer, his voice
a reverent music summoning cliffs
frothed from ice, climbing
and receding in the briny air.
His old companion whispers *Algonquins*,
sinking footprints in the glittering sand,
their tents and fires shimmering on the
landscape.

"The atoms in your body
are traceable to the stars,"
says the astronomer.

"For every atom belonging to me
as good belongs to you,"
says the poet.

With the swell and sway of
the Sound against the tusks
of cliffs, our Island reaches
its long grasp through the
effervescence of Time.

Sabbatical Report: The Importance of Place

Lorraine Lander, Canandaigua

All humans occupy environments or settings referred to as “place.” Relationships with place start early in life with home, a fundamental space we all inhabit. Later, as we age, new spaces enter our lives, such as neighborhood, community, school, work and even nature. Aspects of the physical spaces that we inhabit can exert a great influence on our lives as we learn the various features and opportunities available, as well as how safe and/or comfortable a place can be, among other place attributes. In fact, place can come to have important influences on health and happiness (see Eyles & Williams, 2008, for a review).

Over time, some of us can form important attachments to the places we inhabit. However, profound changes in these spaces can also lead to discomfort and grief, as the predictability we had come to expect disappears and our ability to function at a competent level can be undermined. We can see these reactions, for example, in a changed relationship to home after a natural disaster, or even in nature as one result of climate change.

Based on a desire to know more about our connections with place, I completed a six-month sabbatical in the fall 2017 focused on sense of place and place relationships. My original goal was to better understand how our connections with place influence our understandings of the sustainable potentials we hold for a place, as well as the efforts we invest in the long-term health and viability of spaces such as nature. During my sabbatical, I read about the fundamental importance of place. Recent neurological evidence supports that our brains have primary locations for information about place (Lengen & Kistemann, 2012), just as we have for social knowledge. However, in comparison to what we know in various fields about social and economic relationships, we know far less about our connections to place despite the fundamental roles the various settings we occupy can play in our lives.

My original sabbatical goals were twofold. First, I wished to gain a better understanding and write about place relationships through reading broadly in the scholarly literature. Second, given the importance of places in our lives, I wanted to know more about incorporating place in education, often called “place-based education,” since there would appear to be great value in connecting our work with students to places important to them. Thus, an applied goal for my sabbatical was to create a guide to place-based education that would facilitate that work here at SUNY Empire State College.

Place Relationships Background

There is a broad literature about our relationships to place that spans empirical through primarily phenomenological approaches. I examined literature from both, although my primary interest was empirical studies with a psychology or human development focus. Prominent place settings of interest to researchers include home, neighborhoods, communities and nature. Within this scholarly work, numerous fields of study have examined place. For example, it is a primary concept in the field of geography, recreation, tourism, community sociology, community planning and design, and environmental psychology, but of interest to philosophy, anthropology and more. Each of these disciplines, however, tends to restrict its focus on place relationships to a certain setting of interest. For example, community planners target neighborhoods, while environmental psychologists often explore nature, as do those in the field of recreation.

As I delved into the scholarly literature on place, I found that much of the empirical research focuses on development of concepts such as place meaning (our individual understanding of a setting), place identity (the role a place plays in our personal understandings of self) and place attachment



Lorraine Lander

(how strongly bonded we are to a setting). Research also looks at how these attitudes and beliefs can lead to experiencing a sense of place (a comprehensive concept that is both cognitive and emotional in nature). Data collection often measures how these concepts vary depending on location, culture, transience, etc. However, over the last 10 to 15 years, significant concerns have been raised by prominent scholars (Lewicka, 2011) about a lack of advancement in scholarly understanding of place relationships, potentially due to a lack of theory to deepen that understanding. While I began my sabbatical with the goal of writing an article for a professional journal that would make some advancement in the field and connect to sustainability, after reading about this lack of theory about place, I was interested in the possibility of making a more substantial contribution to place theory.

Using an interdisciplinary approach and my background in human development, I continued exploring place theory and research while looking for options for theory building. As I read the research, I saw two major problems that needed to be addressed in any new theory. The first could be seen in articles where research findings showed that

people can feel more attachment (the place attachment concept) or identify where they live as part of who they are (the place identity concept), while others living in the same area hold far less attachment and do not identify with that location. There appeared to be little theory to explain these differences. One reason for such results, I believe, could be different developmental stages. Yet, I was surprised to find that little had been written about such development. In addition, the field lacked theory that could be easily applied to all types of place settings from home to community, city, nation and even nature, in particular because of how the many fields that looked at place focused on just one setting. To unite the findings from the various academic fields that examine place, a comprehensive theory would be necessary.

Given my previous work and interests, I was intrigued by the idea of working on a developmental model of place relationships, so I considered other developmental theories and their approaches. For example, several theories describe the cognitive and affective changes that accompany growth and experience, and examine how they increase in complexity with development. For example, in Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), learners progress from knowledge through comprehension and then on to higher order thinking processes such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Place scholarship lacks such a model for how our relationships with place settings might also become more complex over time.

In addition to reviewing various developmental theories, I also examined theories about how social relationships are formed, and found many similarities to how social and place relationships develop. In the end, I selected Knapp's (1978) stage model for the development of romantic relationships as a template for creating a model of how place relationships form, although this required some modification of the details of Knapp's work to fit the differences between a relationship with a person and a place.

Several related concepts about settings and those who inhabit them are foundational to understanding place relationships. For example, individuals do not enter place settings

as homogenous entities, but bring with them various personalities, abilities, beliefs and a range of differences, which work in transactional fashion with the characteristics of the place setting. These attributes then interact to create the opportunities that a setting can offer. In fact, getting to know and becoming comfortable in a place is often about identifying the opportunities that it affords. It is this capacity of a place to support the needs of the inhabitant that may determine whether place relationships reach maximum cognitive and affective complexity.

The places most commonly examined in the research literature I encountered are neighborhoods, communities and nature. Surprisingly, there was little scholarship about home. Two other important place settings seemed missing, including school, as a primary place setting for children into early adulthood; and work, as a primary place setting for adults. While I am sure that the education field has addressed aspects of students' interactions with school, and the business field has considered workers' relationships with the workplace, for the most part, these settings have not been extensively studied in place research using existing theories and concepts.

It seems important for a theory of place relationship development to explain how optimal and less optimal settings influence the quality of relationships. For example, matches of opportunities in a workplace setting that are aligned to characteristics of an employee should optimize both job satisfaction and job performance. In terms of our own institution, a flexible school setting like ESC allows for a much wider opportunity for a match between student need and characteristics, while the increased number of options available makes for a greater chance of feeling competent and other positive outcomes, as well as for improving retention of students. The alternative can be an issue. It is unfortunately not uncommon for students to spend time in schools where they are not matched to opportunities that fit their needs, and employees can spend time in jobs that also do not provide a good match.

In working on this theory about place relationships, I also wanted the model to accommodate changes in place settings, and address how these changes can influence

concepts such as place identity, place attachment and sense of place. We know, for example, that social relationships form, wax and wane, reach intimacy and sometimes dissolve over time. Changes in one or both parties in a social relationship undoubtedly influence the quality and longevity of the connection. As well, changes to place settings can change the form and quality of place relationships, and may be particularly upsetting for those individuals who have progressed to place attachment and place identity. In fact, as you will see later when I describe the theory, this type of change or mismatch of need to opportunities can lead to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), where knowledge, attitudes and beliefs no longer align with setting characteristics.

"It is unfortunately not uncommon for students to spend time in schools where they are not matched to opportunities that fit their needs. ..."

Applying Social Relationship Models to Place Relationships

So, how do our relationships with place develop? According to Knapp's (1978) model of romantic relationships, the five stages of relationship building include initiation, experimentation, intensification, integration and bonding. Each stage is dominated by different cognitive and affective activities. My model of place relationships focuses on similar stages in relation to important places we inhabit.

Stage One – Initiating

In Knapp's (1978) theory, the first stage represents first contact and first impressions. It focuses on attractiveness and is often very quick. It is the feeling that "I want to know more," which can be applied to people or places that are attractive. However, for settings where the participant may not be there of free will and total freedom of choice, whether to

stay is not an option, and reactions can range from “Maybe this won’t be too bad” or “I’m going to wait to judge,” to “This is going to be awful.”

The main cognitive response at this stage would be curiosity, with the main affective response described as attraction. Social and cultural beliefs about what is valued may also play an important role in both curiosity and attraction, as well as any prior experiences with similar environments that would provide for comparisons.

Stage Two – Experimenting

In Knapp’s relationships theory (1978), individuals in this stage of getting to know a romantic partner might be thinking, “I am enjoying learning more.” The same could also apply to getting to know a place. At the beginning of Stage Two, broad features are investigated. The individual is a novice, and this stage is primarily about learning basic knowledge and skills. Affordances are important in directing knowledge seeking and actions, as opportunities are explored and the individual seeks common ground to maximize his/her need fulfillment.

What Knapp referred to as “uncertainty reduction” is another important element of Stage Two interactions, as experimenting takes place and information is gathered. The main cognitive activity would be learning. The affective responses that dominate this stage are primarily about such uncertainty reduction and excitement when matches to individual needs and interests are found.

If interacting with a place setting is not voluntary, some changes in need emphasis may occur. For example, most individuals may have a strong need to feel competence as it is one of the primary human needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but place attributes may make successful interactions at this early stage difficult. In the absence of choice about being there, the individual may come to focus on other needs or leave the place setting. When participation is not voluntary in some cases, such as when a child is not functioning well in school, motivation to explore and interact may decline or disappear, and learning may be slow or nonexistent.

Stage Three – Intensifying

In Knapp’s relationships model (1978), couples at this stage would be saying, “We are a couple.” A comparable statement by someone interacting with place might be, “I am fitting in.” The focus is not so much on exploration as it is on interaction, as more knowledge and any necessary skills are acquired. Understanding of the setting becomes deeper and more complex. Affordances for needs are much more predictable, and feelings of competence and confidence increase.

In terms of affective changes, more complex emotional reactions are also developing. According to Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia’s (1964) stages of emotional development, the individual progresses in affective complexity through sorting, valuing and organizing feelings and experiences to eventually reach the formation of attitudes and beliefs. It is this sorting and valuing that goes on in Stage Three. Routines and rituals may appear to further the initial perceptions of stability.

Some promises of the setting, however, may not be realized, and tensions can build in relation to unmet needs and expectations leading to cognitive dissonance. As mentioned earlier, dissonance takes place when a person must make a choice over attitudes and behaviors that contradict each other (Festinger, 1957). Such dissonance is often reduced by changing the relative importance of conflicting understandings, or developing new beliefs and attitudes in order to reduce the uncomfortable tensions being experienced (Losch & Cacioppo, 1990). This may be especially true for individuals who have not had complete choice about the place association and are spending time in a setting where needs are not being met. For example, an individual with a strong need for activity might modulate this to spend time in a space with sedentary expectations to gain approval of others (not an uncommon experience for children in schools). Another example might be a worker who forgoes feelings of competence in order to earn higher wages at a job and maintain family responsibilities even though they are not good at the work or find it too simple. To ease the discomfort of cognitive dissonance, this worker may modulate those feelings and convince himself/herself of the unimportance of challenge or not doing work well. It is

during stage three that place meaning and place identification are primarily formed, as sufficient knowledge is accumulated and predictability is perceived to internalize the place setting with fundamental understandings of self.

Not all place setting inhabitants move on to Stage Four, which is dependent on resolution of cognitive dissonance over unmet needs and conflicting knowledge, skills, as well as negative past experiences. In order to make this transition, the individual must come to value the place relationship in order to voluntarily wish to invest further time and energy in interactions that will deepen the complexity of both the cognitive and affective responses.

Stage Four – Integrating

In Knapp’s model of relationships (1978), the couple in this stage would be saying, “We are one.” When applying this stage to place relationships, the dominant emotion might yield a statement like, “I belong here,” “I fit here,” and “This place is a part of me.” A prominent feature of this stage is the experience of various features of what is often referred to as intimacy.

According to Prager (1997), the essence of intimacy is closeness, as manifested by trust, positive involvement and understanding. Trust and positive involvement can be seen in place relationships. Understanding, the last of Prager’s intimacy attributes, is about knowing the other in great detail and similar processes occur when it comes to knowing a place. In another perspective on intimacy, McAdams (1980) proposed that the goal of intimacy is to experience a warm, close and effective interaction with another. Similar exchanges can occur during place interactions and are likely behind motivation to spend time in a place setting.

The cognitive basis of intimacy feelings for place in Stage Four would involve the individual having highly complex knowledge and skills to support an intimate cognitive understanding of place experiences. Positive capability assessments about place interactions form the foundation for affective responses and lead to the formation of place attachment with associated feelings of trust and comfort. Affective intimacy in relation to place can

be seen in terms of using the place settings as a safe haven and/or a secure base, a prominent feature of child-caregiver attachment (Bowlby, 1969).

One place concept that has been studied extensively is sense of place. In this proposed model, sense of place has both cognitive and affective components, and it may be useful to consider sense of place as another way of looking at intimacy feelings related to place.

Stage Five – Bonding and Beyond

Knapp (1978) also proposed a fifth stage of relationship building that included a step he described as “bonding,” which refers to special rituals that affirm the relationship between a couple. He used the term to refer to official linkages like marriage, rather than a feeling we might call “bonding.” It is unclear if such bonding rituals exist in all place relationships, although they may operate in the background in some, for example, when signing a deed to a property, a lease on an apartment or a contract for a job. When they do exist, according to Knapp, the bond can have significant effects on a relationship in terms of interactions and affective responses with both positive and negative potential impacts.

Beyond the stage of bonding, Knapp (1978) also described stages for relationship dissolution, which may also apply to place settings, although I did not explore these extensively in the model I worked on during my sabbatical. However, in relation to stages of relationship separation, Knapp proposed that people pull away from close, intimate relationships through a separation process. This begins with differentiation, where an individual begins to devote time and energy to aspects of the relationship that are not working. This could be a re-emergence of previous cognitive dissonance over unmet needs or could result from changes in place attributes. Further stages that Knapp described include reduction in both affection and time spent with the other, until the relationship might be terminated. These stages may be relevant to place relationships where characteristics of the setting have changed significantly, thus disrupting sense of place. For example, when a neighborhood is no longer safe, an individual may begin a place relationship withdrawal

process. The same may be true for elderly persons, where it has become a burden to maintain their relationship to a home.

According to Knapp (1978), the dissolution phases are not a return to previous stages, but have their own predominant behaviors, and cognitive and affective processes. In other words, in a couple’s relationship (or a place relationship), they cannot unlearn what they know, even when changes in a person or a place setting may make some old knowledge irrelevant, and new knowledge and opportunities for interaction are introduced. On the other hand, profound change in the other person or place may make knowledge and relationship skills for interaction with them less effective. Thus, both reprioritizing unmet needs may lead to dissolution processes, but change in place attributes may do so, as well, as these make place interactions become less predictable and no longer secure.

I am excited about the potential to make an important contribution to the field of place relationships. I have submitted the draft article I wrote during my sabbatical for consideration in a professional journal that focuses on place. The theory I have proposed in this article will also be an important foundation for other scholarly work. For example, I have begun to focus on an article about how this theory would apply to nature education, given that nature is one important place that we all inhabit. I am particularly interested in understanding how children form relationships to nature.

Place-Based Education

The last portion of my sabbatical focused on connecting sense of place to place-based education (PBE). I have written a guide for this work with several handouts that can be used by mentors and students for project and capstone development. This work was presented to the college through a Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI) webinar and is stored on its website for use at the college.

Place-based education is an approach to community-based education that is frequently associated with education about sustainability (an ongoing interest of mine). Reading and investigation has shown me that PBE is a

subset of various approaches to active learning, an important focus of recent efforts by the State University of New York (SUNY) and other institutions to better prepare students for professional careers and to make active use of their learning. PBE is also closely related to other concepts such as problem-focused learning, inquiry-focused learning, project-based learning, civic engagement/service learning, nature/environment education, cultural journalism, and local entrepreneurship.

While PBE is typically carried out with the “place” of interest being the local community, I believe, for the purpose of supporting PBE with our students at Empire State College, that place should be expanded to other settings that may be of interest to them for their applied learning. Thus, the guide I put together should also be useful for mentors and students interested in nature as place, work as place, and schools as place, among other settings typically occupied.

I believe one of the central strengths of PBE is that including setting in projects and capstones forces students to make their learning more active and applied. It also encourages interdisciplinary thinking, which is often necessary in the real world for professional work whether an individual is working alone or as part of a team.

The guide contains information on the value of PBE, as well as suggestions for how to plan a place-based project or capstone. For example, students can start with typical projects connected to place from their field of study or those projects that might be part of a future career. Thus, a student in Community and Human Services might focus on home when exploring family issues. A student in Educational Studies might focus on school. A business student might focus on the workplace. Once a student chooses a place setting, he/she could consider this space either broadly or focus on an important problem or issue of that place setting. I can even envision a research methodology or other academic/field-based skill (like GIS [Geographic Information System] in the environmental sciences) becoming paired with a place setting to better support active learning in that study. In fact, it was one of the goals of my guide to create something that will be comprehensive across the curriculum.

Handouts accompany the PBE guide I wrote and provide questions for mentors and students to consider in planning and carrying out this work, how to structure active projects, and how to assess their progress. These will work in the humanities, business, social sciences, human services, and sciences. Many colleges that practice PBE do so with large projects that include multiple students and faculty. This type of work is a challenge at ESC due to our distributed environment, although I believe there is still much that could be done to incorporate place into projects and capstones. For example, my guide includes suggestions for how to find partners in local place settings.

Places where we spend considerable time like home, neighborhood, school and work do not simply provide a backdrop to our solitary or social lives. Instead, we build relationships with them and they become part of our identity, a refuge from stress, a target of creative energy, and a support for a whole host of interactions. Yet, we need a better understanding of how relationships with place develop so that we can foster higher quality connections with place. More research needs to be conducted for us to better understand how place relationships can promote stewardship of those settings. As well, incorporating place into our active learning work with students may benefit students' learning, their future careers, and the places they include in their place-based projects.

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Exploring How Higher Education Can Meet the Needs of Third-Age Students

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Introduction

The landscape of aging is shifting. People are living longer, retiring later and redefining their retirement years as the third age of life. They are also pursuing higher education in increasing numbers (Creighton & Hudson, 2002; Erikson & Noonan, 2010). It has been observed that “after so many years of invisibility adult students have finally begun to come into their own” (Coulter & Mandell, 2012, p. 40), yet they “often struggle as they try to progress through systems of higher education that have been shaped to accommodate traditionally aged students” (Hagedorn, 2005, p. 22). With the 65 and older population expected to double between 2010 and 2050 (American Council on Education [ACE], 2008, p. 2; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), this upward trend in college enrollment is likely to continue.

These trends are significant because, while enrollment of third-age students is increasing (Creighton & Hudson, 2002), enrollment for traditional-age students at U.S. colleges continues to decline across all sectors (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017; Cruce & Hillman, 2012).¹

These trends warrant attention to the needs of third-age students and identify third-age individuals as a viable source of future enrollments. On a broader perspective, education is one of the predictors of successful aging and active life engagement (ACE, 2008). Benefits for third-age students include improvement or maintenance of cognitive function, physical and emotional health, social functioning, personal growth and financial independence (Saloméja, 2015). Therefore, rather than a burden on society, an educated third-age population “can play a key role in addressing many of the concerns that stem from their growing numbers” (ACE, 2008, p. 2).

To address these trends, this pilot qualitative research study sought to identify the needs of students who began or resumed their education in their third-age of life (defined as age 61 and older for the purposes of this study). Six themes emerged from this study that can inform institutions of higher learning on how to better meet the needs of this student population: (1) they arrive at college with built-in motivations and clearly defined goals; (2) they value receiving credit for prior learning acquired outside of formal education; (3) they prefer relationship-based learning environments; (4) they experience challenges with online learning; (5) they need support services geared toward their age group; and (6) they value a bias-free environment that respects third-age students.

This paper explores these themes with research support and quotes from study participants. Conclusions from this study point to the need for institutions of higher learning to acknowledge and respond to the demographic shifts in their student populations, to develop a broader understanding of how to meet the needs of third-age students, and to view this age group as a beneficial influence in diverse learning environments and as a viable sector for outreach for future enrollments.

This research project was conducted with the support of SUNY Empire State College’s Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI) and its Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL), which provides time and support for pursuing projects that contribute to participants’ development as well as their mentoring and teaching practices.

Methods

From a database of 417 third-age alumni who graduated from a nontraditional, publicly-funded college, SUNY Empire State College, a subsample of 10 individuals who graduated



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at age 61 and older during a 10-year period (2006–2016) was selected, purposely sampled for diversity in gender, age, race, location and degrees earned. The researchers co-developed a qualitative interview script of 10 questions to gather information about the participants and guide exploration of research objectives. In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit both anecdotal narratives and facts

through questions focused on participants' motivations, experiences, needs and challenges. Transcripts of those interviews were analyzed by both researchers for interrelated reliability to verify each other's observations, thereby expanding the ability to condense information shared by subjects into categories and themes and draw conclusions and insights. This qualitative study used a constant comparative method "... to establish analytic distinctions – and thus make comparisons at each level of analytic work" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54). The researchers used a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), and data were generated and analyzed through a systematic process of coding and categorization (Böhm, 2004) to develop core concepts grounded in the lived experiences of these third-age students.

Study Participants

Ten participants (N=10) – five men and five women – were selected from the larger sample (N=417). In the subsample, the average age at graduation was 68 for an associate degree, 67 for a bachelor's degree, and 65 for a master's degree. They earned two associate degrees, eight bachelor's degrees, and three master's degrees (some earned multiple degrees). Seven study participants were white and three were African-American. All participants had prior college experience. Only two of the participants said they were retired at the time of their interview. Four male participants, but no female participants, were veterans (Graphic 1 and Table 1).

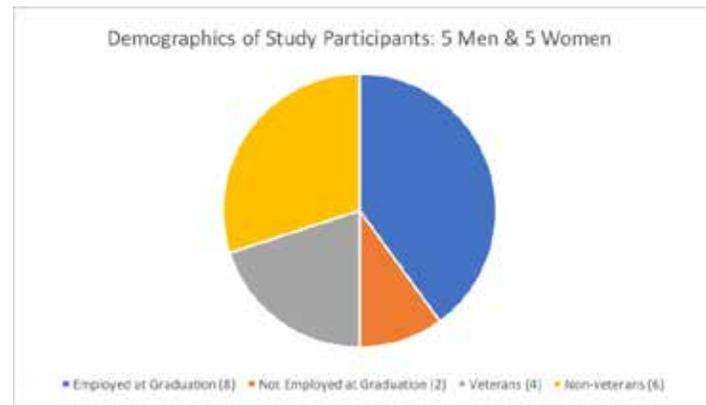


Table 1. Individual Interviewees – Composite Profile (N=10)

Name*	Birth Date	Year of Graduation(s)	Age at Graduation	Ethnicity/Race	Degree and Area of Study	Work Status	Veteran
Female Participants – n = 5							
F-1	3/29/43	2010	67	White	A.A./Interdisciplinary	Self-employed,	No
		2012	69				
F-2	1/28/46	2015	69	White	A.S./Interdisciplinary	Labor law	No
F-3	8/24/45	2008	63	White	B.S./BME	Retired	No
F-4	9/22/47	2012	65	White	B.S./CHS	Substance abuse counselor	No
F-5	8/2/36	2015	79	African-American	B.A./Human Services	Retired	No
Male Participants – n = 5							
M-1	3/4/45	2008	63	White	B.A./History	Self-employed	No
M-2	5/24/46	2016	70	African-American	B.S./BME	Self-employed	Yes
M-3	10/23/42	2013	71	White	B.S./Cultural Studies	Retired	Yes
					M.A./LBST		
M-4	8/28/45	2008	63	White	M.A./LBST	Self-employed	Yes
M-5	12/10/50	2011	61	African-American	MAT/BAE	Math teacher and tutor	Yes

Key: BME=Business, Management and Economics; CHS=Community and Human Services; LBST=Liberal Studies; MAT/BAE=Master of Arts in Teaching in Adolescent Education: Transitional B Certification.

In comparison, the full database of 417 third-age alumni who graduated between 2006 and 2016 from Empire State College represented 1.3 percent of all graduates during that time period. Of those, 67 percent were women, and 33 percent were men. The average age at graduation was 69 (the oldest was 96), and 71 (17 percent) earned multiple degrees. The most popular degree was a Bachelor of Science, followed by Bachelor of Arts and Associate of Science.

Results

Analysis of the interview narratives of the 10 study participants revealed six themes that highlight the needs of third-age students.

- (1) **Motivations:** They pursue higher education with defined and multiple motivations, and most arrive at college with built-in relevance. In other words, they know what they want to learn.
- (2) **Validation of prior learning:** They value recognition of their prior learning and receiving credit for knowledge gained outside of formal education.
- (3) **Relationship-based learning:** They prefer a relationship-based learning environment that includes active mentoring.
- (4) **Online learning:** They experience challenges with online learning.
- (5) **Support services:** They benefit from support services geared specifically to their age group.
- (6) **Age bias:** They seek a learning environment that is free of age bias and respects lifelong learners.

This paper explores each of these themes with support from research and quotes from the study participants.

Theme 1: Defined and Multiple Motivations

ACE (2008) affirmed that “the impetus to learn for older adults is not singular, linear, or even sequential” (p. 10). The study participants affirmed that they arrived at college with defined and coexisting motivations, including: (1) to advance or change careers; (2) to give back; (3) the time was right; and (4) a love of learning. Motivation is an essential consideration because it is “the psychological

driving force behind our behaviors through which ‘goal-directed activity is initiated and sustained’” (Mulenga & Liang as cited in Narushima, Liu, & Diestelkamp, p. 571). Diverse motivations for this age group are understandable, considering the “diversity among older adults,” added Narushima, Liu and Diestelkamp (p. 572). In the current study, participants’ narratives reflected that diversity of motivations.

Motivation #1: Advancing in a career or changing career direction

People ages 65 to 74 represented 26.8 percent of the workforce in 2012, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 31.9 percent of people in this age group will be still working by 2022 (Drake, 2014). Creighton & Hudson (2002) stated that “adults age 65 or older participate in work-related education at the same rate as mid-aged adults ...” (p. viii). ACE (2008) noted that older adult students “are at a crossroads with work, learning, and retirement. Many find themselves leaving their lifelong careers that paid the bills only to want a second, more meaningful career that benefits their communities or society as a whole” (p. 9).

Participants, the majority of whom reported being actively employed, felt having a degree would help them advance in their career, increase earning power or switch career paths.

I needed to make money. I needed to make more money. I needed to improve myself ... [and] get my act together.

I always knew that I was going to get my master's degree at something ... beneficial and useful. ... My undergraduate degree is in electrical engineering ... [however] I have an uncle who was an educator ... and that stayed in my mind.

I wanted to do my own thing. I was in the insurance field for 33 years. When I was doing the financial portion of it ... I became more interested in financing and ... investing.

I had my associate degree earlier on. ... In order to get an upgrade [in my job] before retirement ... I started going back to school.

Motivation #2: Giving back to the community

The need to “facilitate a connection to other people or their communities” (ACE, 2008, p. 7) is a “strong incentive” to attend college later in life (p. 8). This critical developmental task for middle-aged adults is generativity – a way to support the next generation. For the oldest adults, Erikson, Erickson and Kivnick (1986) posited that their critical developmental task is to achieve ego integrity – viewing one’s life with satisfaction to avoid despair. Furthermore, socioemotional selectivity theory (SST) suggests that generativity includes goals such as being or becoming a keeper of the meaning, and taking responsibility for future generations, which are primary developmental tasks for adults later in their lives (Lang & Carstensen, 2002; Villar & Celdrán, 2012), and creating a sense of legacy (Helterbran, 2017). Additionally, Jung (1933) presented the concept of individualization as older adults turning inward during their second half of life to focus on self-exploration and inner discovery, which leads to becoming open to new ideas, experiences, and a renewed sense of meaning and purpose.

Participants in the current study voiced “giving back” as their motivation for pursuing higher education.

I realized that [in] the community in which I lived [students] are math-challenged. I decided I was going to teach math at the high school level and to give [those] students a feel for how math translates to real life ... there's a disconnect, and I wanted to bridge that disconnect. I looked around to see where my strengths were. ... But I knew in order to teach full time, I would have to get my master's in teaching ... and that's my way of giving back to the community.

I wanted to help ... people who don't know anything about finance, the people who are overlooked. ... I wanted to ... present workshops [at] nonprofit organizations [such as churches] so I can tell them about how insurance products work, how financing products work.

I'm working for a non-profit. ... My job is considered peer recovery specialist. I'm a recovering addict of 33 years and I also have my degree. ... So, it's given me the opportunity to give back a little bit.

When I walked across [the stage at graduation], after getting myself together, and I looked ... there were my two grandkids. They said, "Grandma you did it." I said, "Yes." But I tell them you can do it.

Motivation #3: The time was right

Later life is often associated with loss; however, it can also create circumstances (e.g., retirement, lessening of family and parenting responsibilities) that are favorable for pursuing higher education. However, "loss of employment, family disruptions, or financial reversals" may also prompt the decision to seek a degree (Harlan, 2015, p. 153). Furthermore, older adults often have a sense of urgency to pursue higher education while they "have the opportunity to learn what [they] wanted to learn" (Narushima et al., 2013, p. 577). Harlan (2015) concurred, stating that "the transition has more to do with recognizing opportunities that need [to be] secured before time precludes their purpose" (p. 153). For some, the time is right because of the availability of employer or veteran benefits tuition assistance – a strong motivator to pursue higher education, since some are part-time or intermittent students, which limits their access to financial aid (ACE, 2008).

Study participants affirmed this motivation for pursuing higher education.

I dropped out of high school ... in my senior year, got married, had [children]. [When] I retired, I remember having a conversation with one of my older daughters, you know, "I always think about going back and finishing my degree." She said, "So when are you going to do that?" I felt this pressure, like I'd better go apply because she's going to check up on me. Because I was retired, the motivation was to finish something that I had started and had hung over me through my life.

I graduated [from another college] ... then I never went for my master's, [I went through] a divorce. I took care of my parents for quite a few years ... I found myself kind of lost in space. But the VA [Veterans Affairs] offered me a program and wanted to know if I wanted to go back to school. ... So, I had to study. I had to move myself along.

I was a flight instructor first and then an FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] inspector. Then I retired. And I flew little corporate jets for a while. But, I was bored hanging around after I stopped doing that. And so, I thought, geez, I like to learn. I think I'll go to school. ... I was a combat veteran ... and it essentially made going to school free. So, it was a benefit that I couldn't resist.

After my children were teenagers and had their own lives ... my employer paid for me to go back to college.

I was an AmeriCorps worker. A lot of people don't know [that] you get a stipend ... a \$5,000 educational grant for each year. I didn't read where they said it wasn't transferable. I said, "Oh my goodness. I can't give it [to] them. I've got to use it." So that's what I decided. What the heck. Go back. Try it.

Motivation #4: Love of learning

McWilliams (2013) noted that older adults embrace "learning for its own sake" (pp. 27-28) and frame "themselves as lifelong learners who have always found pleasure in education" (p. 6), in contrast to many younger college students' motivation of securing a career. According to Scala, for older adults, "the most often cited motivation for participation in educational programs is cognitive interest and desire to learn ... the desire to "learn something new ... as well as ... seeking intellectual stimulation ... and "learning for the sake of learning" (Scala, 1996, p. 748. Narushima et al. (2013) also concluded that "Intrinsically motivated older people often cite the joy of learning, a desire for intellectual challenges, or a sense of achievement as reasons for their continued learning" (p. 572). This age group does not want to "sit and do nothing." They see taking courses or getting a degree "as one avenue for staying active and engaged" (ACE, 2008, p. 8).

Study participants affirmed that a love of learning was a key motivation for pursuing higher education.

I have always been interested in learning new things.

I love to read. And I really love to research.

Even if you're retired, there's always more to learn ... new doors to open. ... Looking for new areas of interest, looking for new roads to walk down, is what keeps us young in mind, and vital, and involved.

It was really just for myself ... just for self-fulfillment.

It's a personal satisfaction to be able to say I did it.

Theme 2: Validation of Prior Learning

Third-age students arrive at college with a lifetime of experiences and prior knowledge acquired outside of formal education, and they value receiving college credit for that learning. Ross-Gordon (2011) stated: "Adult students who earned credit for prior learning were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree ..." (Prior Learning Assessment section, para. 2). Furthermore, ACE (2008) noted that prior learning assessment "compress[es] time to degree, [and] lowers educational costs," and that "the growing trend of 'encore careers' may propel a greater demand from older adults for assessment of their skills and knowledge" (p. 19). In the current study, participants appreciated receiving credit for prior learning.

I did an essay on music in the black church. Then I did another one on being involved in the community. I was one of the founders of United Tenants. It started in an apartment just like this one, when we were going against a slum landlord. But, I was able to get credit for that. It made a big difference. When you're involved in things, you're enjoying it and you're helping other people. But you never think it's going to help you up the road. But it did. That also attracts older students because so many people have been involved on their jobs and stuff like that. They can use it as a credit. ... It makes a big difference.

Being recognized for having ... life experience that younger people don't have ... there's real value to that, just as there is great value in ... young people who are just full of openness. I think [the] recognition of the value of life experience was really helpful to me.

[Prior learning credits] were related to my political activity and also to the studies I had done – it was really what had brought me into going back to college. It made perfect sense to me.

Theme 3: Relationship-Based Learning

Older adults participate in higher education because of opportunities for social contact and to associate with and learn alongside younger people (Lin, 2011). Erickson and Noonan (2010) agreed, noting that, although “late-career adults typically prefer traditional, face-to-face instruction, some are embracing ... online instruction” (p. 388). Bernardo et al. (2016) discussed the benefits of relationship-based learning for college students of all ages, stating that “The relationships forged between teachers and students contribute to academic results and the completion of degree studies” (Discussion section, para. 3), along with “positive interaction between students and between students and teachers” (Results section, para. 5). Fletcher (2007) highlighted the specific benefit of students’ relationships with mentors who enable personal and professional growth through their role in “assisting mentees to understand who they are and who they have been as they construct new selves that are both possible and attainable” (p. 83), and discussed mentoring as a “transformational relationship” and “collaborative inquiry” that benefits both the mentor and the mentee (pp. 76-77).

The participants affirmed their preference for in-person class environments, and the value of the mentor/mentee relationships in particular.

For me, I love to have [learning] in a class situation because communication is more than words or paper ... [it's] the expressions, the body language. And for me, I get more out of that. And plus, if I have a question or something that you just said, I can raise my hand and get immediate feedback ... because other people may have the same thought ... so I prefer ... face-to-face learning as opposed to online.

I'd rather read and learn and have conversations. That's why I liked my residencies ... because you actually saw the students. You have a conversation back and forth. And you exchange ideas. You actually learn.

[My mentor is] almost like a friend to me. When you're an older student, a more mature student, you're expected to know a lot. [I was] very needy in knowing what I was supposed to do and not knowing academic “vocabulary.” However, [my mentor] translated what they're saying ... [and no one made me] feel stupid. He draws information out of me not just in my studies, but initially. What do you want to do? How do you want to do it? Who are you? What are you? He sizes up his students and he knows their weaknesses and their strengths, and where they really need help and where they really don't, and he asks the right questions of us.

The mentoring program ... really impressed me because you had people that were dedicated in helping the student ... decide which pathway might be best for them. Whenever I had any questions or any problems, I could always talk to my mentor ... and they would help me achieve the goal I was trying to achieve.

Theme 4: Challenges of Online Learning

Although related to the theme of relationship-based learning, the challenges of online learning warrant a separate discussion because of the study participants’ narratives and the focus on this topic in the literature.

ACE (2007) noted that, “While distance education is often the proposed alternative for individuals limited by transportation or geography, it may not prove to be a viable solution for all older adults. This is because, in part, it does not sufficiently provide the sense of community that drives so many older adults to pursue higher education” (p. 19). Furthermore, third-age students prefer not to enroll in online courses because of weak computer skills (ACE, 2008). Nevertheless, noted Erickson & Noonan (2010), “adults over age 50 are increasingly pursuing online instructional modalities of higher education coursework” (p. 388); and ACE (2008) reported that, while the majority of older students prefer on-campus learning, 39 percent of third-age students take courses online.

The study participants had mixed responses about their experiences with online learning, which reflects the findings in the literature.

One thing that I didn't like was ... taking online courses because I had never done it before. And, if you've never done it before, it's a big shock. You've got to be well-organized ... [and] very good with a computer ... [however], you don't have to be in one set location. You could do it anywhere. You could do it at 3:00 in the morning ... 1:00 in the afternoon. ... In traditional classrooms ... you've got to be there.

[Online learning is] just so cold. I think if I had taken an online course that summer ... I would've found it very boring, very dull, and I probably wouldn't have been able to do it.

To be able to do things online ... made life a lot easier for me.

I just recently ran into a lady at the library ... she was on the computer next to me ... she was taking a course ... and she had no idea what she was doing. I said, you know, I wish I could help you, but that's a whole 'nother world, you know?

Primarily, the courses were online, even though some of the instructors ... were here locally. Which was nice because if I was in the middle of something, I could pick up the phone or ... arrange an office visit to talk face-to-face.

Theme 5: The Need for Support Services

Lin (2011) noted that difficulties reported by third-age students can include: demographic barriers (physical changes related to aging such as lower energy levels; problems with memory; finding time for school (if still working); attitude barriers (age bias by younger college instructors); and structure barriers, i.e., some courses that were too structured and did not allow for individual learning needs. ACE (2007) noted that the “lack of support services” to address such barriers (p. 20) “often keep[s] older adults – particularly minorities and individuals with low incomes – out of the classroom” (p. 19), and suggested vigorous support programs for “older adults who have little or no post-secondary experience and limited skills” with particular focus on “preparation support” and technology anxiety (p. 20).

The study participants affirmed their need for support services.

There is a need for an orientation ... and workshops ... geared specifically for older people who may not be familiar with computers [and] may not know what to expect ... things have changed.

For students who have been away from college for many years, there is a need for a grammar review for older students as well as remedial instruction in academic writing styles such as APA.

It would be great if they could maybe for one week ... bring students in ... and have an introduction so they know exactly what ... they should be ready for [or] offer a couple of workshops a week.

A Vietnam veteran said he could have benefited from more support because he had a hard time functioning in school:

PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] does a lot of strange things. When I got out, I still didn't have a good grip on how to use the [online] library. I never had a computer.

He also expressed a need for exit counseling:

They don't have advisors for when you're done.

Theme 6: Age Bias

Stereotypes about older individuals are ingrained in America's sociocultural biases and evident on many fronts. "Ageism surrounds us, but it passes largely unnoticed and unchallenged. Moreover, just like racism and sexism, it is so engrained within the structure of social life that it is unlikely to be challenged effectively by rational argument or appeals to the more philanthropic side of human nature" (Scrutton as cited in Macnicol, 2006, p. 10). Kite, Stockdale, Whitley and Johnson (2005) suggested that age bias exists as general attitudes toward older adults; however, when information about a specific person was available it lessened that bias. Still, ageism can surface in language that focuses on a student's age, for example, "seniors" or the "elderly." Even "retirees" conveys bias, since it ignores the reality that most older Americans are still working. Likewise, "nontraditional student" has a negative connotation. Although "older adults" is used often in academic discourse, it has a divisive connotation that is not suitable for enrollment outreach materials or verbal

or written communications with third-age students. Instead, bias-free terms include: "third-age" (which "implies there's a fourth or fifth age"), "adult learner" (which refers to an age group in a positive way), and "lifelong learner" (which implies a continuum of learning) (ACE, 2008, pp. 3, 12, 13).

Countering stereotypes about third-age students begins with recognizing their diversity. "There are, in fact, few statements which we can make with validity and truth about teaching and learning ... [that] apply to ... all older people," (Percy, 2013, p. 30). Cruikshank (2009) concurred, citing Spector-Mercel, stating: "When 'the old' are constructed as a group, they are seen as uniform, with their numerous differences blurred so that they become an 'aging melting-pot,' and other identities are 'pushed aside by the potent age stereotypes'" (p. 156). Furthermore, "Biased attitudes reinforce discriminatory practices, such as firing older workers and maintaining an education system focused on the young" (Cruikshank, 2009, p. 139). Cruikshank (2009) also suggested that intergenerational classrooms can engage the life experiences of older students to enhance the meaning of what is being taught.

Although the literature supports the presence of age bias, participants in the current study indicated that mentors and instructors at ESC did not see their age in a negative light. Rather, they felt their lifetime of experiences was respected by the faculty with whom they studied.

When you're an older student, a more mature student, you're expected to know a lot. [I was] very needy in knowing what I was supposed to do and not knowing academic vocabulary. However, no one made me feel stupid.

We are mature students. ... There's a different mindset ... and different experiences ... between a 20-something person and a person in their third-age. The mentoring program did gear itself ... for me being an older student, which I haven't seen in other places.

Age didn't matter.

One study participant, who graduated at the age of 79, said:

There's an atmosphere sometimes of negativity [where I live] ... they would say ... "What are you going to school for? You're too old to get a job." I'd just say "Because I want the piece of paper." ... That's why when I walked across that stage ... it was like, what is that sound? I turned. I got a standing ovation ... the negativity pushed me more to prove I'm going to do it whether you believe in me or not ... a couple of people here are now thinking about take a couple of courses.

Recommendations

To meet the needs of this growing student population, the following recommendations are offered for consideration by institutions of higher learning. Recommendations are based on the six areas of need identified by the third-age participants in the current study.

Recommendation #1: Motivations

It is recommended that colleges recognize that third-age students have multiple, coexisting reasons for pursuing a degree, rather than viewing them only as generic "lifelong learners" who are attending college for something to do. Additionally, the majority of participants in this study reported being actively employed and believed that having a degree would help them to advance in their careers or change career direction, mirroring the national employment statistics for older workers (Kiger, 2018). Therefore, it is also recommended that colleges and universities acknowledge the career crossroads faced by this age group, and interact with third-age students to identify their motivations in order to best meet their instructional needs and help them meet their goals. Additionally, colleges can help them identify career opportunities as they re-enter the workforce or change careers, facilitate job-funded tuition programs, or help them identify areas of community service where they can apply their education.

Recommendation #2: Credit for Prior Learning

Third-agers arrive in higher education with a lifetime of knowledge and experience. It is recommended, therefore, that institutions of higher learning acknowledge and award credit for learning acquired outside of formal education. This practice can provide the

affirmation of life experience that third-age individuals seek. It can also make seeking a degree more attractive, which has the potential to increase enrollments in an era of declining numbers for traditional-age students. Combined with acceptance of relevant transfer credits, it can also accelerate completion of a degree program and reduce student loan debt for third-age students.

Recommendation #3: Relationship-Based Learning

It is recommended that institutions of higher learning promote an educational model of relationship-based learning that includes a strong mentoring program and opportunities for interaction with mentors, instructors and peers, including offering in-person group classes. It is further recommended that collaborative learning environments be encouraged between instructors, mentors and students rather than traditional “top-down” lecture formats to enhance learning and provide the social aspect of learning that third-age students seek (Mezirow, 2000). Chen (2014) noted that “adult learners are self-directed, and their learning is optimized when their experience is recognized and utilized in the learning process. Adult students are not ‘blank slates’ [as termed by Nelken], and their life experience becomes the medium through which content is learned and in which to redefine new goals to accomplish” (p. 407). In addition, institutional support for mentors is recommended, including small student loads and relevant training specific to older students regarding the interpersonal aspects of mentoring (e.g., conflict resolution, developing effective listening skills) and relationship-based learning.

Recommendation #4: Online Learning

It is recommended that institutions of higher learning recognize that not all third-age students may be computer savvy or comfortable with online learning. Even though most third-age students prefer not to enroll in online courses because of weak computer skills or the lack of face-to-face connection (ACE, 2008), 39 percent of them do take courses online. Therefore, at registrations, orientations and at the beginning of coursework, it would be beneficial to discuss their level of comfort with technology to identify how much

assistance they will need. Programs such as group computer lab sessions and/or academic coaching would also help, while providing another opportunity for relationship-based learning. In response to Erickson and Noonan’s (2010) observation that instructors should anticipate “higher levels of ‘invisible’ [as termed by Blair & Hoy] labor” when helping “late-career adults” (p. 395), it is further recommended that Mentors and instructors “check in” regularly with third age students taking online courses to address any learning needs that may arise.

Recommendation #5: Support Services

Institutions of higher learning can also meet the needs of third-age students by providing support services geared specifically to this age group. Some may have been away from school for many years and may need help in a variety of support mediums with skills such as academic writing and research, grammar, computers, online learning formats, etc. Additionally, students can be referred to self-directed tutorials to improve skills in research, citations, writing skills, etc. Enhanced guidance during the enrollment, registration and financial aid processes is also recommended to “demystify the college experience” for third-age students (Olivas as cited in ACE, 2008, p. 15), and post-education career counseling can ease the transition to work or volunteer opportunities.

Recommendation #6: Age Bias

It is recommended that institutions of higher learning develop or update policies and practices to eliminate stereotypes about older individuals, acknowledge their strengths and value to the community and academia, and nurture an academic environment that is free from age bias, yet provides challenging studies that adhere to standards of excellence. Additionally, availability of intergenerational classes can benefit all age groups (ACE, 2008). Training for staff and faculty can also address intentional or unintentional attitudinal factors stemming from ageism. It is essential to rethink language used to describe this age group by avoiding terms such as “seniors,” “older adults,” “elderly” or “retirees.” Instead, bias-free terms such “third-age,” “lifelong learners,” or “adult learners” are more appropriate within academic settings, as well

as in enrollment outreach programs (ACE, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, the use of images of students who represent diversity in terms of age is also recommended for online, print and advertising outreach materials to reflect the growing presence of older individuals in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the generalizability of this study. The subsample of 10 alumni represented only 2.4 percent of all the alumni for the large database of 417 Empire State College students. Also, only alumni living in the state where the researchers resided were included in this study, and study participants were chosen from ESC, a nonresidential, open-access, nontraditional public college that focuses on adult learning. The college also engages vigorous mentoring and prior learning assessment programs, and offers flexible modes of study, including on-campus, cross-enrollment, and an extensive online learning program that may not be available at other colleges. Furthermore, the categories developed in a study can never entirely capture “the essence of a concept in its entirety” (Willig, 2013, p. 78), and since construction of the categories was done by the researchers, these results may reflect (unintentional) bias. In addition, the socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects of the subsample were not explored.

Because of limitations of the generalizability of this qualitative pilot study, there is a need for expanded research. This could include conducting a poll of all third-age graduates in the ESC alumni database used for this study; comparison of third-age enrollment at other colleges and universities; and examining influences of gender, socioeconomic and sociocultural dynamics that could affect themes and conclusions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, higher education must strive to continue meeting the needs of third-age students whose pursuit of higher education is a catalyst to: advance in current careers or change vocational direction; give back to their families, friends and communities; and experience personal growth. Of greatest importance is that pursuing higher education

in the third age of life challenges those who practice ageism, which Robert Butler defined as “a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin color and gender” (as cited in Macnicol, 2006, p. 7). For these third-age students, and many like them, later life is not a period of loss and disengagement, but a time for growth and reinvention.

Note

- ¹ For example, students age 60 and older represented 29 percent of alumni as of 2018 at the college where the study was conducted (State University of New York Empire State College, 2018, p. 3).

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A Fulbrighter at SUNY Empire State College: A Letter from Timișoara

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When I first received news in 2016 that I would be spending a year as a Fulbright Foreign Student Program grantee at SUNY Empire State College, I was elated and stunned in equal measure. Even though I was writing a Ph.D. in American studies, and had therefore encountered New York many times in fictional form, I had never visited the city in person. The trouble was that the fictional accounts of this ultimate megacity ranged from romantic to genuinely terrifying, from elegies to a vibrant center of contemporary art and culture to accounts of violent discrimination, homelessness, and vivid descriptions of post-traumatic disorientation. To calm my nerves, I resolved to believe Thomas Wolfe, who said that “One belongs to New York instantly, one belongs to it as much in five minutes as in five years.” In retrospect, this may not be true for everybody, but I certainly could not have felt more welcomed than I did at Empire State College.

I first came to know about Empire State College when I was still an undergraduate student attending a lecture by ESC mentor Tom Grunfeld, fascinated by its topic – a photographic journey through (at-that-time?) inaccessible North Korea. Professor Grunfeld was himself a senior Fulbrighter at the university where I was studying, the West University of Timișoara, in Romania. Like most university cities around the world, Timișoara is rather diverse compared to other cities in Romania. This is not only due to the ever-increasing number of students from abroad who choose to study here, but also to the city’s intricate history. Throughout its history, Timișoara was part of the Hungarian, Ottoman, Habsburg, as well as Austrian Empire, and has known periods of migration and colonization. Its history is reflected in the city’s architecture and the many languages

spoken here even today, in spite of massive emigration of various communities during the Ceaușescu regime (Nicolae Ceaușescu, president/secretary of the Romanian Communist Party) and after the 1989 Romanian Revolution (in which Ceaușescu was overthrown). It was no doubt this history of my hometown that brought back Professor Grunfeld, and which, in turn, brought me to Empire State College in 2016.

New York turned out to be infinitely more diverse than Timișoara, or any other city I had visited before. From the very first day, living in Jackson Heights, Queens, walking to the next block felt like I was walking in the space of a different community altogether. In my year there, I came into contact with many cultures, through their foods, music, art, or simply by talking to as many people as I could. It remains, to this day, the best part of my New York experience. The same sense of harmonious diversity persisted at Empire State College, where, attending a number of fascinating classes, I not only became more familiar with the topics discussed but benefited greatly from the discussions I had with my fellow students, whose backgrounds and experiences enriched our conversations perhaps even more than the great books we talked about.

Empire State College, creating favorable and supportive conditions for its students, encourages this kind of atmosphere. Here, I was pleasantly surprised to find that Professor Grunfeld was not an exception when it comes to focusing on student needs. In class, as well as during private discussion sessions with faculty members, I felt as though there was no problem that could not be solved. Even before arriving in the U.S., Alan Mandell, ESC mentor and Fulbright contact, made sure that I would have the best conditions to



Loredana-Florentina Bercuci

accommodate my research and personal needs once I arrived in New York. After I arrived, all members of the faculty I came into contact with kindly offered feedback and advice with regard to my research, always sensitive to my personal approach. While my project benefitted a lot from the access to resources, such as online journals or libraries, it was this approach to teaching that encouraged me the most to finish my dissertation, which I defended in March 2018. The reason why the atmosphere at Empire State College was invaluable to my research is that it unexpectedly offered a new perspective on the topic of my dissertation: trauma. I learned through my learning experience there, as well as talks with faculty members, the importance of empowering and teaching students by allowing them to work with their own

resources and experience, i.e., the importance of listening and offering resources rather than prescribing in the teaching process.

Incidentally, this was a lesson I was learning in parallel from my doctoral research on trauma. My interest in this topic was initially sparked by two courses I took at the Albert-Ludwigs University of Freiburg, Germany, in 2012: *The Americanization of the Holocaust*, and *The Theory of Adaptation*. I was thus introduced to trauma theory and transmedia narratology. I had not been particularly interested in film, comics, video games and new media as academic topics before then, although I enjoyed them in my spare time perhaps more than I should have. While these courses were indeed fascinating in themselves and might have convinced me to undertake this sort of research regardless of other circumstances, they also coincided with the research I was doing for my M.A. thesis. I was then reading about the return to realism in contemporary American fiction. What interested me was their disenchantment with postmodernist writing, over which I had spent my college years laboring. It seemed to me then that fiction was turning more and more toward both the referential and the autobiographical, even if some of the playfulness of the postmodern had not completely been discarded yet. As a result, I was only moderately surprised when a quick inquiry into contemporary autobiography and memoir sales revealed a massive preference for these modes of writing.

Upon reading a couple of these memoirs, I could not help but feel that they were eerily similar structurally to the sort of testimony I had encountered in my Holocaust course, but often not quite as serious in their motives or intentions. In fact, they ranged from heartbreaking memoirs of loss to sensationalist accounts of all sorts of embarrassing personal stories that would have been more at home in tabloids. Regardless of this fact, they all proclaimed themselves as stories of trauma. It seemed that everybody had some trauma to unearth. To truly confess, I will have to say that I found this rather irritating. Overnight, everything had become traumatizing: An instance of serious abuse was equated to some slanted remark by this or that ignoramus. While the line between what constitutes

serious abuse and bearable insult is highly debatable, the overgeneralization and trivialization of the word trauma has done a great disservice to those who have not only suffered through horrific situations, but need to have their stories heard in order to receive well-deserved capital, whether financial or otherwise. At the same time, suffering that to me was more deserving of attention was blatantly ignored on political grounds. The trauma tag was only liberally imparted to certain types of people.

Who gets assigned this so-called trauma tag is of utmost importance because testimony of trauma can make or break the life of individuals or groups. As is well known, it is often used in court to convict perpetrators or to elicit reparations. For instance, testimonies of the victims of governments that have committed deliberate discriminatory acts against minorities or dissidents, ranging from unfair taxes to slavery, incarceration and murder, are used to elicit public apologies from said governments. Sometimes governments respond to charges of injustice by suggesting the events in question are not important or by denying them altogether. For example, despite frequent requests that it acknowledge and apologize for the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Turkish government denies that the episode ever occurred. At other times, governments admit to having wronged citizens, but argue that it is too late to do anything about it, as the argument against reparations for slavery in the U.S. goes. Less frequently, governments establish commissions dedicated to detailing and explaining earlier injustices. Finally, with increasing frequency in recent decades, governments sometimes apologize for historical injustices. Such apologies perform important public functions by legitimating victims and offering reparations, and thus providing much needed psychological and financial relief to groups still suffering today because of previous injustices.

In spite of this large number of contexts in which the word trauma is invoked, many have noted that the definitions of trauma that are immensely popular in the humanities, especially those of trauma theorist Cathy Caruth (1995; 1996), are prescriptive and exclusionary. According to Alan Gibbs (2014) and others, these definitions produced

“... the overgeneralization and trivialization of the word trauma has done a great disservice to those who have not only suffered through horrific situations, but need to have their stories heard in order to receive well-deserved capital, whether financial or otherwise.”

formulaic works, defined by modernist and especially postmodernist techniques that allow for experimental depictions of trauma and are decisively Euro-American. Many urged the diversification of what is understood as trauma, and I myself aimed to do just that by extending the analysis of trauma stories to those stories that are told in different media, with use of more accessible channels than the traditional ones.

Around the time I was thinking up the structure of my dissertation project, the Bill Cosby scandal broke out. It seemed to me then that trauma testimony had broken out of the pages of books and courtrooms and into the court of public opinion, and it mattered very little whether Cosby would be convicted in court or damned by public opinion. His fall from grace would happen either way, bringing along with it discussions about what this means for the representation of masculinity. While public damnation is not by any means new, the way it happened in the case of Cosby bears the mark of a new era. His accusers were no longer constrained by the limitations of traditional media and their trauma stories could proliferate freely, so that anyone could have direct access to them.

Considering all this from afar, it seemed that Americans attributed the word trauma so liberally that the word had lost all meaning and power. When I was in New York, I got to experience the power of this word firsthand

as the presidential election of 2016 took place. It was then that I saw a disoriented New York, swelling up in waves of protests over a result that came as a shock to its denizens. This shock was reflected in almost all of my academic experiences, too, as academics across the U.S. and across the world pondered the rise of populist nationalism, and wondered if they themselves were in part to blame for it. Donald Trump's victory was unexpected, so much so that even the most pessimistic of those who were rooting against him were still bumbling around in a state of disarray and shock many weeks after the results were announced. I myself am part of this category: watching the results roll in, I was offended that so many people would elect someone as incompetent, not to mention chauvinistic, to be the president of country that basically dictates how the rest of the world lives. Upon expressing my anger, I and many of my peers were accused of living in a bubble of college campus identity politics fraught with an excess of emotion, irrational moralistic indictments and not much connection to economic issues of the "real" world. The trauma tag was back and stronger than ever; it was now being applied to me, and yet my narrative was not legitimized, but delegitimized by it.

Amidst the political hysteria surrounding the election, Cosby's name cropped up again as liberal pundits were accusing Trump of sexual

harassment. To my surprise, such accusations turned into a cultural phenomenon known as the #MeToo movement. Debates around what constitutes sexual harassment no doubt created the necessary climate for accusations of gross sexual misconduct against Harvey Weinstein to finally come to light. An avalanche of similar revelations followed the Weinstein debacle: the careers of liberal gurus such as Kevin Spacey, Louis C.K., Al Franken and Leon Wieseltier were ended in light of similar accusations. The women writing testimonies under this hashtag invoked the trauma that they had suffered as a result of sexual harassment or abuse. Trauma remained a means of making claims to sympathy, and, in this case, belief. The discussion revolves around how women's stories of harassment tend not to be believed, to be considered unimportant, and how the burden of proof that the harassment happened is unfairly placed on the victim rather than on the perpetrator. Basically, the discussions point to the failure of due process with regard to accusations of sexual misconduct. The result of this is that accountability is placed into the hands of the public who has the power to ruin these men through public shaming. A process of this magnitude would obviously not have been possible before the proliferation of the internet. In spite of the individualistic nature of the claims of trauma, the self that these

women achieve is legitimately empowered in a network where resonance with similar stories is the main mechanism of legitimation.

Ultimately, what my research, my lovely experience at Empire State College in New York, and being part of the international Fulbright family have taught me is the importance of the particular and of securing access to knowledge, discourse and resources to everyone, be they exchange students from around the world, adult learners, or people who have suffered trauma. While the current international political climate is more inclined toward divisiveness than inclusiveness, I will definitely hold on to these values and share them with my students. As I see one of them off to her own Fulbright year in the U.S., I can only hope that her experience will be as good as mine was at Empire State College.

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Playing With Fire

Alan Stankiewicz, Syracuse

I have spent most of my creative adult life working with clay. Early on, as a member of a pottery cooperative in Connecticut, I developed and mastered skills in understanding gas and reduction fire. Along the way, I also had opportunities to access the Japanese pottery technique of raku, and salt firing as a way of informing my work.

Moving to Syracuse, New York, 12 years ago, and working out of Clayscapes Pottery, Inc., have afforded me the chance to join the Independent Potters Association (IPA). It is through Clayscapes and the IPA that I have been able to address a lifelong dream: doing wood firing, as well as using my clay work to support community service fundraisers such as "The Bowls Project" and "Cups for a Cause," both of which make contributions to local charities.

Although I've had the opportunity to use various firing techniques in finishing my clay works, I find wood firing to be special because it not only provides that unpredictable layer of wood ash along with unique flashing indicative of wood fire clay pots, but it also allows me to engage and create my work through the use of the community.



"Innsmouth Blue Vase"

"Stoking the Kiln"





"Kiln Site in November"



"Wood Inventory for the Weekend Firing"



"Bisque and Glazed Ware Before Loading the Glaze Firing"

Wood firing minimally requires 72 hours of constant stoking of wood into the kiln in order to reach temperature; we create appropriate atmospheric conditions by using both softwood and hardwood in making ash, which in high enough temperatures makes its own glaze. Along with listening to the kiln through the heating and cooling process, it is primarily these two activities that allow us to judge internal conditions in best determining when to reduce the kiln. "Reduction" is when you close off the kiln, starving it of oxygen and forcing the fire to search for energy in order to sustain itself. This process can be very dramatic late at night when the fire seeks any holes in the kiln to feed its thirst for oxygen. Often extending several inches beyond the walls of the kiln, the kiln's fire (energy) illuminates the night sky with its flame. It is also in the reduction phase when the fire pulls iron out of the clay body and glazes, resulting in the desired colorization of both clay and glaze. Reducing the kiln at appropriate times during the long firing processes achieves well-saturated clay pieces often associated with wood fire aesthetics, as well as enables the circulation of air and ash, contributing to the success of overall wood firing.

All of this cannot be done by one person alone; a successful wood fire requires a team effort – a community of sorts – with seasoned shift captains teaching and mentoring new participants throughout the lengthy process: stacking the kiln in order to enhance the potential desired results; firing the kiln; and waiting during the weeklong cool-down period before the kiln can be unloaded, thus revealing the results of our efforts. All of these activities allow us, through shared informal critique on the grounds of the kiln site, to gather further information we may choose to apply to future work and to future group firings. It is with this shared documentation that I grow as an artist, inventing new directions for my work, anticipating the next time I get to play with fire.

Photos courtesy of Alan Stankiewicz



"Untitled"



"Untitled"



"Clay Bucket"

"Finished Pieces Laid Out for Informal Group Critique"





"Wood Firing the Kiln, the Late Shift"



"Three Small Bowls"

Additional examples of Stankiewicz's work are viewable at <https://www.ipacny.org/>
(see Members, Alan Stankiewicz).

Excerpts From “How SUNY ESC Works: Student Perspectives”

Dee Britton, Syracuse

Introduction

The following edited excerpts are from a report, “How SUNY ESC Works: Student Perspectives.” This pilot study used a mixed method research design and focused upon undergraduate students who were enrolled in the 2016–2017 academic year, and alumni who graduated with an associate or bachelor’s degree between 2006 and May 2017. Students in The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, International Education, the School of Nursing and Allied Health, and the School for Graduate Studies were not included in this pilot project because those programs, policies and/or procedures have significant differences from the rest of the undergraduate student experience at SUNY Empire State College. In total, 206 students and alumni participated in this project. The full report, available on the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation website at www.esc.edu/cmlai/, includes suggestions for further research.

How SUNY ESC Works: Student Perspectives

SUNY Empire State College (ESC) was established on April 1, 1971 to serve “individuals of all ages, throughout society, according to their own life-styles and educational needs” (Boyer as cited in Bonnabeau, 1996, p. 18). Over the past 47 years, there have been significant changes in college policies, procedures and practices (e.g., implementation of set terms, adoption of “letter” grades, elimination of narrative evaluations). The past five years have been a time of “re-imagining, re-structuring, re-emerging” (Hancock, 2014). In November 2013, President Merodie Hancock charged an “Areas of Study Futures Team” (composed of 19 faculty, three professional employees, two members of the Office of Academic Affairs, a dean, and an associate dean) to “lead a collegewide conversation” on the re-visioning of the college’s undergraduate degree programs (SUNY Empire State College, 2014, p. 12). The charge specifically stated that the team was “organized to give voice to innovative ideas from a diverse range of constituencies” (p. 12). The focus of including diverse constituencies has been a founding concept. When SUNY Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer charged then Acting Director James W. Hall “to bring this unusual institution to life,” Hall convened a diverse group because he “believed that ‘the depth and complexity’ of the College mission called for ‘different major viewpoints’ to be brought together” (Hall as cited in Bonnabeau, 1996, p. 22).

One constituency has frequently been overlooked in these organizational discussions: ESC students. The focus of this research project was to specifically identify the practices, policies and procedures that students find valuable in their ESC experience. We know through the SUNY student satisfaction surveys that many of our students are satisfied with ESC (SUNY Empire State College, n.d.-a). Mentors have anecdotal

information of “what is working” for their mentees. However, I was not aware of a collegewide examination of “what works” for our students and I found the absence of their voice troubling. Through this research, which was selected as the 2016–2017 Susan H. Turben Chair in Mentoring project, students and alumni were asked: why they chose ESC; their experience and opinions of the modes of study; their opinion and thoughts about educational planning; how they defined success at ESC; the essential elements that supported that success; and changes that they would recommend. This report does not attempt to analyze or explain student/alumni responses. Its sole purpose is to report how ESC works from the student perspective.



Dee Britton

What Supports Success?

ESC students identified three key elements of success at this college: relationships; educational programs and flexibility in modes of learning; and educational planning and prior learning assessments. When asked what the primary factor of success was, students and alumni responded:

Primary factor/ element of success	Percentage of students/ alumni selecting this as their first response
Relationships	56%
Educational programs	12%
Individualization of education	12%

Relationships

Studies of “traditional college students” have found that relationships are fundamental to successful college experiences. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) noted that “Satisfactory personal relationships are a *prerequisite* for learning” (p. 4). A Gallup (2014) poll of 30,000 U.S. graduates found that:

... Where graduates went to college – public or private, small or large, very selective or not selective – hardly matters at all to their current well-being and their work lives in comparison to their

experiences in college. For example, if graduates had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in their well-being. ... Feeling supported and having deep learning experiences means everything when it comes to long-term outcomes for college graduates. (p. 4)

In my study, our ESC students overwhelmingly declared that relationships are/were the primary factor in their success at the college. Fifty-six percent of responding students and alumni stated that relationships with and encouragement from ESC mentors, faculty, tutors, staff (professional, administrative and support) and librarians were the essential elements of their success.

It feels like a family to me. I know it is a school but it feels like family. I've learned more in this non-school environment than I ever did in a traditional institution.

Everyone does their job. It is bureaucracy at its finest.

I'd been out of college for more than 20 years. The ... writing [coach] really helped me get started. I was intimidated about the writing and the writing coach got me back up to speed.

This is a group of people who are really dedicated to helping you succeed. You don't find that very many places.

You aren't just another number. They know you. They know your goals.

My tutor. She went so far above and beyond. We had evening appointments, weekend appointments. She even volunteered to drive 45 miles to my unit to meet me. [Unit refers to the SUNY Empire geographical location to which the student was assigned.]

Several respondents also stated that fellow students were important to their college experience.

There were some classmates who were really great. ... [They would offer,] do you want to Skype a conversation? Do you want to video chat to figure this out?

When you talk with other students, they all have great stories. They make you believe that you can do it. I spoke with a student who had struggled and she is now about to start a doctoral program.

Mentors and faculty

Forty-four percent of the students and alumni specifically identified mentors and faculty as the most important elements of success at ESC. When asked about their specific relationships with mentors and faculty, students and alumni responded:

	Very good relationship	Neutral relationship	Not a good relationship
Mentors	64%	19%	17%
Instructors	47%	41%	12%

Mentorship ... gives a student an opportunity to refocus at certain points. Kept me on a clear track. That wasn't something that I had in previous experiences in higher education. It kept me focused.

My mentor was vital to my success there. She understood what my goals were and guided my educational path with my work and the interests that I had for my long term educational goals. She was key to my getting it finished.

I continue to have friendships with several of my instructors, who were real mentors for me even as I pursued my graduate studies elsewhere.

I still reach out to "X," "Y," and "Z" from time to time to thank them for their continued and wonderful support. They made me believe in myself and believe that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. They were RIGHT!

LOVE MY MENTOR. She guided me towards taking greater ownership of my studies and degree plan. She saw that my challenges in completing my studies were more about my fears than my capacity.

Mentors are by far the best thing that I love about this college. It makes it a very personal and unbelievably helpful way to steer the student into the right classes to take. I could not even imagine how I would have gotten this far without [my mentor]. She is always suggesting classes that I love and are a good fit for my degree. She is very knowledgeable and it shows.

I loved having my mentor to guide [me] in the right direction. My prior college experience left me with classes I didn't need or a schedule that was unreasonable. My mentor was able to show me my road map to complete my degree.

I love being a student at ESC and the Mentors clearly feel the same about teaching for ESC too. Morale is always high with ESC instructors.

Seventeen percent of respondents stated that they did not have good relationships with their mentor. Some stated that it was due to lack of communication. Others claimed that their mentor's lack of understanding of the student's field created significant barriers and challenges. There were also suggestions that it should be more clearly defined how mentors are assigned and how students can request mentor changes.

I needed a mentor change because I felt that I wasn't getting the help I needed.

[My mentor] had limited knowledge of my career path, training I had received, or experience that I had, resulting in poor ability to relate to me or guide me in writing my iPLAs [individualized prior learning assessments]. In regards to my [degree program] rationale, he gave very little feedback. When it was given, it was improper information, and he had a lack of responsiveness or when questions were asked. This caused me to have multiple rationales written and rewritten after he approved their submission to COAR [Center Office of Academic Review].

Educational Programs

There was a tie for the second most frequently cited element of student success (12 percent each). Students and alumni stated that ESC's educational program (i.e., the quality of courses/studies combined with the availability of multiple modes of study) tied with the individualized approach to education (i.e., individualized degree programs, educational planning, and prior learning assessment). When asked if the difficulty and amount of work was appropriate for the courses (on a scale from 1-10 with 10 being most appropriate), the weighted average was 8.13. Some specific comments:

Yes, thorough. Very high standard and greatly challenging but I am grateful by the end of each course completion that I am fully versed on the subject.

I found all my courses challenging and invigorating. I actually don't know if the course difficulties or work loads are standard for the level or academic credit, as I have nothing to compare them to. I always feel that I am encouraged to work as much and as deeply as I am able and that I am respected by the professors for that work and my general interest in learning. That feels appropriate to me.

The rigor of the studies is what I expected, but of course, one can read more and go deeper into the topics if one has the time and inclination. There are ample resources to take the studies to the next level through the SUNY library resources and various additional online links to scholarly and other educational articles and videos

Yes, I find the coursework more challenging than the other two colleges I previously attended and I love that! On the flip side I'm sometimes very stressed about meeting due dates.

Modes of study

SUNY Empire State College (n.d.-b) proudly declares that it “brings the classroom to you. Study part-time or full-time, onsite or online. You can even combine onsite and online learning and experience the best of both worlds” (Learn Where You Live section, para. 1). Students and alumni support this claim.

Mode of study	Percentage of students/ alumni taking at least one course/study in this mode
Center for Distance Learning	76%
Independent Studies	51%
Face-to-Face Study Groups	29%
Online Study Groups	29%
Blended Studies	25%
Residencies	14%
Cross registration at another college	8%

Percentages total more than 100% because many students stated that they participated in more than one study modality.

Many students have taken more than one mode of study, and they commented on the importance of having a variety of modalities from which they could select:

Overall, I was pleased because the classes were challenging and demanding. For me, I'm a lifelong learner and I want to be challenged.

I did everything. Started out with group studies but wanted to start going faster. ... So, I decided to do a mix. Honestly, I did appreciate online because it made my life easier but I miss the camaraderie [sic] and the presence of the professor at the front of the room. I didn't feel that I had as much interaction with my classmates there. I didn't build the connections.

I did my gen eds [SUNY general education requirements] all in group studies. Then when I started in the meat and potatoes, there wasn't anyone to do those. I did most of those classes through CDL [the Center for Distance Learning]. I did some independent studies. There were a few independent studies that I did about topics that I wanted to explore. I probably did 6-10 independent studies and the rest were CDL or group studies.

I liked independent study because they focused on a particular topic and work closely with that topic. I liked group studies because you could engage with other students and learn from them and the professor. Distance learning was helpful because of my busy schedule and the commute to get to the location was sometimes difficult. You can check in on a class whenever it is convenient to you ... each lends to a holistic quality learning experience which could not be achieved by one of these methods alone for my courses.

Primarily, I enjoyed the different modes of study, because I really got to experience all of them, and work with the mode I felt was most effective for me.

I have most enjoyed CDL for the widest range of [the] student population and the temporal flexibility. The technical problems with the moodles [sic] [the college's current learning management system] are very frustrating however and the lack of clarity or reasonably thought-out limitations in the course assignments/materials/expectations is often truly problematic. Face to face study groups are most enjoyable for the opportunity to make in-person contact with other thinking adults but difficult to manage in working/parenting schedule and severely limited in choice of courses. I personally love individual study because I like working alone and at my own pace and in close relationship with a mentor, but I definitely miss the interaction and support of peers. I hope to try out all the modes of study available at Empire before my degree is complete!

I really enjoyed being able to mix all modes of study. This helped keep things interesting, accommodate [sic] my adult life/work schedule, and as a student of the arts cross registration and individualized studies helped me access really quality studio arts classes.

I enjoyed both modes. The individualized studies allowed me to do my work at the professional pace I was comfortable with. The cross-registration classes allows me inside [sic] into the state of education today.

Students and alumni were asked to identify their favorite mode of study and to discuss their experience and strengths/weaknesses of the various modalities. Their favorite modalities are identified below by percentage and include student comments and discussions about that modality.

Online structured learning/Center for Distance Learning (50 percent) and online study groups (3 percent):

All online. It was very different from being in a classroom where you have students and a professor around you. You were on your own but never alone. I need to stress that. All of the professors would keep in contact with you. It was very hard for anyone who is doing online studies, this is not a pass. This is really hard work. It is harder than in class. Everything is written, everything is reviewed. And then given back and there was back and forth. Sometimes you can work with other people but even that was on the phone. Is this something I would recommend? Definitely, but they would have to know that this is giving up a block of time ... and you have to be devoted to this. If you aren't, it isn't going to work for you. There is no hiding from the professor or not showing up.

Online 100%. It was something that I was skeptical about. Started traditional brick/mortar but that didn't work out. Then tried blended but didn't like that. Went 100% online and liked that because of the flexibility. Went from being skeptical to really being impressed.

When I was in traditional school, I sat in the back and was quiet. Online I could ask questions and I didn't feel judged. I really developed good relationships with instructors online. There is a screen between you and the people. Takes away from the fear of being judged.

It was good to be online because my children were at home and it attracted people from everywhere. [I am] teaching online now for [another institution]. I am teaching people from all around the world. I love the different people and so many different ideas in one place ... we can see how things are affected from different regions and perspectives.

I did like online because you could do it on your own time but it was more work. I would focus more on the online courses than the other ones. It was very structured.

I feel very isolated as an online student but it does give me flexibility.

I liked having the ability to be flexible with coursework and the online environment made it easier to participate in group study.

I've just started my first online course and completed three independent studies in the spring semester. I don't have a clear idea of a preference at this point. But, I do like the more rigid structure of the online course.

In the online courses I took, I was braver to voice my opinion and not as insecure as when I was face to face.

It is important to note that some students identified very strong opinions about online structured course discussions. Some students stated that these provided valuable contributions to their knowledge and a sense of community in the virtual classroom. Others found discussions difficult, annoying and unnecessary.

Strength [of course discussions]: I got to read other people's papers. On discussions, you would put something up and you would get to see their ideas. They are short essays and I get to read what someone else is doing. Sometimes I would say, wow, that person is really on point and I didn't think about that. Weakness [of course discussions]: Part of my responsibility was to respond to other people but people never posted. I emailed the teacher and they didn't give us dates, just weeks. I was the only person who was posting. 16 people in the class and I was the only person who was posting. When everyone is on top of the game and doing the work on time, it is really good.

The CDL courses I really enjoyed because I liked the discussion posts. There was nowhere to hide. In CDL you couldn't do that, you were forced to be engaged. I liked ANGEL [the college's former learning management system] a lot. I would be on there every day because I wanted to see if someone wrote back to comment on what I said.

I thought [online] was harder. I liked the convenience but I found it harder because you had a virtual connection with people. It was good because I could take more risks but it was harder because you had to write and respond to other students' posts. I guess you do that verbally in a classroom but that is a different type of pressure.

Those were the most work of any of the courses. There is so much to read and reply to x number of other students in the discussion and write a paper. For that, the challenge is finding people to have discussions with. It was easy to have people say "I agree." It was harder to find those people who is [sic] engaged and thinking beyond the basics, I found it interesting to get in those discussions. One drawback: it is people writing online, not human contact.

I hate discussion boards. Most people have time to finish. How many times do you get it that you can't reply. You need to have posts due earlier and then have the replies due later.

I actually prefer classroom study, but my schedule would not allow for that. However the CDL courses with the discussion boards were great.

Online discussion for participation points in group classrooms adds a significant amount of work to an already heavy workload with essays and other related homework assignments. In my opinion, these types of requirements are wholly unnecessary. During my independent studies, I discussed readings and assignments with the instructor outright and reflected my knowledge directly with a brief verbal conversation rather than having to jump through prescribed hoops to "prove" I'd done the readings to my fellow classmates. Online discussions also make you reliant on the work of others to proceed, given a specified number of expected responses that you cannot post without the participation of others. It was often difficult and inconvenient, as many other students waited until the last minute before posting. I was fully prepared to comment throughout the modules and had to police the classroom forums in order to submit my work before

the deadline – often [at] midnight with posts only starting to come in that very evening – or be penalized.

The mandatory DB [discussion boards] were annoying and generally a waste of time. However, a huge portion of your grade depended on your participation in the DB. I'd rather be graded on my work, not on my responses to other people's work.

Independent studies (23 percent):

All I've done is independent studies. It was very interesting. At first, I thought that it was best to learn from a teacher. But I've discovered that I did a lot better when I relied on myself to learn about the material. We were in communication every week or two. We then started conversing about subject material because we were interested.

I tend to go overboard. They are good for someone like me because I wasn't bound to anything. At first I found that extremely stressful and had a few restless nights about it. When someone says here's a subject, write a paper and send it to me. I think that is more like master's level [work] if you ask me. When it was opened like that, it was daunting. Once I got used to it, I started thinking about it like I was working. I was told to make a report and then report back to [my] administrator. That helped me.

My favorite is independent study. It is very flexible and could [be done] at my own pace. Although sometimes I didn't get a lot of feedback and needed more interaction with the professor.

The independent study is exactly what it is ... independent. Some time I felt that it was too loosely structured without having a specific course schedule. It was easy for me to get distracted. However, they did build on each other and the learning piece was great because I was free to do what I wanted.

Independent study was the most difficult because you set it up to do whatever it is you want to do. For me, there would be a general idea of something that I thought would be interesting but I didn't really know how to go about figuring out the important areas to learn. Because it was such an open forum, the teachers were more hands-off... [there was] less guidance. I always wondered if I was

doing the right thing or the wrong thing. There wasn't enough structure. The other types of classes were laid out and much more structured.

Independent study. I prefer this. It is on my pace. If I am stuck I don't have to move forward. I'm also the kind of student who doesn't hide at the back of the class. I want to be challenged. I want [to] challenge the professor. I've also hijacked classes. That is why I like the independent, one-on-one studies.

I loved being able to work independently and not having to deal with discussion boards and interacting with my peers. I worked at my own pace with materials that were selected for me based upon the course and things I had already studied. It felt more personalized.

I am an independent person and have little extra time to spare as a single mother of two college aged children with a full time job that takes up most of my day. This is the best way for me to work, meet with my professor and learn the skills required for each class; it is truly wonderful.

Face-to-face group studies (17 percent):

Group studies are my favorite and preferred. Enjoy interaction with professor and class. Different perspectives and talk about current events and what we are learning. This makes it easier to learn. The hours of the classes was [sic] difficult. Most are from 6–8. I would prefer for the classes to be earlier. Class sizes were small. Great advantage.

I prefer to have face to face study groups because the social interaction with the fellow students and instructors provides a better college experience.

I particularly enjoyed the residencies and face to face study groups, because not only was I learning from the instructors, I was learning from my fellow students as well. ESC has a very diverse student body, and listening to concepts and ideas from a variety of people from all different walks of life with various perspectives, really opened my eyes and my mind to different things, and contributed to a full breadth of understanding.

I learned more with the face to face classes where the teacher taught the class to the students. I also like the interaction with the other students and the group work we did together. Overall, the learning experience was much more rewarding.

The interaction offers so many opportunities to hear varying perspectives from the variety of people in discussions that what is lost in an on line experience, is body language, presentation. I have not tried an online course.

Residencies (4 percent) and blended studies (3 percent):

The residencies were good. I think that there was too much time in between the residencies. There were only a couple of them that I took that the instructors used Moodle. Some of them you were really on your own and Moodle could have really helped in between.

My favorite modes were residencies. I could listen to things and we could discuss and share ideas. For me, that was the best because English is my second language. I need some interaction with people.

Blended and hybrid: you then have the obligation of both [online and face-to-face]. It puts a whole different spin on it when you get to know others. I don't really have a campus that I feel affiliated with.

The residency is my favorite. I enjoy the one-on-one interactions. In the independent study I never once asked a question of my instructor. The Center for Distance Learning was the worst. I know that they have set it up the way they do to make sure that you know the material. It was the hardest, it didn't fit with the flexibility of Empire because this has to be done by this date. In the residency, even though it is only 3 times, you get to know the instructor. There is nothing like that interaction.

... Residencies allow for in-person interaction without the commitment of having to show up every day like for a regular class.

Differing interpretations of “online learning” and “distance learning”

In addition to identifying Empire State College student experiences and perspectives, one significant finding from this research was student and alumni confusion regarding the meaning of “distance learning.” Given that more than 32 percent of ESC undergraduate students were enrolled as students in the Center for Distance Learning in 2015–2016 (the next highest enrollment was the Metropolitan Center with 13.2 percent) as well as our institutional history and culture, many ESC faculty, mentors, administrators and staff assume that “distance learning” experiences are Center for Distance Learning courses. The student and alumni surveys and interviews identified some confusion about the meaning of “distance learning.”

One obvious confusion is the college’s differentiation between Center for Distance Learning courses and online study groups. When Center for Distance Learning-affiliated students were asked if their online courses were CDL courses or online study groups, all confidently stated that they were taking CDL courses. Several asked what an online study group was because they had never heard about these. Several regionally-based students had less certainty about the CDL/online study group identification.

I don’t know. It was, you know, on Moodle.

I took, you know, group studies, online.

... Were they online through the Center Distance Learning or online study groups?

I don’t know. I think that they were CDL.

What’s the difference?

In fact, one student complained about differing expectations of “online courses.”

Some of the online classes had specific due dates and assignments. I knew what was expected and could be prepared and get ahead. I really liked that. Other classes only had stuff that was due for the next assignment. Some classes had discussions that were required ... others had only readings and assignments. It was really confusing.

Upon further discussion and questioning, it became clear to me that this student had taken both CDL courses and online study groups. To her, however, they were all “online” courses. Understandably, students do not differentiate between structured online courses and group studies. They sometimes look very much alike. There may, however, be important differences between online structured courses (formerly known as CDL) and online study groups regarding ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility, course expectations, and consistency of design and structure.

The confusion about the term “distance learning” also was not limited to those who were taking online courses or studies. A student, living in the middle of the Adirondacks, told me that:

I’ve been all distance learning. Is that what it is called? I do my work, meet with a mentor by phone and submit papers on line.

Upon further discussion and questioning, I realized that the student has taken only independent studies. However, since she rarely goes to the unit and lives approximately 40 minutes away from her unit, all of her college work is “at a distance.” It may be important to note that there may be a difference in student and mentor/staff interpretation of “distance learning.”

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I Dream in Rhyme

Heidi Nightengale, Auburn

In January 2018, I received news that I had won a New York State Council on the Arts Grant. The project I proposed would allow me to combine my two greatest academic passions: working with youth at risk, and poetry. I had been writing poetry since I was a young person myself (7 years old – and I can still recite that first poem!). The opportunity to work with young people on the practice of poetry alone was thrilling, but to combine this work with youth categorized as “at risk” fired up my human services practitioner neurons; my brain was alight with self-generated dopamine. As I imagined the implementation of my project, I wanted my future young poets to experience the same – a lightness of mind and spirit. Many at-risk youth experience heaviness in all aspects of their lives. This opportunity to change their brain charges for a small period of time – and in doing so, create a desire to return to those “feel good moments” through positive involvement in the arts – motivated my planning and implementation.

As a mentor in human services, I felt as if I had struck gold as I began to examine the benefits of learning about and writing poetry for all youth, but especially for at-risk youth. Many will argue that all youth are at risk. I agree. And the research indicates that all adolescents experience the potential for risk on a continuum from low to imminent – but experience risk, nonetheless (McWhirter et al., 2017).

But I have wondered, pondered and then studied for quite a while about the protective factors of the arts for adolescents. As a poet and human services professional, this was an intuitive venture, and one I hoped would vet out my “gut” feelings and my many anecdotal experiences from over 30 years of working with youth.

I hit pay dirt with my research. For instance, a longitudinal study completed in 2012 indicated that: (1) Socially and economically disadvantaged children and teenagers who

have high levels of arts engagement or arts learning show more positive outcomes in a variety of areas than their low-arts-engaged peers; (2) At-risk teenagers or young adults with a history of intensive arts experiences show achievement levels closer to, and in some cases that exceed, the levels shown by the general population studied; (3) Most of the positive relationships between arts involvement and academic outcomes apply only to at-risk populations (with low-socioeconomic status [SES]). But positive relationships between arts and civic engagement are noted in high-SES groups, as well (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012).

Thus, I came upon the impetus to write the grant for what I called, “Nine Lines Public Poetry Project.” The expression “nine lines” came from the limit of lines one can produce on signage on public busses in the area of New York state I live, work, teach and write in: Auburn. One of the goals of the grant was to display the poems of the participants on the local busses of the Cayuga County line during April, which is National Poetry Month. Twelve individual poetry workshops later in five elementary, middle and high schools, along with youth at the Booker T. Washington Community Center in Auburn, a total of 48 youth talked about, read and then wrote their own poems. These finished poems were produced into illustrated broadsides



Photo credit: Brandon Wakehem

Heidi Nightengale listens as her poetry participants work through their ideas in February 2018 at Seward Elementary School in Auburn, New York.



Heidi Nightengale

Photo credit: Carrie DeBois

and plastered all over Cayuga County. And finally, 47 of the 48 youth (one young high school student had a conflict with his ROTC commitments) read their poems at a public poetry reading with nearly 100 people in attendance. I was happy that the event was of interest to the local media, which showed up to photograph and write a long feature on the work of these young, talented and proud people (see Rocheleau, 2018).

During this experience, I found that in each workshop there was at least one young person who *really* connected to poetry. In one workshop with second- through fifth-graders, a second-grader came to me privately and whispered in my ear – the young boy smacked of anecdotal evidence of a low-socioeconomic background, was multiracial and a child in the district’s elementary school with the highest rate of free lunch recipients – “I dream in rhyme, and I want to grow up to be a poet.” I told him that he had just said aloud a potential

line for his poem, which he ultimately titled, “I Dream in Rhyme.” Hearing my reaction, his smile was bigger than his face, and yes, he included that line in his poem written about the “dailiness” of walking home from school.

Over the years, as my own writing practice has sharpened (I hope!), I’ve begun to think about that first poem I wrote. Those lines have stayed with me for 50 years: “I see a daisy popping up to get some sunshine. I see a daisy popping up because it’s spring time.” My 7-year-old self scratched the words out on the back of an old and opened envelope (a strategy still often used), and I showed the poem to my parents. Their praise for my art, for my poem, was a crystalizing moment in my development. That very day, pleased with myself, pleased with the *praise from adults*, I decided, like my young second-grade participant, that “I dreamed of being a poet.”

While I do not write in rhyme except internal rhyme as a technique, I *do* dream in rhyme. I also have dreamed of giving other poets exposure, and that dream has been actualized with the development of my publishing venture, Clare Songbirds Publishing House, LLC, a print forum for art-quality chapbooks and full-length manuscripts of poetry (<https://www.claresongbirdspub.com/>). The venture started over a verbal “dream session” with a friend and former student, Laura Williams French, in June 2017. By August, we had launched the publishing house together, complete with a garden party affair to rival any royal garden party. Seventy people were in attendance, including colleagues from SUNY Empire State College’s Central New York and Rochester locations. A dream *not* deferred.

Clare Songbirds has already created some 30 books now in print. We made the long list among several hundred entries for the U.K.’s Saboteur Award for “Most Innovative Publisher” in April 2018, and one of our poets won the 2017 Independent Book Award for the best full-length poetry manuscript. Most special to me in the accomplishment of the publishing house, though, is the publication of two manuscripts by our colleagues, Mindy Kronenberg (*OPEN*) and Elaine Handley (*Securing the Perimeter*). The trust and affirmation that such already admired and accomplished poets would put their work in

my hands as editor and publisher brought a blush of poetic sunshine to my soul and my work at SUNY Empire State College.

I continue to write – both poetry and children’s picture books. I completed my latest chapbook, *Tillable Soil*; and my newest children’s picture book, *Robert’s Red Sweater*, was published in late 2018. I have enjoyed a bevy of readings and invitations to read. As I introduce myself and where my poetry comes from to my audiences, I always remember to ask each individual in the audience to understand the changing power of the arts, of poetry, in the lives of young people – wherever each youth may fall on that risk continuum. I ask them to reach out to youth to expose them to the same impetus that brought them out of their comfortable homes to a poetry reading.

Realizing that books themselves open up everyone, at risk or not, to opportunities for learning on one’s own, I pondered the status of my neighborhood. I live in a transitional part of the City of Auburn, a street where Section 8 housing apartments are nestled among those owned by the elderly. Many of my neighbors have no cars. I think many do not have a library card to our local free public library, and just maybe, have never been in a library since their school days. I investigated the organization, “Little Free Library” (<https://littlefreelibrary.org/>), and after much excitement about this international movement to bring little neighborhood libraries to remote locations or places where barriers to library experiences exist, I was gifted with my own Little Free Library over the holidays. It is now posted in my front yard. The library receives daily visits from young and old alike. Some take books, some leave books. Often I see



Heidi Nightgale’s Little Free Library, officially registered as the 69,339th library across the globe.



Young readers making selections from Heidi Nightgale’s neighborhood-based Little Free Library.

neighbors gathered around the library talking, sharing stories and helping to select books for each other and their children.

One day, I was outside weeding in my front gardens when I noticed a girl who appeared to be in middle school looking through the books. I stopped my work at hand, and asked her what she liked to read. She said she was interested in fantasy series. After one phone call, I received two complete sets of fantasy series for her. This little “job” of maintaining a neighborhood-based “Little Free Library” is also part of my human services work – providing an accessible way for all to read, to reflect on their reading, and to return for more books! It seems that this is what we do as faculty mentors, too. We provide the fodder for thought. We provide the tools for continued learning. I have taken my lessons as a faculty mentor into my neighborhood, and I continue to learn from my neighbors who teach me about compassion, enthusiasm and taking chances. That is what it is all about. I highly encourage all of us at Empire State College to consider becoming a curator and custodian of a Little Free Library.

Without the ability to combine my human services practice with my 30 years of poetry writing and publication (and now editing and publishing), *and* the unique ability to teach both in an interdisciplinary modality due to my practitioner credentials here at Empire State College, I myself might be “at risk” – at risk for stunted growth, at risk for dreaming without rhyme ... or reason.

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"It may be ... that the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking inherent in being a good restaurant server or carpenter or preschool teacher or, yes, hairdresser can be leveraged in helping the student see the connections between these strengths and those needed to be successful academically. One of my first students at UWW [University without Walls/University of Massachusetts] was a bartender who explored in her portfolio the ways in which the skills she acquired through that work had proved helpful in her human service career. She understood that the characteristics of the helping relationship transcend context."

– Karen A. Stevens, "The Influence of 'Have Not-Ness' on One Academic Trajectory"
 In A. C. Benoit, J. S. Olson, & C. Johnson (Eds.)
 Leaps of Faith: Stories from Working-Class Scholars
 Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2019, p. 189

Embedding Case Studies in Coursework: A Strategy for Building Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

Heather M. Reynolds, Saratoga Springs

"This [case study analysis] was a great process because it allowed us to work together to come up with strategies for teaching. I appreciate these case studies because this is definitely information I can use in the classroom and I like sharing ideas."

– SUNY Empire State College
teacher education student

Introduction

I have frequently used case studies in a wide range of courses I have taught over the past 25 years in both education and psychology. My decision wasn't initially research-based, but was grounded in my observation that the use of even brief real-life examples or scenarios in my classes could bring about interesting and informative discussions where real-world, collaborative problem-solving happened. Research does support that when case studies and associated discussion questions are well-structured and follow best practices, a variety of positive impacts are noted across a wide range of fields (law, business, education, social work, etc.). According to Shulman (2000), the value of using case studies "lies in their capacity to create bridges across the great chasm that divides policy from practice" (p. 2), by integrating theoretical knowledge into an authentic, real-world scenario/situation (e.g., Zhao, 1996). Research shows that the use of high-quality case studies promotes problem-solving and critical thinking skills (e.g., Popil, 2011), analytical skills (e.g., Wasserman, 1994), and the ability to deal with ambiguity through the consideration of multiple perspectives and possible solutions (e.g., Floyd & Bodur, 2006).

Although there are some guidelines about what needs to be included in a high-quality case study (this will be discussed in detail in the next section), I have used cases that have included very simple examples such as the following:

It is Maria's first day of school and her students walk into the classroom yelling, laughing, pushing each other, and Maria can't get anyone's attention. By the end of class, all she had accomplished was to get students in their seats, take attendance, and hand out textbooks. Students lined up at the door before the bell despite her asking them to stay in their seats, and when the bell rang, they rushed into the hallway.

The discussion would focus on what Maria could have done differently, as well as what she can do proactively to ensure that things are not as chaotic tomorrow. I found that even a brief paragraph that presented a dilemma or complex classroom situation could lead to an interesting and informative discussion where there was high student participation and a lot of shared problem-solving. And, as the facilitator, I could make sure that students focus on/are made aware of best practices and research-based strategies through the questions that I ask.

My dissertation study (Meyer, Astor, & Behre, 2002) focused on teachers' reasoning about intervening in a hypothetical physical fight between students in different school locations (e.g., the classroom vs. the hallway vs. the parking lot). I found that many teachers had not been informed of, or had not discussed, the safety policies of their schools and many were caught off guard if they had to deal with a physical altercation between students. Presenting a scenario *before* teachers encounter violence/fights/bullying in schools is a great way to have them proactively problem-solve what to ask and what to do. The following is an example I've used with teacher education students:

Mike Washington is a new history teacher at Woodlawn High School. He experienced a few minor discipline problems in his classes for the first few days, and was pleasantly surprised that he hadn't dealt with anything



Heather M. Reynolds

more serious. When he was hired, he was told that the school had a zero tolerance approach to violence, and that students were expelled immediately for fighting. This was the only information he was provided related to student discipline/fighting, besides a faculty handbook that had very little information on safety procedures.

During the second week of school, Mike was on lunch duty and was patrolling the hallways around the cafeteria. He heard a scream and turned a corner to find two female students involved in a physical fight. He looked around and couldn't see any other teachers or staff to help him. He verbally commanded the girls to stop fighting, but they wouldn't stop. A girl who was standing next to the fighting students, told him to "mind your own damn business." He stepped in to physically break up the fight and one of the girls screamed, "Get your hands off me!" She turned and swung at Mike, hitting him in the face, and knocking him back. This girl then went back to attacking the other girl again.

Mike winced in pain for what seemed like several minutes before the assistant principal came running with several hall monitors, and pulled the girls apart. Rather than being thanked for his efforts to keep the girls from hurting each other, the assistant principal yelled at him while he was escorting the girls to his office. "What were you thinking? You never lay a hand on a student." Mike was exasperated. He had what would surely be a black eye tomorrow and he had gotten in trouble with his administration for trying to keep students safe.

When used with teacher education students, this case tends to generate a conversation about personal experiences with regard to school violence and safety, the advantages and disadvantages of different strategies, and often results in them seeking out information from their administration if they were new to the school and didn't know the existing policies. And, as the facilitator, I am able to focus the conversation/discussion on problem analysis and possible solutions.

Writing Case Studies

There are specific recommendations for the key components of high-quality case studies. Case studies should address a "real-life," relevant issue or situation that promotes critical and analytical thought (e.g., Davis, Peters, & Cellucci, 2014; McFarlane, 2015; Yadav et al., 2007). Cases should be complex and engaging, without being too long or detailed (e.g., Davis, Peters, & Cellucci, 2014). Cases should be structured to foster collaborative problem-solving, including brainstorming and discussion (e.g., McFarlane, 2015). Cases need to be open-ended enough to promote several different interpretations of the case by the students (e.g., Heitzmann, 2008; Wasserman, 1994). More specifically, there should be no clear answer so that students need to struggle with some ambiguity (e.g., Zhao, 1996). Finally, it is important to create empathy for the different characters presented in the case study, regardless of their perspective, to assure that there is no "easy" or "right" answer (e.g., McFarlane, 2015).

Facilitating Case Study Discussions

The key to a meaningful and enlightening case study discussion is the questions used to focus the discussion. Students can read a case study and share their own thoughts and ideas, but structured discussion questions (posed to individuals or groups) help to focus the discussion in order to promote the best outcomes. To begin a fruitful discussion, students and the instructor need to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. Therefore, the instructor/teacher must create a respectful and safe environment where students can struggle with ambiguity, assumptions and complex issues (Wasserman, 1994). Part of establishing this safe environment is letting students know that there will be multiple perspectives and alternatives considered, and that there may be multiple solutions to the scenario presented. Focused, probing questions are critical for a high-quality case study discussion. Questions should focus on encouraging students to share their own responses and ideas in a collaborative environment, challenging assumptions, stereotypes or inaccuracies, and linking responses/practices to the professional literature (e.g., Heitzman, 2008; McFarlane, 2015; Richman, 2015).

Writing High-Quality Discussion Questions

When I write cases, my discussion questions generally adhere to the following format (based on the work of Heitzmann, 2008; Wasserman, 1994; and others). I tend to begin the discussion by asking my students to identify the key issue(s)/problem(s) in the case. As a follow up, I ask students to define the problem/issue from the perspective of the different key characters in the case study. If you go back to my school violence example earlier, I would ask students to identify the perspective of Mike the teacher, the perspective of the students, and the perspective of the assistant principal. This allows the discussion to begin with the identification and consideration of multiple perspectives. I then ask students to consider the assumptions, stereotypes or generalizations that exist in the case (e.g., does one person in the case hold assumptions that are not evidence-based?). I then encourage students to think about both immediate and

long-term solutions. What is the best way to resolve this situation and what are some long-term strategies for addressing this issue? Then, in order to pull the discussion back to best practices (and evidence-based research), I ask students to think about the theory and research they've been reading and how these relate to the case. I always create or use cases that are directly tied to the readings in the course. And finally, I ask students to think about what could have been done proactively to avoid the primary issue/problem that is presented in the case study.

The following are some responses from SUNY Empire State College teacher education students when asked about the utility of using cases in their coursework (Reynolds & Wagle, 2018).

- *"Cases were helpful in thinking about and/or problem-solving in my own [classroom] experience."*
- *"[The discussion] was very helpful because there are situations similar to the case study and sometimes it is hard to think of an effective way to succeed. By listening to the different strategies and techniques of how to approach a situation like this was very helpful."*
- *"This scenario was a very useful vehicle to allow our group to explore different aspects of this issue."*
- *"This case study was helpful for my [classroom] experience as I have had collaborative learning activities in my lessons that I would like to have been more effective. It helps to see the details and get you to think about the situations in different contexts. The discussion with my classmates is useful to allow feedback from others who provide their personal experiences in similar roles."*

Case Studies as a Way to Discuss Controversial Issues

The current political climate has brought new challenges for teachers at the K-12 level and in higher education (e.g., Pappano, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). This is particularly true for teachers of government, civics and social studies, although politics appear to be infiltrating many different courses and subject areas. Nearly 30 percent of high school

teachers have reported an increase in students “making derogatory remarks about other groups during class discussions,” and over half of the high school teachers surveyed reported that students were experiencing higher levels of “stress and anxiety” after the 2016 election (Rogers et al., 2017, pp. V-VI). An article in *The New York Times* highlighted the challenges higher education faculty have faced in the past year with increased levels of disagreement, hostility and conflict in courses, particularly during class discussions (Pappano, 2017).

Several studies have noted that most faculty (both K-12 and higher education) have very little training or formal preparation for dealing with controversy in the classroom, and the associated responses of students (e.g., Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; Hughes, Huston, & Stein, 2010). Case studies were identified as a positive tool for preparing faculty for “difficult” classroom moments, defined as “when the emotions of students and/or faculty escalate to a level that threatens teaching and learning (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 7). These moments are usually prompted by a statement or comment related to a sensitive issue. A case I am familiar with from my own contact with schools is a student chanting, “Build a wall” during a conversation in a social studies class about immigration. A teacher’s reaction to these comments, particularly if the comment is ignored, sends a very powerful message to all students (e.g., Fournier-Sylvester, 2013; Hughes et al., 2010). Are teachers prepared to respond to this? How would you respond if this happened in your classroom?

Teacher education programs, generally, do not prepare teachers to deal with these kinds of specific situations. Now, more than ever, preparation, reflection and thoughtfulness surrounding controversial issues is critical. Hughes, Huston and Stein (2010) found that teachers who participated in a professional development opportunity involving well-structured “difficult moments” case studies and resulting discussions had a significant, positive impact on teachers’ confidence, classroom policies, teaching approaches and inclusiveness. And clearly, more strategies for how to discuss controversial issues in classrooms would help higher education faculty.

Applications to Online Teaching and Learning

Given that we are a college where many courses are fully online, are best practices for case studies different in an online learning environment? Research that has looked at the effectiveness of using either written or multimedia case studies in online courses has revealed a variety of positive and encouraging outcomes. Richman (2015) found that using high-quality cases in online courses 1) increased student depth of knowledge, 2) promoted a higher level of understanding, and 3) increased student engagement. In an online environment, there is added flexibility of how to utilize case studies. Cases can be the basis for online discussion forums where students respond to a set of questions in a whole group discussion. Cases can also be utilized as a prompt for a written analysis where students would work individually. Or, cases can be assigned to small groups of students who would work collaboratively through the online environment to analyze the case and share their outcomes with the larger group.

In some areas of study (e.g., nursing, medical fields), virtual interactive case studies are a highly effective way to prepare students for careers such as nursing or other professions with a need for strong clinical decision-making skills. A study by Burke (2017) found that the addition of virtual patient cases to the curriculum in a nursing program improved students’ decision-making and diagnostic reasoning skills.

*“Now, more than ever,
preparation, reflection and
thoughtfulness surrounding
controversial issues is critical.”*

Video case studies have been used both in face-to-face and online learning environments. For teacher education (and other fields), video cases can provide a valuable opportunity to analyze common situations, interactions or practices in a collaborative peer environment where the instructor can help to focus the

conversation on key points of analysis (e.g., Osmanoglu, Koc, & Isiksal, 2013). In online environments, video can provide a more interactive and engaging method for students to gain key information and analytic skills when compared to a written case. One study (Gavani, Hazrati, & Ghojzadeh, 2015) found that although there was no significant difference in critical or clinical reasoning skills when the student outcomes for written and video case studies were compared, students preferred video case studies over written case studies in terms of both time management and level of interaction. Although again, it is really important to note that regardless of the format, the quality and the nature of the discussion are critical to the effectiveness of a video, online and/or written case study analysis. Given the level of comfort that our current K-12 students show with technology, one would think that the preference for video (over written cases) would continue to grow.

Conclusions

The use of case studies in classrooms as a teaching practice has the potential to increase our students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills and their ability to grapple with ambiguous or confusing situations. In addition, high-quality case studies can help our students to identify and challenge their assumptions and stereotypes about certain groups and think through complex, controversial issues. Research demonstrates that cases in a variety of formats (e.g., written, video, multimedia) can have positive outcomes on student critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This article has included the key “best practices” for writing and using case studies in your courses that are critical to meaningful short- and long-term positive student outcomes. If we can prepare our students for situations and problems they encounter in the real world through hypothetical, realistic case studies, we are helping our students to make that crucial link between theory and practice, and better preparing them for life outside the higher education classroom.

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Notes From Ukraine, 2017

Victoria Vernon, Manhattan

Is Ukraine safe for travelers? What has changed since my last trip home 12 years ago? How are my friends and family surviving the prolonged economic transition, bloody revolutions and the violent confrontations with Russia? Also, is the old borscht and vareniki diner still downtown near the tanks and cannons displayed by the Museum of History? These questions were on my mind on the way to Kharkov, my hometown, a place where I spent the first two joyful decades of my life. Kharkov is famous for several things other than my birth: It houses the largest city square and the largest indoor-outdoor market in Europe. The latter is the size of an enormous and crowded Walmart, with essentially similar stuff for sale. In the more distant past, the city was a proud industrial production hub of the USSR; its scientists contributed to the design of the first Soviet atomic bomb. More recently, Ukraine had been on the news a lot, portrayed at times as a torn up battlefield, so I was prepared to face the worst.

Upon my arrival, Kharkov looks amazingly neat and more beautiful than ever. Renovated public places – squares, streets and parks – are shiny clean. A new pedestrian bridge, several new monuments, a long list of art exhibits and entertainment events in the local paper – everything points out that normal life has resumed. Burgeoning small businesses are busy with customers – shops, cafes, Ukrainian food chain diners, schools offering English lessons, medical offices advertising any kind of diagnostics your ailing soul desires, hair salons, kiosks, watch repairs, tour agencies and drug stores selling herbal and conventional medicine. Several new orthodox cathedrals have been built over the last few years; their golden domes adorn the city landscape. Fast subway lines have expanded to connect more distant residential suburbs to the business center, bringing the city closer together and giving its central area a small-town feel. I rented a place downtown via Airbnb, made

calls with WhatsApp, and used Uber to get around – the universal language of apps is spoken all over the world.

On the outskirts of the city, a newly built giant Feldman Ecopark invites visitors for a full day of entertainment including beautiful picnic spots in the woods, a large state-of-the-art zoo with 2,000 exotic animals, an education and therapy center for children, stables with horses, a fishing pond, and exhibits of art and antique cars. The park is open all year round, it does not charge admission, and free busses run daily from downtown. The park is built and maintained as a charity project of a foundation set up by a generous local millionaire. Yes, capitalism has its good sides, too.

All street signs are no longer in Russian, but in Ukrainian and English. Since 2014, Ukraine has embarked on a campaign to replace street names of Soviet revolutionaries with Ukrainian public figures. Even the former neutral-sounding “Revolution Street” received a new name, “Kulikov’s Descent,” after someone obscure. Not only streets, but districts, villages and towns have been renamed all over the country. The economist in me should point out that changing names and addresses is an expensive undertaking, as it requires massive reprinting of addresses and updating of all documents. I read somewhere that historians had been scrambling to find namesakes of Felix Dzerzhinsky and other Soviet heroes, digging into legacies of their brothers, children and unrelated people with similar last names in hopes of finding a virtuous person and rename places using the same last names. I wondered for a second if General Robert E. Lee had a brother, also an army general, but on the good side of history. Let me guess, the namesake strategy probably won’t work.

Monuments to Vladimir Lenin and other Soviet heroes have been torn down all over the country, often informally by small groups of nationalists. Thousands of mosaics, sculptures and Soviet-themed paintings have been



Victoria Vernon with her economics professor, Tamara Merkulova, chair of the Department of Economic Cybernetics at Kharkov State University.

destroyed. Such was the fate of a large and prominent figure of Lenin pointing forward in the central square of Kharkov, a monument that for many years was an iconic symbol of the city placed in every picture and shown to every visitor. It was taken down without a vote, thus depriving the next generation of students from a nearby university of a convenient meeting spot “under Lenin.” Not everyone is enthusiastic about demolishing monuments; after all, they are part of history. Post-Soviet countries could approach the issue creatively and set up cemeteries of old communist statues and signs, or outdoor museums of Soviet art.

A short distance from the now empty monument space on the central square, Kharkov State University conjured up three new bust sculptures to Nobel Prize winners whose names are closely or remotely associated with the university: Ilya Mechnikov (medicine), Simon Kuznets (economics), and Lev Landau (physics). The economist in this group was a pre-revolution student of a high school where some university professors

taught; that's his affiliation with my alma mater. Technically, I can also join this group. All I need to do is to win a Nobel Prize.

Ukraine's currency, *hryvna*, has lost a lot of value in dollar terms compared to a few years ago. The average monthly salary of a Ukrainian worker is under \$200 at the current exchange rate, down from over \$400 only a few years ago. No wonder Ukrainians are reserved rather than excited about the newly allowed no-visa travel to EU countries; most people won't be able to afford it. A more expensive dollar means small manufacturing firms and produce farms may not be able to afford foreign components, and the public may not be able to afford imported goods such as electronics. The devaluation benefits oligarchs, exporters of metallurgy and low-processed food, which use local resources and are not dependent on foreign inputs. Their dollar earnings from exports can buy a lot of local currency units, meaning they can afford to acquire disproportionately more assets, such as land and factories, and get even richer because payments to workers are low. Coincidentally, the new democratically elected president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, is a billionaire who owns a chocolate and candy manufacturing empire, and exports a lot of his ROSHEN brand candies. (He named the brand after himself: PoROSHENko.)

Cosmopolitan and having an educated population, Kharkov tends to stay away from the heat of revolutions, avoids violence and is skeptical of extreme swings and radical views. Revolutions occur in Ukraine about every decade. They start out as protest movements and mass demonstrations, spread to several cities, and end with a change of government. The first revolution of 1991 was a movement in support of independence from the Soviet Union and Russian hegemony. In Ukraine, the word "independence" still implies independence from Russia.

The second revolt, the "Orange Revolution" of 2004, was a massive peaceful protest against corrupt regimes of the first two presidents and against vote manipulation during the third presidential election. Mass protests overturned the election results and bestowed victory on the marginally more popular candidate. The new president later became known as a guy who survived a poisoning attack that disfigured

his face; he left no notable legacy of reforms or positive changes. His then rival, rejected by the Orange Revolution, won the election five years later, and eventually made history as one of the most corrupt Ukrainian leaders who embezzled millions, including almost certainly millions from foreign aid.

The most recent crisis of Maidan (2014) was fueled by the corruption of President Viktor Yanukovich and by a genuine disagreement among the country's population as to who Ukraine's best friend should be, Russia or the West. Russia offered to lend a small amount of a few billion dollars plus provide cheap gas, while the EU offered a choice to unfriend Russia and get a larger loan of a few hundred billion dollars in exchange, a dream of EU membership, but no gas. Both offers were pretty good, making for a hard choice. Ideally, you want to take both and keep the money, but the EU and Russia demanded a commitment, saying one can't marry both. Thus, the country split into pro-West and pro-Russia camps. A national referendum could have been helpful and wise at that point. Instead, the debate degenerated into name-calling and street fights. The choice about a historic development path came down to a contest of which side had louder propaganda and greener wallets. The two-month standoff in Kiev was financed by moneyed interests: unemployed people were paid to participate; food deliveries were organized; and weapons were brought into the *maidan* (Ukrainian for "square"), covered up in ambulance vehicles to avoid police checks. Various interest groups paid media for "information inflows," or an assortment of fabricated fake news against specific political candidates in order to influence the new election.

Information is becoming a weapon of mass distraction all over the world. In contrast to the rules of the game in the U.S., meddling in elections using the media as a weapon is not seen as anything unusual or criminal in Ukraine and Russia; it is largely part of a rough, competitive democratic process where individual voters must choose what they believe and what they don't. The Russians – at least the ones I talked to – are flattered to hear their country mentioned in the U.S. news daily in this context; they are thrilled to be noticed and surprised to be regarded as important

participants in the U.S. elections. They are just not at all sure they deserve that much attention, modest as they are by nature.

To the south of the Kharkov region – almost in a different world – is a blue-collar area of Donbass, where a slow civil war has been an endless drain on resources for the years since the Maidan revolution. The civil war started out as an internal conflict between radicalized Ukrainian "nationalists" and pro-Russia "separatists." The nationalists were groups of young men from western and central Ukraine who came to attack the pro-Russian locals, and to crush their windows with baseball bats to teach them a lesson. The locals continued anti-nationalist rallies; more fights broke out, so the Ukrainian government sent tanks and heavy weapons to the area, and even killed protesters. Russia reacted; it entered the conflict to support the predominantly Russian population in the area. Who is fighting now? On the pro-Russian side, there is a mixed group of true believers who want Donbass to split from Ukraine, plus hired paid soldiers sent by Russia. On the Ukrainian side, there is a mix of Ukrainian volunteers: extremists, released prisoners, and contracted soldiers. At one point, Ukraine attempted a mobilization of men up to age 55 on top of already existing two-year conscription, but mobilization was abandoned as unpopular and hard to enforce. I heard stories that fighters from opposing sides now call each other to let "the enemy" know where to shoot so no one gets hurt; after all, they are paid workers, and everyone wants to stay alive no matter what governments order them to do.

The streets of Kharkov seemed quieter in 2017 than I remember them in the 1990s. I wondered why. Students of several large universities were away for the summer, perhaps. People no longer like other humans; they are home with their smartphones and computers, perhaps. Or the general demographic trends are catching up with my hometown: the latest population count for Ukraine is 42.7 million, down from 52.2 million in 1993. Migration and low birth rates are to blame. Another explanation is a marked decline in the number of visitors from Russia. Thanks to new travel restriction imposed by Ukraine, Russian passport holders are asked to present an invitation from a Ukrainian citizen or business,

a rather ridiculous rule that is selectively enforced for men ages 18 to 55. A similarly annoying visa and invitation travel restriction by Russia for U.S. citizens was the reason why I chose not to visit my second historical motherland (Russia) on this trip.

In another spectacular attempt to shoot itself in the foot, Ukraine eliminated all direct trains and flights to Russia. Note that the two countries used to be one: 20 percent of the Ukrainian population is Russian; family members live on both sides of the border. Back in the time of the USSR and for years since its breakup, economic ties between Ukraine and Russia were strong and production factories in Ukraine required Russian components. The Walmart-size outdoor market in Kharkov attracted commerce from many neighboring countries, especially Russia. As Ukraine severed ties with its main trading partner, its own economy became less industrial and more agrarian, more primitive and less diversified. While production ties may take years to rebuild, some immediate changes can be made to boost the economy. Tourism to and from Russia should be encouraged by all means as an easy way to earn revenue for a country with an average annual per capita income of \$8,200, which is half that of Russia's or Mexico's. Russia imposed no similar travel barriers for Ukrainian citizens. You can still go visit Crimea, as long as you are willing to wait in a long passport check line at the new Tijuana-like border crossing.

The new normal in my motherland includes a large dose of anti-Russian propaganda. Russia is touted as an occupier, supporter of bandits-separatists in Donbass, and an authoritarian state with no freedom of speech. To disavow further its eastern Big Brother, Ukraine blocked access to two popular Russian-run social media sites – an interesting move for a country concerned with preserving freedom of speech.

To be fair, propaganda is heavy on both sides of the border. In Russia, media tells horror stories about Ukrainian bandits-nationalists in Donbass, and about discrimination against Russians who are being oppressed and not allowed to speak their native language. Language discrimination is an exaggeration: I saw and heard no evidence of it. Kharkov has always been a Russian-speaking city, although

most of the population is bilingual, and the preference for using Russian has not changed despite universal conversion of grade schools and universities to Ukrainian, and introduction of language testing as a prerequisite for state jobs. In schools, particularly in universities with foreign students, teachers find informal ways to offer their classes in Russian.

Despite its effort to condemn oppression of compatriots, Russia never welcomed migrants or refugees from Ukraine. In its own effort to restrict the inflow of undocumented guest workers from Tajikistan and Moldova, Russia recently introduced residence-based work permits that restrict job searching to a geographical area, making it harder for potential immigrants and refugees to settle down.

The West sees Russia as an aggressor for its annexation of Crimea and military operations in eastern Ukraine. The U.S. has not recognized the results of the Crimean referendum; the official U.S. maps still mark Crimea as Ukrainian territory under temporary Russian occupation. Crimea residents, in turn, are overall content with their choice of an occupier – their earnings and pensions have increased, and infrastructure is improving. The West imposed a series of sanctions against Russian officials and restricted trade with Russia. The officials probably deserve the travel bans and asset freezes. However, the low-income population is starting to feel a shortage of essential medicines because active ingredients are no longer imported.

Russia is still under sanctions, first for the Crimea annexation, and most recently for supporting the regime in Syria. In the meantime, Ukraine is being showered with IMF (International Monetary Fund) and EU (European Union) financial aid. Some of the conditions of the loans require stronger anti-corruption institutions. Ukraine is yet to build a better legal system, improve protection of property rights, strengthen contract enforcement and create independent courts. Stronger rule of law will ensure that this massive foreign aid is used to finance public services, and none of it is pocketed by local oligarchs and foreign consultants like Paul Manafort.

What I find remarkable is the fact that all through the conflict with Ukraine and the West, Russia has been selling gas to Europe and to Ukraine using pipelines that go through Ukraine. Obviously, big money interests that control hydrocarbon trade on all sides want nothing to do with politics. They care about profits.

The profit motive underlies growth in international business in at least three other industries. Vacations on the Black Sea are popular among foreign tourists for being affordable. A less well-known tourist attraction of Ukraine – believe it or not – is Chernobyl, the home of the worst in history nuclear disaster of 1986. Back then, an entire city in “The Zone” was abandoned within hours – personal possessions left behind, and left untouched for decades. Thirty-plus years later, guided tours take visitors along a radiation-safe path through the apocalyptic reminder of Soviet life, a still life of streets with phone booths, monuments to communist leaders, slogans on buildings, workers' apartments, and bumper cars frozen in mid-motion, all taken over by time and nature. In addition, Ukraine is becoming an attractive destination for medical tourists from the U.S. and Western Europe seeking dental procedures, in vitro fertilization treatments, and laser eye and cosmetic surgery. On a less proud note, I noticed yet another way Ukrainian private sector encourages international business: There are large subway ads in my hometown inviting females under age 35 to join matching sites to find mail-order husbands abroad.

Among other things I learned from this trip was a bunch of serendipitous discoveries. As one example, I met 19-year-old girls who were Mormon missionaries from Utah spending their gap year in Ukraine. They are sent to random countries by a lottery, covering their own expenses, with a promise not to call their parents more than once a month. On weekends, their large group gathers in one place to play American football. On other days, they learn Russian and offer English lessons to Ukrainian youth. They also teach Ukrainians to sing American folk songs including “Country Roads.” Now in the U.S., every time I hear this song, Ukraine comes to mind. “Country roads, take me home, to the place I belong!”

Going to College is *Not* Like Going to The Home Depot

Janet Kaplan-Bucciarelli, The Threshold Strategist¹

Many in higher education and industry have lamented the prevalence of low college completion rates. When students don't graduate, it's bad for the college and the economy. And it's not good for social cohesion when millions of people are left behind while those with degrees see their prospects improve. But what effect might non-completion have on the *students*, themselves? What does college mean to *them*, and so what would be lost if they drop or stop out? Few researchers have explored the situation from the learners' perspective. As a former adult education instructor, I wanted to know more about the millions of low-income, first-generation adults who aspire to college. I wondered how a more holistic understanding of this population might help college practitioners better prepare for, teach and support academically underprepared students on the threshold of higher education.

This curiosity led me to my dissertation research, titled, "*Can You Just Move the Curtain?": Stories of Women from the Educational Underclass at the College Door*" (Kaplan-Bucciarelli, 2018). In this article, I focus on one of the participants in my study, "Reese" (a pseudonym). Her stories, and my efforts to see and *feel* the world from her perspective, helped me understand more about the strengths and vulnerabilities of adult learners. The study gave me hope that by adjusting institutional and instructional practices, higher education insiders can help adults learn more effectively in college, begin to heal from difficult lives, complete certificates or degrees, and transform their lives. So now I am on to my next question: Do we as practitioners, and do our institutions, have the will, hope and patience to turn *toward* our students when so many of them are turning away? Our ability to respond will impact far more than degree completion rates. We each have the potential to advance social and educational justice in this country

that is increasingly divided into the college haves and have-nots (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2016).

The Interview, Part I – Childhood, School and Work

At the time of my study, Reese was a 36-year-old, white, gender-nonconforming woman with no children. She and the other nine participants in my study were enrolled in pre-college "transition" classes associated with a community college in the Northeast region of the U.S. in the fall of 2016.² As I did with all of the participants, at the start of the first interview, I asked Reese to create a timeline of her life, and include events or memories (from her school years and beyond) that influenced who she was as she prepared to enter a college classroom.

Reese started her timeline at sixth grade when she and her classmates were "involuntarily transferred to junior high" because of an elementary school renovation project. She was "unprepared" for the change and it "totally disrupted [her] school flow." At the same time, her home life was "pretty tough." She, her mom and two siblings lived in low-income housing, and they did not get along. When her brother started to drink alcohol and use drugs, everything "got exponentially worse." He was violent and sometimes kicked holes in the door to her room. Sometimes Reese went to her aunt's apartment to do homework, but when she was 14, her aunt died, and from then on, when school got out, Reese would drop her things off at home, and go right out again. "Anywhere but home," she said.

At school, Reese was bullied for being "smart," and over time, she skipped more and more classes. In the middle of 10th grade, she was told by a school administrator that she was so far behind that she might as well drop out. As she recounted her story, Reese quietly wiped away tears and explained: "I'm a really smart person, and it wasn't that I couldn't do



Janet Kaplan-Bucciarelli

the work or didn't want to, but I got to this place where I didn't care about it. Like, the system wasn't caring about me and I didn't care about it." Reese started staying at Denny's (a restaurant that was open all night) and often slept at the apartment of one of the waitresses who opened her place to troubled, drug-free teens. At some point, Reese just stopped going to school altogether.

At around age 20, without preparing in any way, she took and passed the GED test. Finding work never seemed to present much of a problem. Reese had several retail jobs in a mall, was a manager at McDonald's, assembled complex devices at a manufacturing plant, and then, for 10 years, managed the set up and remodeling of retail stores for a large chain. At each job, Reese was "scooped up," promoted and given more responsibility because, as she put it, "I'm a pretty great catch! Whatever I have tried to do, I've been good at it. Construction? Got you! I just learn it. I'm pretty smart. I'll figure this shit out." The trouble was that most of the jobs never paid much, and often she had two or three at a time.

With a college degree, Reese knew she would have more options for more interesting, safer and better-paid work. Plus, she respected college graduates more than people without degrees. Reese said graduates were “really well-spoken ... able to get their ideas out to other people,” but people who hadn’t been to college were “just kind of doing whatever with their time.” She lived in an area where there were many colleges and college-educated people, and as a result, Reese was often assumed to be a student or graduate. This frustrated her because while she did not want to lie to people, she also did not enjoy revealing her lack of educational attainment. Seeking better job prospects, as well as more respect for herself and from others, at age 36, Reese registered for the free transition to college and careers class at the community college.

The Interview, Part II – Interests and Experiential Knowledge

Too often in the U.S., a lack of educational attainment is associated with a lack of learning and knowledge. As Rose (2012) put it, “the cognitive content of occupations is given short shrift” (p. 137). By requiring a college credential, employers regularly communicate their belief that experiential learning and knowledge is not enough. And students often carry this same assumption when they enter college. They tend to undervalue what they have learned outside of school. Because of this, some scholars who work with returning adults claim that “the most significant role of the instructor is to convey her or his belief that the student’s learning from experience has value” (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010, p. 382). This sort of recognition of an academic newcomer’s knowledge, intelligence and learning capacity – by an academic insider – has the “potential to validate learning and, at times, transform the student’s view of herself as a learner” (p. 382). In the short time I had with my study participants, I wanted to acknowledge them (and help them acknowledge themselves) as learners and thinkers. One way I did this was by inviting them to talk about their interests and the learning they had done *outside of* academic settings.

I asked Reese, for example, if she could tell me about her interests or about interesting conversations she’d had in the past. She told me about how she learned from other people, like her girlfriend, Maggie (a pseudonym), who worked with developmentally disabled kids and adults. Reese said that Maggie was “super, super fascinated by autism and all things that go along with that,” and that they talked about “different ways of being in the world. ... Like a neurotypical person.” When I admitted that I had never heard the term “neurotypical,” Reese explained,

A neurotypical person – like, somebody ... who doesn’t have an autism diagnosis. I mean, um, so you and I could interpret body language and things in an emotional way that perhaps someone on the autism spectrum can’t. And so, they have to ... they have to actually use their intellect and intelligence to try to discern what people are thinking and feeling. ... So, conversations like that, are really interesting to me.

Reese’s intellectual curiosity was not limited to people, development or communication, however. She pointed to the terrarium across her living room from where we sat, and added, “I’ve always loved animals ... and I love plants.” Then, she explained how she had seen on Craigslist that someone was trying to find a home for some tree frogs. Reese said the photos “really sparked” her interest, and so she “just sort of set about looking up, like, what to do.” She “went on tons of websites ... kept watching videos on, like, people building different vivariums. ...” When I admitted that I had never heard the word “vivarium,” Reese explained the concept like a seasoned educator:

So, I knew what an *aquarium* was because I was keeping fish at that time. So, *that’s* an aquarium. (She pointed to one across the room.) And a *terrarium* is where you have dirt and plants. And then I learned when you put a live animal in it, it is now called a *vivarium*. And I thought, “That’s so freaking cool!” I’m like, “I want a vivarium!”

Through her research, Reese found out about “a huge convention for people who like frogs and reptiles,” and she made decisions about six months in advance about what she needed

to buy. Then, when the time came, she went to the convention, bought her supplies, and, over time, figured out the best way to design and build her vivarium – and keep her frogs (named Houdini and Snoop Frog) from escaping. About her out-of-school learning, Reese said, “I was realizing that if I’m interested in something and I want to know about it, I can learn it and be successful at it. People see this [vivarium] and say, ‘Oh my God! It’s beautiful! ... How’d you learn how to do that?’ And I’m like, ‘I don’t know, I just did it. I just learned. I just researched it.’”

Reese made her learning sound fun, natural and easy, and, like many of the other participants I interviewed, she smiled and spoke in a confident tone as she described her experiential learning. After her joyful explanations about “neurotypical” people and “vivariums,” however, I noticed a palpable change in the feeling of our conversation when I moved us on to explore her experiences in the transition class and her thoughts about going on to college.

The Interview, Part III – Thoughts About Self and About College

In the second half of the interview that day, I asked Reese about her overall feeling about the transition course, she said she had discovered that she was not “as far off from being able to be a successful college student” as she had thought. Other participants echoed this perspective. About the math component of the class, however, she (and several other participants) said there were concepts she did not understand, and she did not have enough time to learn the material before the teacher moved on. While her math skills had improved somewhat, the experience had been quite demoralizing for her. But there were two other experiences, in particular, that made Reese truly question her competence as a student. The first was an essay her teacher had assigned; the second was the course registration process itself.

About the essay, Reese explained that the topic her teacher assigned did not make sense to her. She said,

We were supposed to write about an obstacle that we’ve overcome. And the way I was thinking about obstacles,

I just was like, you know what? To me ... running into an obstacle suggests that I was on a path and I'm walking, and then a boulder fell into my path, right? But that's not how I've been living my life! Like, I walk through huge fields, right? Because I'm not on a specific path. Boulders are everywhere. I just freakin' walk around them, so they're not really "obstacles." They're just, sort of, things that are there. So, I don't understand. I don't even know how to pick out an obstacle because I haven't had a goal, right?

Eventually, Reese asked her girlfriend for help on the paper, and that made a big difference. But Reese was extremely frustrated and seemed disappointed with herself when she finished telling me this story. She said, "So, I wrote my obstacle paper ... but I couldn't come up with it on my own. ..." For much of her life, Reese had not had people on whom she could depend, and she prided herself on her ability to do things *on her own*. She did not like other people's judgments about her and other people's deadlines for her. Perhaps most importantly, however, her life had taught her that other people were unreliable. To depend on someone else was to be weak and to put herself at risk. Although her teacher likely saw the assignment as simply an academic challenge, from Reese's perspective, it was a threat to her strength and autonomy. As Reese put it, "*Not-knowing* makes me feel *not-competent*."

Reese described another experience of "not-knowing" in school, and that one, coming at the very end of the transition course, left her with the feeling that college probably was not the right place for her – at least not yet. She explained that their transition teachers had supported her and her classmates when they first put in their college applications, "But as soon as the college got hold of it, like, things just started happening." She described going to register for her first semester of classes and "not-knowing" where any of the offices were or how she was supposed to choose classes. She said, "I walk into these offices. Like, there's Admissions, Financial Aid, Student Records, all these things. And I'm just like, 'Whooooo does what?'" She was sent from one office to

the next, and handed paperwork she did not understand. "But it's like I'm expected to know this and I don't know it ..." she told me.

Just at the moment Reese realized she truly needed help from someone else – an advisor, perhaps – she was told she would not be assigned one until the middle of her first semester. Reflecting critically on her situation, Reese said, "I think people need to have somebody that they can go to and figure this out, like, right away. Like, from the moment they walk in because I'm ... I'm still so intimidated." As I listened to Reese, I had the sense that she had just provided me with a great gift in the form of a *disorienting dilemma*, something Mezirow defined as a challenge or problem a person cannot understand or solve with her established frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Reese had seemed to me like a great candidate for college; she had the ability to think analytically, critically and creatively, and she enjoyed expressing her opinions and listening to those of others. She was curious and she knew how to learn. Despite all of this, however, she stalled at the college door.

"Not-knowing *makes me*
feel not-competent."

The Interview, Part IV – Educating the Researcher

After she finished telling her registration story, I was quiet for a few moments. Reese had described taking on and succeeding with numerous challenges: surviving an unstable and unsafe home environment, securing and learning new jobs, navigating new relationships, and undertaking various home renovation and other construction projects. In the transition class, however, she had not perceived math, writing and registration as *challenges*; rather, they were *threats* to her self-concept. And living the life she had lived, one can understand why Reese would want, and need, to avoid threats. But how can one be a *student* – in a college setting – if one personalizes "not-knowing" and associates

"not-knowing" with being "not-competent"? How can one be a successful *student* if one does not first see oneself as a *learner*?

In the interchange below, I communicated to Reese my own "not-knowing" and my desire to understand her reaction to the registration experience, particularly in light of the other stories she had told about her experiential learning. What Reese communicated to me led to a sort of *perspective transformation* (another Mezirow [2000] term) on my part. I wonder if the issues she illuminates here will surprise other higher education practitioners as much as they surprised me.

Janet: The reason why – one thing I find interesting about that is because – I keep picturing you, like, in The Home Depot, let's say.

Reese: (Laughs.)

Janet: And finding your way around. "I need nails that look like this," and then there's something about it being *school*, it being an *academic* place that feels like it's harder to navigate.

Reese: Totally.

Janet: Like it's a completely different situation.

Reese: It's not nails and screws. It's not concrete things that fit into one another. ... It's, like, it's so malleable. It's almost all intellectual and it's almost all fluid and whatever, that I can't make sense out of it. Or I have a hard time making sense out of it. [At Home Depot,] I don't have to ask the associates for things I need. I can just go and find them myself, right? But [college] is not Home Depot ... you have to talk to this person and explain what it is you need and try to make them understand!

Janet: And you don't know what you need, yet.

Reese: And maybe I don't know. I can't see all my options! Well, how am I supposed to pick that one if I don't know all my options? "Well, which class do you want to take?" "Well, I don't know!"

Janet: You don't even know what's in the store!

Reese: I have no idea 'cause I can't see it! You know? And also, that person will say, "Well, I can't help you with that. You're going to have to talk to this person about that." And I'm like, "What? What?" Or, "Well, that would be in this other window. You need to go to ..." and I'm like, "But, can you just move the curtain? So, I can see?"

After spending years doing work that was low-paid, unappreciated and beneath their abilities, the participants in my study yearned for more respect, more stability and more control over their lives. Many wanted work that was meaningful to them and that would help other people. They wanted to express themselves and to be counted as full-fledged adults. They all had been told, and they believed, that college was a solid strategy to help them move toward their goals. But like Reese, most of the participants did not know what college would really be like nor what it would require of them. Herman and Mandell (2004) wrote that, "Adult students want their learning to make them more powerful in the world" (p. 1). And Luttrell (1997) observed that "Adult education is about establishing a credible, worthy self and public identity as much as it is about gaining a diploma" (p. 126). It seems to me that these adult educators understand the "expressive aspirations" (Deterding, 2015, p. 292) of the participants in my study: that adult learners' desire for further education is about much more than economics. Going to college is symbolic of being a "worthy striver" (p. 296). But in the daily life of the college, how many instructors and others truly understand the role we are called to play in terms of orienting these newcomers to our learning culture and our expectations? Do we adequately realize how much is foreign to individuals like Reese, and how painful it can be to feel so capable in some realms, yet so incapable in *the* realm that has the power to determine one's future? Do we fully comprehend how threatening *not-knowing* might be under these circumstances?

Not all of the participants in my study were as articulate or reflective as was Reese, but like her, almost all had a history of trauma or adverse life events. Most of the participants' stories about their early lives included several of the following factors: a struggling single mother; frequent moves and changes in

schools; exposure to violence or sexual assault; a lack of adult guidance and support; the illness or death of a close family member; and a lack of economic security. Several spoke of learning disabilities (diagnosed or suspected). With this history, coupled with academic failure or non-completion (in high school or after), many of the participants indicated that they were now involved in a kind of healing process. If they had not stood up for themselves earlier in their lives, they would *now*. If they had not spoken out when something felt wrong before, they would *now*.

So, it did not work for Reese to walk into school and feel lost and incompetent when what she wanted most was more self-confidence and increased control over what had primarily been an unpredictable daily life. The last thing she and any of the participants in this study wanted was to fail again and to feel humiliated. In the end, for Reese, the risk proved too great. Although she may still do it one day, she did not enroll in college after completing the transition classes, and the registration process was one determining factor.

It both enrages and inspires me that these learners arrive at college with such hope, yet so rarely succeed. There is great pressure to go to college and get a degree, but so many barriers for lower-income adults: cost, time, work and family responsibilities, lack of child care, psychological wounding and more. There has been quite a lot of scholarly work done in the U.K. regarding educational injustice and the constrained decision-making of marginalized adults at the college door, but I found much less here in the U.S. To me, it is morally unacceptable that a society that so prizes higher education allows it to remain so unattainable for millions of citizens. I offer the following principles and recommendations to those higher education practitioners tasked with making college learning not only accessible, but inviting, comprehensible and effective for adult learners who so want to enroll and succeed.

Principles and Recommendations

These recommendations are founded on the three core principles of what I call a "threshold-responsive approach to college transition." Threshold is a term I adopted from Goto and Martin (2009) to describe

the adult learners in my study who were "on the threshold of starting a new life through education" (p. 10).

The first principle is that thresholders arrive at the college door as resilient, multidimensional individuals with significant strengths and vulnerabilities, both of which must be acknowledged and addressed. Too often, adults like Reese are understood in a very narrow way: as academically unprepared, and lacking in confidence and college knowledge. We mischaracterize aspiring students when we fail to acknowledge strengths, such as their intellectual and other interests, their capacity to learn, their experiential knowledge and their resilience. We misunderstand them if we ignore their history of trauma and adversity, the effects of which are known to influence one's ability to take risks, respond to setbacks, seek support and learn (Perry, 2006).

The second principle of a thresholder-responsive approach is that thresholders (the great majority of whom are first-generation college students) face a great cross-cultural divide when they attempt to enter the college environment. The world of higher education has a very unique worldview, language and set of expectations. If newcomers are to integrate into this foreign culture, thresholders' interactions with the college need to be both affirming and orienting – not only in the classroom or the counseling center, but in the offices of the registrar, as well.

The third principle of a thresholder-responsive approach is that learning (specifically, learning to be a student) is not a solitary task undertaken by each individual – *on her own*. It takes more than just desire and motivation for adults like those in my study to enroll in, transition to and persist in college. Becoming a college student is a relational endeavor that requires the active participation of academic insiders. Gale and Parker (2014) held that institutions must go beyond helping students learn and adapt to existing academic structures and mindsets. Colleges and practitioners must actively listen to, learn from and allow themselves to be changed by the knowledge, experiences and needs of their students.

With the recognition that every institution is different, I provide here a sample of recommendations for institutional, program

and pedagogical change, all of which have their roots in one or more of the principles just described. It is my hope that these ideas might supplement those that others have already designed and developed for their particular students and circumstances. The goal is to create a campus culture that is more safe, just, inclusive and inspiring – one where both thresholders and insiders recognize themselves as adult learners in a process of change.

Recommendation #1 – Become a trauma-informed institution

While the topic of trauma/adversity (TA) and its effect on adult learners is not a commonly addressed issue in the literature on thresholder transition, adult educators commonly report hearing stories of TA from their students (Horsman, 1998). And researchers have found that community college students experience more adverse life events than students at four-year universities (Anders, Frazier, & Shallcross, 2012). While there is nothing any institution or individual can do to directly heal much of what Reese and other participants experienced in terms of TA, institutions can take steps to ensure that their people and practices do not throw salt into the students' existing wounds. In a trauma-informed organization, everyone, from the admissions receptionist to the president, participates in trainings to develop an understanding of how students' TA experiences impact their lives and their ability to seek information, take risks, respond to problems, advocate for themselves and learn. When an approach like this is in place, "every interaction is consistent" with the goal of promoting growth (Elliott, Bjelajac, Fallot, Markoff, & Reed, 2005, p. 462), and any services or interactions are more likely to be healing than harming (S. Brown, personal communication, January 19, 2018).

Recommendation #2 – Minimize unnecessary stress to make college more doable

While the women in my study saw promise in college and associated having a credential with a more stable, less stressful life, they also anticipated that becoming a student would increase their stress levels. When Reese and I met for our second interview, for example, she had had a car accident, was spending hours dealing with her insurance company, and was in search of a new car. She was even more

stressed because she had not written the essay that was due that day for class. She explained that whenever she had to decide between taking care of her basic needs or getting her schoolwork done, there was no question about her priorities. She said, "I'm sort of hypervigilant with making sure my needs are met and that I have a roof over my head and whatever. That just comes from my history ... I just know that should something go down in life, I'm going to prioritize that and not necessarily school."

Amarillo College (AC) in Texas implemented a campuswide initiative to support students like Reese who face significant barriers to their educational participation. The college conducted a survey and asked students what was preventing them from succeeding in school (Lumina Foundation, 2018). AC's president said he expected "academic answers" (p. 12), but what he heard from students had nothing to do with academics and everything to do with child care, health care, utility payments and the like. In response, AC launched its "No Excuses Poverty Initiative," making connections with local social services agencies, and setting up a one-stop advocacy and resource center on campus. There is a food pantry, a mentoring program, a legal clinic and a counseling service all in one office. Struggling students can get gas cards or bus passes if they are short on money and cannot get to school temporarily. They can get a bag of groceries if they do not have enough money to shop one week. Scholarships (especially for adults with children or other caretaking responsibilities) are available, as is assistance with the cost of textbooks and tuition. This kind of initiative communicates to students, as well as everyone who works at the institution, that the college wants each student to succeed, and that it will do whatever it can to make that possible. AC claims its initiative has contributed to a dramatic increase in persistence and completion rates. Each college would need to conduct its own study to determine the needs of its particular students, but AC provides a promising model of how to reduce stress and present the college as a supportive partner for students struggling to balance life and school. Such an approach might really help someone like Reese.

Recommendation #3 – Foster authentic connections between thresholders and academic insiders

One major finding of my study was that the participants were making decisions about college without having a thorough understanding about what college entails. The majority of the women only had very general ideas about college, namely that it would require a lot of time and a lot of work. Reese's perspective, illustrated in our Home Depot interchange, communicated that she really was not clear about what college was for. She and some of the other participants also had idealized images of college students, believing, for instance, that good students *always* did their homework on time or that *real* students were more "motivated," "committed" and "dedicated" than the participants perceived themselves to be. As first-generation students, thresholders would benefit from opportunities to learn about college through authentic relationships with peer mentors – people like them who are just further along in the academic process.

"This kind of initiative communicates to students, as well as everyone who works at the institution, that the college wants each student to succeed, and that it will do whatever it can to make that possible."

I imagine pairs talking with each other about their various writing assignments, for example. How encouraging would it be for the thresholder to hear that her peer mentor struggled to come up with a thesis statement, too? Or that the peer mentor (from a similar socioeconomic or other) background was not only surviving college, but loving a class? The mentor could show the thresholder how she registered, what classes she chose and why, thereby modeling skills and understandings the thresholder needed to develop.

Another idea for a way to show thresholders that college people are more like them than they might imagine is to invite faculty and staff to interact with thresholders in intentional and authentic ways. The University of California has a systemwide FirstGen Faculty campaign, for example, to encourage first-generation students who are now faculty members to identify themselves to new students during the first week of the school year. Professors wear FirstGen T-shirts or buttons and offer guest lectures or use other means to “foster a sense of belonging and ownership” among the first-generation student population (Flaherty, 2017, para. 6). Relationship-building efforts like these can forge connections that make college less foreign or intimidating. They communicate care to thresholders, and send the message that people like them not only have a place in the college setting, but succeed there.

Recommendation #4 – Make learning autobiographies and associated skill and knowledge inventories a standard part of the educational approach

Whether it is for initial placement into a pre-college transition class or to individualize a teaching and learning approach, we need better ways of learning about students, their history, thoughts, inner conflicts, prior knowledge and future goals. Part of what happened in the interviews I conducted was that the participants took stock of themselves. They looked back on their lives, projected forward and considered the role family, education, work and learning had played in their lives. Most of the participants appreciated the opportunity to reconsider some of their beliefs and have their learning and experiential knowledge acknowledged by an academic insider (me). Many educators have written about the ways in which students benefit from creating educational biographies (Stevens, Gerber, & Hendra, 2010). Students experience an increase in self-knowledge and self-confidence, and often come to “a new sense of ... personal empowerment to achieve future goals” (Brown, 2002, p. 235). Michelson and Mandell (2004) wrote that their use of learning biography (as part of a broader prior learning assessment portfolio) encouraged learners “to find a voice and become active participants in their learning and in their schooling” (p. 25).

Teachers benefit, as well, by developing an appreciation of what and how students learn in work and other settings.

Incoming students could be taken through the kind of process I used in the interviews in order to identify past learning experiences and interests. They could then, with the help of a teacher and a list of skills and knowledge/awareness, check off the many assets they would bring with them to the college door. Reese did not see the ways in which researching and building a vivarium prepared her to be a college student, but a teacher could help her make those connections. In addition to building the student’s self-knowledge and confidence, this activity would also help the teacher know what her students were interested in and capable of. And even if a student decided not to go on for further education at that time, at least she would leave the institution with a better understanding of her knowledge, attitudes and strengths, and the sense that her interactions with the college had been enlightening and growth-inducing rather than deficit-focused.

Millions of adults, like Reese and the other participants in my study, dream of furthering their education, and many of them have already taken the bold step of approaching the college door. Far too often, however, the barriers prove too numerous, and these college aspirants become “economically and educationally stranded” (Brown as cited in Asimov, 2018, para. 8), and confined to an “educational underclass” (Rose, 1989, p. xi). What is the role of higher education practitioners here? I realize many of today’s learners do not have the academic skills and life experiences many of us expect. But as someone who came from the world of adult basic education and who has taught leadership development in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and adult literacy contexts, I also have seen the power and potential of “post-traditional” students (Soares, 2013) like Reese. Although one hears mostly about structural solutions to problems in higher education (e.g., online classes, accelerated courses or prior learning assessment for adult learners), such practices will only succeed if they are informed by an approach that begins with something as simple – and complex – as *listening* to academic newcomers, and *seeing* college

through their eyes. Truly, how else will we learn that going to college, for them, is *not* at all like going to The Home Depot?

Notes

- ¹ Janet Kaplan-Bucciarelli is an independent adult and higher education consultant with The Threshold Strategist, located in Amherst, Massachusetts. She earned her Ph.D. in educational studies, adult learning development, from Lesley University in 2018.
- ² This study included only women; in fact, the majority of adult students in community colleges are women. However, many of my findings confirm what previous researchers found in studies of marginalized adult learners in general.

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The Perils of Separating Immigrant Families: A Perspective

Lear Matthews, Manhattan

What follows is an edited version of a July 3, 2018 blog post published on the website, Guyanese Online. The original text can be found at <https://guyaneseonline.net/2018/07/03/the-perils-of-separating-immigrant-families-a-perspective-by-lear-matthews/>.

“Immigration has become a simmering social issue churned by politics, economics and sentiments related to ethnocentric ideals.”

– Matthews (2013)

Introduction

Restrictive immigration policies have undoubtedly escalated under the current United States government administration. Implications for the wider immigrant community, including the negative impact on cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, must be taken into account as we deliberate the repercussions of changing policies in a caustic sociopolitical environment. The potential clinical and social perils of the egregious policy of separating families at border crossings are of concern to many. This article gives a perspective on the problem and suggests some possible solutions.

The Problem

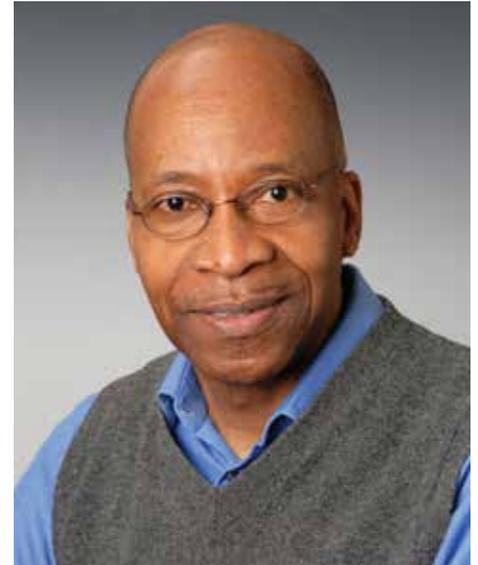
The forced separation of parents from their children, a recent policy carried about by the Trump administration, has evoked national and international outrage. It is important to note that seeking asylum or refugee status is permitted by U.S. immigration law. However, this unconscionable, callous policy, labeled “zero tolerance,” is reminiscent of an even bleaker time in U.S. history when, as a country, we separated children from their parents, particularly among the poor and people of color. This phenomenon has been prevalent over the last 200 years as evidenced in the American Indian boarding schools, the Orphan Train Movement, the founding of the

Children’s Aid Society, Japanese-American internment; as well as in chattel slavery beginning in the 1700s.

Separating children from their parents puts them at risk for myriad problems. These children often experience emotional trauma, potential safety risks and the overall compromising of their well-being. These cause anxiety, depression and acting-out behaviors, including the potential of becoming gang members to acquire a sense of belonging. When parents are detained, criminalized or held in custody, they are generally afraid to retrieve their unaccompanied minor children due to fear of deportation, and the children often end up in the child welfare system. The intersection of immigration law and child welfare compounds the problem for systems, families and for staff of relevant institutions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and organizations such as The Children’s Village, have been assigned to manage the case coordination, mental health needs and placement (with distant relatives or designated foster care homes) of youthful migrant detainees.

Nevertheless, excessive delays at designated “ports” of entry have only exacerbated the separation of families. While family reunification and family permanency are central to the child welfare system, the elevated discrepancy between law/policy and practice – the likes of which we’ve never seen before – can be detrimental to the emotional state of migrating families. Language barriers and cultural differences can also have negative repercussions. Perhaps a little known fact is that, much like the workings of private prison corporations, privately contracted detention centers profit immensely from the “business” of immigration.

Barriers can further increase because of the following: personnel’s lack of knowledge on how to navigate the system; family court



Lear Matthews

judges’ lack of awareness of why parents may not be available to attend permanency hearings when they are detained; immigration judges who are not able to keep parents and children together. One government official purportedly stated, “We don’t need judges, we need more arrests”; personnel including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials are constantly expressing (explicitly or tacitly) their own compassion for or their biases against immigrants.

Humanitarianism is a doctrine based on the duty to promote human welfare. It is consistent with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (2017) and the mission of the social work profession: values that focus on efforts “to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people” (Preamble section, para. 1). It is a universal doctrine that we hold to be true personally, professionally and as nations. Consequently, we should strive to help people who are oppressed or persecuted due to religious differences, political philosophy,

sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or survivors of violence and the aftermath of wars and natural disasters.

The United States and hundreds of other countries ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees that builds on Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries (UNHCR, 2010). According to the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) (2015) website, "Refugee status or asylum may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion" (Refugees and Asylum section, para. 1).

USCIS (2015) stated that an individual "may apply for asylum in the United States regardless of your country of origin or your current immigration status" (Asylum section, para. 2). The asylum-seeker may include her or his spouse and children who are in the United States on the application at the time filed, or at any time until a final decision is made on the case. To include a child on one's application, the child must be under 21 and unmarried. Current U.S. immigration policy (not law) informed by the belief that America is overrun by illegal aliens and criminals is not based on fact, but on nativist rhetoric presumably designed to ramp up a particular political base. The recent deletion of "a nation of immigrants" from the mission statement of the USCIS (Gonzales, 2018), and the use of terms such as "infest" (Trump, 2018) to describe the presence of newly arrived immigrants cause further division, stress and resentment.

The goal of the act of separating families appears to be to punish and deter. Countries are expected to protect their borders. However, politicians, past and present, have been accused of using the issue of immigration as a "football" to gain political latitude. The current administration, in its zeal to control the country's southern border, exhibits xenophobic tendencies, and is often unpredictable if not contradictory in its actions regarding matters relating to immigration policy and practice.

Conclusion: Possible Solutions

Separating parents from their children has had dire interpersonal and social ramifications as demonstrated in previous chapters in American history. Whether this approach is used as a deterrent and punishment or is a genuine effort to monitor the borders of the United States, a heightened sense of awareness and policy re-examination is required.

I would propose the following possible solutions:

- (1) Nativist rhetoric must be debunked.
- (2) Advocating for *reforming* ICE (not *abolishing* it) to reflect less political motivation and more accountability, particularly regarding the welfare of those who do not pose a security threat to the nation, would be effective.
- (3) There is an urgent need for politicians to focus less on not appearing "weak" on immigration, but rather to be guided by a moral compass and social justice principles.
- (4) Policy decisions must be informed by understanding the causes and consequences of the push/pull factors of immigration.

- (5) The welfare of separated parents and children should be addressed by human services and legal support organizations.
- (6) While it would be a challenge, a formula must be developed to balance humanitarian and security concerns in devising effective immigration policy.

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A Poem

Thomas Kerr, Manhattan

Lifted

She walks with me
through open doors

a core of kindness
between the floors

up to ten back down
to five – that's where we met

where the elevator stopped
and I got in

and she walks with me
through open doors

her loving kindness
nears perfection

the Theravada story, the original Gautama
who taught Mahayana happiness

walked in lifetimes, among humanity
footprints in the malaise of suffering

people ask today: where did you meet?
in tandem we reply

believed to be the fourth, Gautama Buddha
prophesied the birth of a successor

loving kindness lifts between us
she walked with me through open doors.

She walks with me through open doors
and had we not met the cycle would not
have been broken, I would not have
actualized the following:

over the years, maybe thirty,
I tried to follow
to let things go, or take hold
call it heartfelt, it wasn't whatever

the meditation and the movement
were intended to ease the motion
settle down the ocean swirling like
a tide pool storming in my head

I return to thinking of such moments
when my system failed relief, until the
lift went high as ten and took us down
to floors
a mindfulmatic, heartfelt sympathetic feeling

she still walks with me through open doors.

Here she is today hair askew time delayed
clutching reaching something holding to

she walks with me staggeredly stumbling
through our lives together holding freely

loosely touching sometimes clinging
sometimes needing sympathy, symphonies

we have walked through those doors
the light, the floods, the droughts, the nights

and we have fought, she has lost and
she has won
and I sit embarrassed, sit in sorrow and in joy

and still she walks with me through
open doors
when open the light storms with breathlessness

captures our desire like first meeting
like City Hall, our first road trip, first blizzard

for we have been lifted, and she walks with me
through open doors

an elevator shaft, a core of kindness
still we ride that line that passes between
the floors.

Effectively Facilitating Cross-Cultural Learning: Lessons From the Buffalo Project

Rhianna C. Rogers, Buffalo; Students Dominique M. Murawski and Halee C. Potter

Reflections on the Buffalo Project: A Forward by Rhianna Rogers

When this work began in 2010, I had no idea what a profound impact this project would have on others and on me. As I enter into the eighth year of working with students and colleagues on the Buffalo Project (2010-2018), I would like to reflect a bit on the impact it has had on my teaching, my students, my colleagues, Western New York (WNY) and the greater SUNY Empire State College community. It is fascinating to think that this project, which originally grew out of a course assignment I developed with students in U.S. History through Ethnology, could sustain for so long and create so many engaged community activism projects for myself and for others. It amazes me that this project has grown into the basis of undergraduate and graduate theses; has inspired research projects across the state; has become the focus of numerous community presentations and academic panels; has impacted institutional programming across the college; and has garnered so many publications for colleagues, students and me. I can humbly say that I have been excited and honored to be a part of this work and watch it grow into what it has become today.

For those who are unfamiliar with this project, I have been the principal investigator (PI) of an ethnographic study of WNY culture at SUNY Empire State College for the past eight years. Coined the “Buffalo Project,” this study is a community-based, diversity project focused on student perceptions of cultural inclusiveness in WNY higher education. As a longitudinal study of student perceptions, the Buffalo Project has provided students with a framework to discuss their perceptions of culture and cross-cultural competencies¹ and their relationship to academic success and persistence. The results

of this work have informed some significant programmatic changes at SUNY Empire at the Buffalo location, as well as created collegewide programming (e.g., the 4th Annual Diversity and Inclusion Forum, and the 3rd Annual Deliberative Conversation Series); and community events (e.g., Diversity Food Festivals), which have helped enhance the ESC student experience as well as increase student engagement and retention efforts in WNY. Based on the success of the Buffalo Project 1.0, this year, my co-PIs, research assistants and I are currently expanding this project into the Buffalo Project 2.0 (2018-present), which will be a joint ethnographic study of three SUNY campus cultures in the WNY area (i.e., SUNY Empire State College, Buffalo State College, and the University at Buffalo). Since the last article that Aimee Woznick (former co-PI at SUNY Empire) and I published about the Buffalo Project in *All About Mentoring* (Rogers & Woznick, 2015), work on this project has continued in new and exciting ways. The following article was co-written by my current co-PI (Dominique M. Murawski), an invested student research assistant (Halee C. Potter) and me about the importance of this work and how it can (and should) be replicated elsewhere. Our hope is that this model of collaborative research can be adopted and shared with others so that students and community stakeholders in other institutions/organizations can benefit from an innovative framework like this one, and be engaged in activism through the academic process.

Introduction

Demographic changes in U.S. culture have significantly reconfigured higher education in ways that were barely imaginable just 15 to 20 years ago. Immigration, the rise of multiracial birth rates, power struggles between socioeconomic classes, drastic differences in U.S. mainstream and marginalized cultural values, and varied access to quality education



(l-r) Rhianna C. Rogers, Halee C. Potter and Dominique M. Murawski

Photo Credit: Rhianna C. Rogers

across the country have significantly altered the needs of the 21st-century student. Acquiring the skills necessary to work within and across multicultural groups is no longer an option, but a necessity. The growing need for students to develop cross-cultural competencies has resulted in colleges and universities pushing for more resources around these types of initiatives. For example, New York state Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and (then) SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher issued a 2015 SUNY Diversity Policy that required each SUNY campus to: (1) hire a chief diversity officer and (2) develop diversity, equity and inclusion plans on each campus (State University of New York, 2016).² Shortly after this recommendation, in Western New York, Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown launched a similar initiative to facilitate the successful integration of the city’s growing immigrant, refugee and minority populations. Yet despite these initiatives, cultural barriers continue to exist for New York’s diverse students in the college setting (e.g., based on race, socioeconomic status, technological skills, literacy, age, gender and so on.). Arguably, these initiatives are a great starting point, but the real work must be done at the local campus, community and grassroots levels. It was under this premise that Rhianna C. Rogers created the “Buffalo Project” (Rogers

& Woznick, 2014).³ Combining student surveys (2010-2014) with current literature, recent WNY cultural initiatives and diverse community stakeholders, the Buffalo Project offers an excellent model for developing cross-cultural competencies among diverse student populations. It is the authors' hope that this paper highlights the importance of culture studies in higher education, as well as offers adoptable strategies to build healthier cross-cultural learning environments.

Background

Before providing suggestions for broader implementation of this project elsewhere, it is important to contextualize the culture of the Buffalo region. Historically speaking, Greater Buffalo has long been plagued with cross-cultural insensitivities, economic hardships and racial tensions (Goldman, 1983; Fry & Taylor, 2012; Price, 1991; Housel, 2009; Kucsera & Orfield, 2014.) Anecdotally, when Rogers first came to SUNY Empire in 2010, many of her students told her that college was the first time that they had engaged with people from different races (Rogers, 2013). As more students expressed their experiences in class, it became apparent that many Buffalo students were uninformed about other cultures and understood each other through their limited exposure in media, textbooks, personal experiences and commentaries conveyed to them by someone else (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, mass communications of all kinds). Sometimes these exposures reflected truths and other times stereotypes, which, in the earlier years of this project, made engagement in cross-cultural collaborative work more difficult. However, giving voice to these perceived difficulties, constructing a safe environment built on trust, mutual reciprocity, and respect among students and their diverse perspectives, ultimately led to the creation of culturally inclusive activities and assignments focused on the development of students' cross-cultural competencies (Rogers, n.d.). For example, Rogers used informal discussions with students and the Buffalo Project data to create "Practical Projects" in her courses. In these assignments, students were asked to conduct their own ethnographic study of Buffalonian culture within a cultural area or group of their choosing so that they could learn how to appreciate different perspectives in the

community. Each term, course evaluations indicated that students found these projects to be exciting, eye-opening and fun. By acknowledging Buffalo's past and connecting it to people's experiences, the Buffalo Project has created unique programming and assignments that incorporate student voices, empower students to engage in culture in new ways, and grow their cross-cultural competencies within the community in which they reside.

Strategies for Implementation

As this paper highlighted, the Buffalo Project's use of student data/voice enhanced the engagement of diverse learners and increased cultural competencies at SUNY Empire. We believe that the adoption of lessons from this project can increase student engagement and learning in other environments. Below, we have provided a few steps that can be used and replicated elsewhere:

1. **Contextualize the region with diverse data and be an active listener.** It is important to collect research from a variety of perspectives (e.g., newspapers, focus groups, surveys, blogs, social media and academic research) and pay attention to what people say, no matter if you agree or disagree with their perspective. This approach will allow you to have a more holistic view of the culture(s) in the area and be able to articulate them to others in the community.
2. **Reach out and develop student and community buy-in.** Make sure stakeholders fully understand your intentions and the importance of your research to the college and community. This requires you to be authentic, intentional, honest and forthcoming with your research data. Share your data and be willing to allow students and community members to make suggestions and modifications in order to foster increased buy-in.
3. **Encourage participation and involvement.** Let stakeholders know that their voices are important and that they can be a part of the project. Allow them to present their research, publish papers on their own topics related to the greater project, and think of new directions in

"... the Buffalo Project has created unique programming and assignments that incorporate student voices, empower students to engage in culture in new ways, and grow their cross-cultural competencies within the community in which they reside."

which to take their work. The more organic and open the format, the more inclusionary it can be, and the more cultural intelligence can be developed.

4. **Obtain feedback.** Creating healthy cross-cultural competencies also requires a willingness to make changes when needed. Feedback, whether formal or informal, allows stakeholders to ask questions and engage in conversation, as well as suggest new ways to engage others in this process.
5. **Finish projects and allow new ones to form.** One of the most important points when doing research on sensitive matters is to make sure you follow through with solutions and share your results. Giving voice, sharing data, publishing findings, presenting at conferences, sharing authorship with stakeholders, and encouraging people to create their own associated projects are just a few ways you can illustrate that what they say matters. Be open to the changes that may arise when stakeholders get onboard; it may change the trajectory of the project in new and exciting ways that you may have never imagined (Rogers, n.d.)!

Final Thoughts and Future Research

As a society, we need to acknowledge that diverse students do not always experience cultural equity in learning environments. Whether it be the results of limited access,

Eurocentrism, racism, lack of skills, historical trauma or something else, if a student is uncomfortable with another student or faculty member, they will be less likely to ask questions, seek help and fully participate in the academic enterprise. By increasing the cultural competencies on campus through the co-creation of programming and assignments with stakeholders, we believe the adoption of the Buffalo Project principles can positively impact the retention and graduation rates of diverse populations. As we have seen in the Buffalo Project, having a campus that offers safe spaces and cross-cultural events supports an atmosphere of inclusivity. It is when we take time to understand our own worldviews, ask questions about others, and listen to our students and community stakeholders that we will be able to fully address the issues that are impacting them. As an institution of higher education, it is our responsibility to prepare our students to be successful graduates and culturally competent members of the 21st-century globalized workforce. We believe the Buffalo Project format is one platform for creating such an inclusive environment.

Notes

- ¹ Cross-cultural competencies can be defined as “set[s] of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that help organizations and staff work effectively with people of different cultures” (University of California, Davis, n.d., para 2).
- ² As Cuomo stated, “New York has a long and proud history of embracing diversity and taking decisive action to dismantle barriers to social and economic mobility and promise equal opportunity for all New Yorkers. By taking these actions ... we will address underrepresentation of minorities in the State government workforce and ensure that our leadership

reflects the strength of New York’s diverse communities” (New York State Governor’s Press Office, 2017, para. 2).

In March 2016, SUNY published the *Campus Guide for Strategic Diversity & Inclusion Plan Development*, which pushed for each campus to create “a diversity council with broad and deep representation” because “a campus-based diversity council can help to shape conversations and relationships to support diversity planning and advance strategic goals” (State University of New York, 2016, pp. 7-8).

- ³ It is important to note that SUNY Empire State College’s Niagara Frontier Center was renamed SUNY Empire at Buffalo in 2016. Since data was collected prior to this change, we have decided to refer to its former name in this study.

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Report on “Life’s Decisions” Forum

Rosalind October, Brooklyn; David Gechlik, Manhattan

Introduction

The forum, “Becoming an Educated Consumer on Life’s Decisions,” was held in November 2017 at the college’s Manhattan location. Its focus was on preparing for long-term health and quality of life situations. The room was filled with over 50 students, as well as presenters and faculty. Students came from mentor David Gechlik’s study group, Coping and Positive Thinking; and from mentor Rosalind October’s group on Case Management. There were other students in attendance who saw the flyer and came to the forum. The evening began with an offering of refreshments before attendees settled in. Following this, the meeting was called to order and everyone was officially welcomed and informed about the evening’s agenda.

There were two sets of presenters: two representatives from the Caribbean American Social Workers Association (CASWA); and another two from Metropolitan Jewish Health System (MJHS) Hospice and Palliative Care, the featured presenters for the evening. We thought it fitting to invite representatives of CASWA, given that SUNY Empire State College was celebrating the Year of the Caribbean Cultural Initiative. The two CASWA representatives were President Shaun Henry and Vice President Genevieve Alleyne. Mr. Henry spoke about the mission of CASWA and the work the association is doing in the Caribbean community in New York City. Ms. Alleyne spoke about the importance of individuals knowing the value of helping by understanding that an individual does not necessarily need a degree in social work to be helpful, but should have the desire to make a difference in another’s life. She used herself as an example, in that she has two master’s degrees, neither one in social work, but is still making a difference in assisting others.

The main focus of the evening was the presentation by Rosie Bernard, an ESC student, and her supervisor, Toby Weiss. They both work at MJHS (Ms. Weiss is the

director of cultural sensitivity and Jewish programming). The idea for this forum actually came during Rosalind’s Case Management group of which Ms. Bernard was a part. In one of the sessions where issues of confidentiality and working with family members were addressed, Ms. Bernard mentioned that she deals with these issues every day at her job. She was given an opportunity to share more information about her work, and in doing so, mentioned a form and process called “the five wishes.” Rosalind became very interested in her explanations and asked whether she would consider making a presentation. Ms. Bernard immediately gave a positive response and indicated that she would like her supervisor to present with her. A phone conference took place with Ms. Bernard and Ms. Weiss, along with David and Rosalind, and plans were finalized for the forum.

Making End-of-Life Decisions

This forum on “Life’s Decisions” was fully embraced by all in attendance. Although the topic seemed to be a sensitive one, the attendees were engaged during the presentation, and were actively involved during the discussion that followed. On one hand, Ms. Weiss clarified the difference between hospice and palliative care, and focused on how to deal with patients and family members who mostly face making end-of-life decisions. She described various scenarios, and what can be said to and done for families during such crises. She also shared the importance of laws that affect the work done in hospice and palliative care.

On the other hand, Ms. Bernard talked about the importance of completing end-of-life documents, and explained that this frees family members from making important decisions on one’s behalf if or when someone becomes too ill to make certain decisions for oneself. She described the different forms used in hospice and palliative care, while cautioning that these forms should be completed and signed long



David Gechlik and Rosalind October

before someone reaches that stage of illness in life. She also took her peers through the paces of completing and signing a wallet-sized health care proxy.

The forum allowed for open discussion, and although most enjoyed the process, prior to the forum, many had voiced skepticism about addressing the topic. By the end of the evening, however, voices were heard testifying to their understanding about the importance of having the relevant forms completed. Some even took extra wallet-sized health care proxy cards to share with their loved ones, and have them complete and sign.

Forum Feedback from Students

Although the feedback covered both information about CASWA and MJHS, most of the feedback surrounded MJHS. Here is some feedback received about the forum:

Again, this presentation was definitely necessary to educate and possibly prepare for these circumstances, if necessary.

I have always felt that it is important to have health coverage, a 401(k) and life insurance, but this class taught me that I have to think more in regard to choosing a family member that I feel is responsible enough to speak for me in the event that I am not able to make any decisions.

This was a great class ... to actually have the handouts of the actual documents. The instructor presented the material that can be hard to discuss in a very practical way.

I have never been exposed to the information provided as I have never really had to deal with this. ... I am glad I learned about the proxy document as I never knew about that.

This meeting allowed us to become familiar with various end-of-life decisions. ... The presenters made us very comfortable with this difficult subject.

This information should be out there in our communities, in ads, and TV commercials.

While doing the exercises today, I realized that I am pushing my mom to make decisions. ... I am happy I attended today's class because I realize how difficult this process is.

Throughout the discussion, students shared personal experiences and realizations about the importance of gaining this knowledge and signing these forms. The evening ended with students giving thanks to the presenters for the valuable information shared.

Offering Opportunities to Students

We think it is important that we offer our students opportunities to take up difficult and important questions for a few reasons:

- They bring together students from different locations of ESC.
- They bring together students who are working in human services fields with different backgrounds and give them a forum to share their expertise.
- They normalize students' experiences while enhancing knowledge of the particular subject matter.

- They allow students to congregate in a forum that is different from the more conventional group setting.
- They allow students studying human services the opportunity to communicate with each other outside of the structured study group.

Concerns About Connecting the Personal, the Professional and the Academic

In developing this forum, our major concern was about the sensitivity of the topic, given that it addresses mortality. This is an issue from which many shy away and find it difficult to embrace, let alone discuss. Actually, before engaging in the forum, we had a number of meetings with the presenters to discuss some "what if" situations. The lead presenter assured us that the topic would be broached in a very subtle way, beginning with the importance of becoming familiar with a body of information. Coincidentally, many in attendance had dealt with this issue personally, and/or on behalf of loved ones, so it was not completely unfamiliar.

One student who attended the forum talked about the importance of knowing this information. She mentioned how lack of knowledge led to some hardship for her family when her brother unexpectedly died in an auto accident. She passionately shared her story, which seemed to have resonated with other students. Another student talked about having to make decisions on behalf of her ailing grandmother, and how relevant it was not only to learn about the process of making final decisions, but also to recognize the criticality of knowing what documents to sign. These real-life experiences of their peers seemed to make an impact in the room, as students heard from each other. Such student comments eased many of the concerns we might have originally had.

The connection of personal, professional, and academic experiences and perspectives is an integral part of being a professional helper. This accents the "human side" of being an academician in the helping profession and enables students to see how important it is to work from a holistic standpoint. In other

words, it is valuable that we bring in our personal/clinical/professional experiences as academicians. None of us can stand outside of our experiences.

Since many of our students have dealt with the illnesses of friends and family, this forum helped students to apply their life experiences to their college learning. Students came away from the forum with a strong belief that they need to be informed when it comes to issues of mortality. This competency helps them become better human service professionals.

Mentors Collaborating: How Did We Think About This Together?

Over the years, we have regularly discussed various strategies for teaching; collaborating on an event such as this one seemed fitting. The reality is that our students deal with many issues as adults, and giving them the opportunities to learn about addressing real-life situations as part of their academic studies is also part of our responsibility as adult educators. We talked together about the importance of preparing students in advance for this upcoming forum, and using our scheduled group time for the forum itself. Importantly, the issue of making life decisions regularly came up during discussions in both of our groups. This also helped the students to prepare for the forum and helped us think about how to try to make the forum an effective one.

We strongly believe that we need to do more of these collaborations because they show students the common thread within the helping professions, despite the differences in the titles of individual studies. In addition, the forums themselves indicate the respect that faculty have for each other, and the importance of the common goals of student learning and success. As mentors, we must come together and collaborate to enhance students' learning. We must continue to work together to maintain a positive learning environment, even when discussing difficult topics.

To Our Colleagues

April Simmons, Manhattan

April Simmons offered these words on the occasion of the retirements of two of our colleagues, Jim Wunsch and Bob Carey. They offer us insight into the meaning of both gratitude and thanks.

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”

– Confucius

This quote captures so perfectly the legacy that both retirees, Jim Wunsch and Bob Carey, have left behind in their remarkable longevity of service to the mission of SUNY Empire State College. There is a tremendous lesson learned when witnessing two individuals still standing, still smiling and still remaining authentic to their dedication and love for their work after many years of service. In short, they loved what they did. In retrospect, they are leaving behind parts of themselves within us all as we continue to build our legacy remembering what they have done.

“If your legacy could speak right now, what exactly would it say?”

There is much to be sought when one decides to dedicate him/herself to a larger purpose and transition to a new path of living, learning and experiencing. It is the learning of all things being worthwhile, but not having to last forever. It is the memory of good doing and hard work that continues to show its face. It is the type of legacy you would like to leave

behind when you transition to new things. It is the reflection of those you’ve touched and your impact on their world.

Empire State College is not just a special and unique experience for the students who walk through the door. It is a gateway of learning for us all in the many departments and locations in which we coexist. It is an everyday navigation of components and the constant watering of soil that continues to make the college blossom. When we wake up each day and make the decision to report to work, it is no longer personal. It is an entangled decision that will involve and leave behind a piece of our doing in someone else’s life. That is what makes it special.

In a sense, we have all retired at some point in our lives. This can simply mean that we have decided to transition to something that has finished serving us or something that has not served us at all. We have all journeyed through an experience in which we have left something behind or picked up something along the way. Yet, somehow we made it here. We have made it to this institution to offer something new, separately but yet together. That is what makes it unique.

There was a deep sense of gratitude that beautified the air during the celebration for both retirees. It is this gratitude that individuals stood and expressed; these were heartfelt sentiments of exactly how they were touched by these colleagues. When our students stand before us, they will also experience gratitude and thanks for all that they are given when they retire from the doors of ESC. What would you like them to be grateful for? If your legacy could speak right now, what exactly would it say? These are two questions that pilot my life and my journey with Empire State College. I see and reflect upon the experiences of each and every student realizing that each student has also retired from something. Students have left



April Simmons

behind something to get them here and they are looking for something special. They are grateful to be a part of the college and grateful for their learning. They are grateful for their passing grades and for their experience. They are grateful for the knowledge and information provided to them when they needed it most. I reflect upon this all and then I make a decision to treat it just as special and with just as much gratitude as they do. I make a decision to water their experience every day and continue to sow my own. I ask: What are you grateful for?

Our students may never see us again, but we must understand that the gratitude that fills their hearts will come from something we did or did not do. It is the same as when one transitions from this earth. We remain filled with the legacy and memory of whatever it is that was left behind. Our work and the energy that we give in all that we do remain long lasting and ever filling to those who experience it. Let us remain impactful, significant and purpose-filled as an ESC community.

First Noodle Under the Sun

Deborah J. Smith, Saratoga Springs



Deborah Smith (right) with her medical student museum guide at the Shanxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Mentor Deborah Smith was awarded a China Studies Institute Zhi-Xing China Academic Impact Fellowship, and traveled to China in June 2018. Her reflection on the experience follows. More information about these opportunities can be found at <http://www.aascu.org/programs/CSI/>.

I was lost in Xi'an, having missed a turn following the road toward the Big Wild Goose Pagoda. When I asked directions at the Xi'an Conservatory of Music, an animated conference in Chinese ensued between the three security guards and two students present. Finally, a Baidu phone map materialized: The guards pointed me in the correct direction and I arrived at my hotel on time.

Don't you just love China?

In my travels around the world, I've gone alone or with one friend, the latter usually when we have conference presentations. Traveling solo is the easiest way to connect with local people at the ground's-eye view. Traveling in a group, though, gives you instant connections with group members and often takes you to

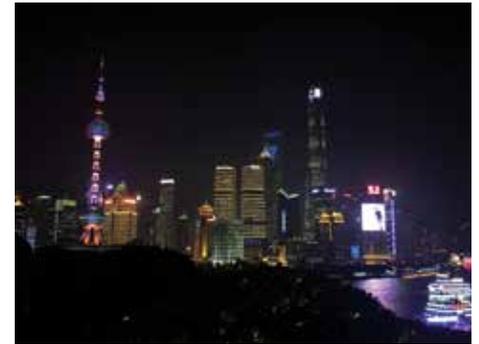
places you'd miss or never think of seeing. In either scenario, you can stumble on the "wow" moments that will stay in your mind forever.

What were these "wow" moments in China? As I look over the three-week trip, several come to mind:

The Shanghai Metro: Fast, inexpensive and designed to make transportation clear to everyone, the subway system in Shanghai, like its counterpart in Beijing, covers the city easily and quickly. Large arrows on the floor and color-coded signs designate routes; the map is alongside the track near the boarding area. Next stops for both directions in Chinese and English are indicated. On the subway car, stops are announced in both languages, as well. If you go the wrong way (possible, but difficult), there's no climbing up, down and around to the other side of the tracks. Just get off, walk 8 feet back across the platform and take the next subway.

Zoom, you're there.

The Shanghai skyline: Walking the river promenade in the city was lovely, as was dinner at the art deco Fairmont Peace Hotel (Charlie Chaplin slept there). But the real thrill was the top-story outdoor bar. When the sun disappears, The Bund waterfront lights up like New Year's and it *is truly* a sight to behold. The sweep of neon lights glittering from the skyscrapers, illuminated boats sailing the river (and the night we arrived, free beer at the bar) make this a good reason to return to China and spend every night atop a Shanghai hotel.



The Bund waterfront, Shanghai.

They dance: One Wednesday night in Xi'an, a group of us roamed the pagoda areas just after dinner. Soon we came upon a group dance in the local square.

Dozens of adults, in their 20s to their 90s, moved in double-line formation to the beat of cymbals. They carried glittering parasols and striking multicolor fans. Around and around they went, changing the steps from time to time, twirling and pumping parasols, fluttering and swirling fans until they could almost fly. It was fabulous; as wonderful as the water fountain show in the square that same night. Later, we dropped into the First Noodle Under the Sun restaurant for drinks before going home. I love that name. It sounds like an island vacation with a very skinny person ... I fantasize it's me.



Dancing at the All Day Mall, Xi'an.

The people: This is the understatement of the century: China is big. China has lots of people. Throughout the millions and billions of them, several faces stand out.

Here's my list:

The student at Xi'an Jiaotong University who painstakingly showed us through the university's history museum was one. Kurt DeBord (a professor from Lincoln University of Missouri) and I decided on the spot to make a gift bag for him, something he never expected. The look on his face was so moving. We knew if we had done nothing else in China, we at least made one person's day.

Later that same afternoon, the faculty guide at Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine's Museum of Traditional Chinese Medicine left us to attend a meeting. Suddenly, pushed into the translator role and doing an exquisite job, was the young medical student in traditional costume. She was excited to see visitors; when she learned I was a nurse, her face took on angelic proportions. Most people only look at a nurse this way if they are very ill or in pain. It made a nice change and an equally fun photograph.

Always, there were the children and the elders. From the Great Wall to the Terracotta Warriors sculptures, the promenade to the Temple Gardens, China's children are the cutest ever. Babies with big chocolate drop eyes win your heart without contest. But so do kids with pinwheels in their hair and cool T-shirts, whether bouncing along on the sidewalk, bursting the bubbles dad blows into the air or heading off to school in their uniforms.

Chinese elders are a breed apart. The retired woman who hosted us for tea in the *hutong* (a narrow street or alley) is living on her own in her family's house. Between her government pension, health insurance and her glass painting, she is living a good life, doing what she enjoys.

In China, I routinely found myself sitting next to older folks who'd ask my age. If I caught the question before a younger relative whispered, "Westerners don't answer this ..." I'd truthfully say I'm 63. These same women would then *insist* I looked younger than 63. Sitting with someone in her 80s to my right and a 70-year-old woman to my left, I thought of Gloria Steinem's book *Doing Sixty and Seventy*. That's happening now, right here in the Forbidden City.

OK, I'm not the First Noodle Under the Sun, even if I don't look 63. But ... can it get any better than this? Unfailingly, Chinese elders are proud to tell you they are 70, or 80 or 90. Advanced age for them is not a mark of decline, but a badge of honor. *I survived this long in life.*

May we all live to say the same and mean it.

Finally, my deepest thanks to all of those who made this trip possible: my support on the ground at home and in China; to AASCU (the American Association of State Colleges and Universities), and to SUNY Empire State College and its International Education program; the government of the People's Republic; all the people of China and our fabulous guides Hera, Wendy and Kelly. China would not be the same place without the help of Li Caixia, our escort with the patience of a saint. It's not easy being a leader for ordinary tour groups. But it's even harder to guide a bunch of academics, who are used to going their own way without question or comment, like the First Bunch of Noodles ever created in China.

So from the bottom of my heart, thank you Li. You are the best.



China Studies Institute Fellows 2018. (Deborah Smith, back row, far right; ESC's Sandy Winn, back row, middle; guide Li Caixia, front row, left.)

The Impact of Media: A New Model for Understanding Parasocial Experiences

Gayle Stever, Rochester

Social and Behavioral Sciences mentor Gayle Stever was the recipient of the Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship in 2017, and delivered the following edited lecture at the Fall Academic Conference the same year.

I am going to talk to you today about some theories that have been a lifetime in development. Before I get into the current work I am doing, I will preface it by saying that back in the late '80s and early '90s, when I had just begun my work in fan studies and the psychology of media, I was told numerous times that what I was doing was trivial and insignificant, and that I was naive to think media fandom was anything that could be studied in any scientific way. The moral of that story is that if you know in your heart that something is important and matters, don't let anyone convince you otherwise!

In 2011, I got a phone call from a moderator from the American Psychological Association who asked me, rather than be on a panel for the national conference, would I talk for a full hour? I was flabbergasted as I had moved away from trying to present at psychology conferences (I had instead gravitated to the International Communication Association), as the psychology people thus far hadn't really wanted to hear about what I was doing. She asked me if we could take the word "parasocial" (I'll get to what that means in a moment) out of the title ... she was afraid people would confuse it with "paranormal." I laughed and said maybe having parasocial in the title was a problem back when I had given a talk at APA in 1994. Dead silence from her ... and then she said, "You were doing this way back then? Wow, you were on the cutting edge of something!" So ... vindication is sweet!

When I came to SUNY Empire State College in 2009, one of the reasons I chose to make the move was that working in an interdisciplinary environment where I would have daily contact

with people in other disciplines sounded like a really great thing. And it did turn out to be that way. The first year I was at the then-Genesee Valley Center, I gave a talk to the faculty on my work in fan studies. When the talk had finished, mentor Ed Warzala came up to me and said, "I know the perfect book for you. The methods for analysis in that book are perfect for what you are doing." I got the book he recommended (George & Bennett, 2005), and a year later was presenting at the Eastern Communication Association as part of the "Top Three Papers" panel, a paper (Stever, 2011) based on an analysis I had done using that very book. I was forever getting great help on my work from other mentors outside my discipline like Wayne Willis (history) and Adele Anderson (anthropology).

Being the 2017-2018 Turben Scholar award recipient was very exciting for me. I remember being at my very first All College Conference in the spring of 2010, and thinking that I would love more than anything to receive that particular award. For me, scholarship represents the culmination of everything we do as faculty. It is our way to model to students what it means to be a scholar and a lifelong learner.

My research in media psychology and how media affects development has been the result of more than 30 years of pursuit of questions that had their foundations in my childhood. Because I am a highly intuitive type person (just like the fans in my research turned out mostly to be), I was motivated as a child by all those characters I saw in media who fueled my ability to fantasize and dream of possibilities. That notion of fantasizing connections with imaginary others and finding inspiration in those imaginary interactions was the reason that, when given the opportunity to write a research thesis in my master's program, I chose to study fans, and the impact that media has on their development.



Gayle Stever presents her Turben lecture at the 2017 Fall Academic Conference.

My goal for some years has been to integrate the work being done in cultural studies and communication with the work being done in the social sciences in the areas of fan culture, parasocial relationships and celebrity, and more recently, social media. My most recent paper, written with a colleague from Chapman University, Riva Tukachinsky (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2018), was a chance to realize my dream of collaborating with a prominent communication scholar. Our paper focused on parasocial relationships from a developmental perspective. A parasocial relationship (PSR) is the imaginary social relationship that one has with media figures that one has not met. All of us interact with media on some level. The theory that Riva and I developed starts with the premise that just as in everyday social relationships, PSRs begin with an initiation phase. We based this model on one by Knapp (1978) where he postulated five stages of the development of a relationship, starting with initiation, moving to experimentation, then intensification, integration and finally bonding. Riva and I felt that the relationships that people develop with media personalities, not carried out face-to-face but rather through

imaginal processes, developed in the same way. Many of the seeming inconsistencies that appeared in the research on PSR could be explained by the idea that if you collect data on people who are not at the same stage of relationship development, the outcomes will not be the same.

Here is an example: While it was theorized that people who form PSRs are motivated by loneliness, most studies that tried to operationalize loneliness were not finding a correlation with PSRs at all. People who were not lonely were just as likely to report parasocial interactions and PSRs as those who were. Riva and I speculated that perhaps it was at a certain stage of the development of the PSR where we would find more people who exhibited loneliness. The studies we surveyed appeared to bear that out although, of course, more research will be needed to be completely certain.

Another example was the research I did for my own master's thesis in which I found that committed fans of all of the celebrities whose fans I surveyed were more likely, by a factor of two to three times, to be introverted intuitive personality types (see Myers & Myers, 2010 for more information on Jungian personality types). This research was done on fans who had been behaviorally identified as being highly committed to their favorite celebrity. McCarley and Escoto (2003) tried to replicate my study (Stever, 1995), but they surveyed college students, having them identify a favorite celebrity. There was no connection in their study between having a PSR and personality type. The difference in those two studies is obvious. Many of the people in the other study were clearly not very far along in their PSR, while in my study, all of the participants were very committed to their favorite celebrity. The two survey populations were not developmentally comparable at all.

When we meet someone new we decide, usually based on that first meeting and on things like attraction and mutual interests, that this is a relationship we wish to pursue further. In the same way, in a parasocial relationship, we "meet" someone new through media and based on attraction and similarity, we are interested in knowing more about that person.

For example, if I see *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* and feel an attraction and affinity for the Aragorn character, and for the actor who portrays him, Viggo Mortensen, then based on that attraction, I might find and watch other movies with this actor. This is the experimentation phase. If I find that I like these other movies, I might reach a point where I consider myself a "fan" and systematically start looking for all of this artist's work. The intensification phase might involve collecting all of Mortensen's work, and also might involve going on the internet to find more information about him. By the end of the intensification period, being a fan might become integrated into my identity. My friends all come to know that I am a big Viggo Mortensen fan, and if they see something he's going to be doing, they make sure they let me know. They send me links to things they happen to see. At this point, I have even identified fellow fans with whom to enjoy conversations about my favorite celebrity.

"[Myth:] Intense fandom is pathological; Answer: It can be, but most of the time it is not."

This movement through the first four stages of Knapp's (1978) model is similar to what happens when you meet someone, get to know them, become friends and ultimately become best friends or even a romantic couple. At the integration stage, that person becomes a part of your identity, as your best friend or significant other, just as the favorite celebrity becomes someone your friends and family associate with you based on the knowledge that you "follow" them.

As Riva and I developed our paper, we found seemingly contradictory studies that were better explained when you factored in our model. The final paper is one that I presented at the International Communication Association Conference at the end of May 2018 in Prague, Czech Republic (Tukachinsky

& Stever, 2018) and is subsequently being published in the ICA Journal, *Communication Theory* (Tukachinsky & Stever, in press).

The key defining aspect of the term "parasocial" is that it refers to something that is not reciprocated, i.e., "I know you very well and you don't know me at all." Unfortunately, this term has been subject to some misunderstanding that has made some scholars reluctant to embrace it. But there is nothing inherently pathological in a PSR. We all do this "imaginary social relationship" engagement any time we watch a movie, read a book or engage in weekly television. The *Star Trek* fandom, something I have studied extensively, is based on people who saw a television program and saw embedded within it some ideals with which they identified. Many fans wanted to extend this television world into the real world and became heavily engaged in convention life where they could go and playact a favorite race or character (Klingons and Vulcans abound at such conventions). They could also meet and even get to know beloved actors who play those favorite characters. There are many of the actors who have a large subset of fans with whom they are well acquainted, and at this juncture, the PSR transitions to a regular social relationship.

Singer Josh Groban also has a number of fans with whom he has become "friendly acquaintances" (Stever, 2016). These are all normal, healthy, (mostly) high-functioning adults who consider him to be someone they know, and this consideration is in no way a delusion. I write in the above referenced paper about a fan in England who is well known to Groban; he recognizes her and reaches out to her whenever he is over there. I've seen a YouTube clip of a concert in Scotland where he is telling a funny story and suddenly stops and says, "I know that laugh. Where are you?" He then tells the audience that this woman has a great laugh and he always misses it when she's not there at one of his concerts in the U.K. My paper is the only one on the subject of fans as friendly acquaintances of which I am aware.

Part of my work has been about dispelling myths that people have about fans and celebrities. These were:

1. Intense fandom is pathological; Answer: It can be, but most of the time it is not.
2. Celebrities are impossible to meet (and if you think you're going to meet one, you are deluded and just kidding yourself); Answer: Most celebrities, except for the really high-profile ones, are not that hard to meet if you travel to events and look for opportunities. In my case, I was looking for opportunities to observe real-life fan celebrity interaction, and the opportunities were not hard to find at all.
3. Those celebrities are all alike; Answer: Celebrities are a diverse group of unique individuals, just as any other group of people is diverse. (Corollary: Those fans are all alike – same answer.)
4. Fans are mostly teenagers and children; Answer: Fans come in all ages; what changes is the developmental motivation for being a fan. Teens get crushes because they are that point in life where they are exploring romantic feelings for the first time; Adult fans are more likely to follow a given celebrity artist because of interest in their work, and/or a desire to support causes they see the celebrity supporting, as in Josh Groban's charity foundation to support arts education.

I have now written a book as part of a series by Routledge, called *The Psychology of Everything*. My book is *The Psychology of Celebrity* (Stever, 2019). I spent a good part of the last year and a half learning about scholarly theories of celebrity and relating those to the work I have done on fans. In the new social media era, there is a new brand of celebrity referred to in the scholarly literature as a "microcelebrity." This is a person who has become famous due to his/her YouTube or other social media exposures. These people can build a following that is very large and global. A part of this is blogging, and some people have blogs that are followed by thousands or even millions of people. All of these new roads to celebrity have changed the very nature of both the concept of celebrity and the impact of media on our lives. I wrote about this and other topics related to the study of celebrity in my book.

It has been recognized that the study of the impact of celebrity culture on society is a very new area of scholarly inquiry. A new journal called *Celebrity Studies* was first published in 2010. According to the journal's website, "*Celebrity Studies* is a peer reviewed journal that focuses on the critical exploration of celebrity, stardom and fame. It seeks to make sense of celebrity by drawing upon a range of (inter)disciplinary approaches, media forms, historical periods and national contexts" (Journal of Celebrity Studies, n.d., para 1). Reading that, it is easy to see why this is a good fit with the scholarly goals I've had in my career. When I was approached by Routledge and asked to write my book, I was excited to take on the challenge. The 18 months of work helped me stretch from where I began as a fan studies scholar, to someone who now is part of a community of researchers and scholars who are writing about the impact of celebrity society on our current world today. Looking at it all in a historical context, there is a good reason why, in the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, I was (as the APA moderator said) on the cutting edge of something. Toffler (1990) had written a book called *Powershift* where he had explained that in the 1980s, we were moving from a society based on mass media to one based on de-massified media. Another way to say this is that we've evolved from eight or 10 national magazines and three or four television channels, to literally thousands of media choices, in magazines, television, film and the internet. I wrote about this in my book and discussed how it has affected the world of entertainment, politics, the economy and really every aspect of life today (Stever, 2019).

All of my published papers are on ResearchGate.net. This is a resource with which faculty should become well acquainted. It is "social media" for scholars and greatly facilitates the exchange of ideas among the community of researchers.

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The Case for (At Least Some) Traditional Research at SUNY Empire State College

A. Jordan Wright, New York University

Jordan Wright was a faculty mentor at SUNY Empire State College from 2011–2017, serving as the department chair for psychology, chair of the Institutional Review Board, and faculty associate with the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation. He is now a faculty member and director of the NYU Center for Counseling and Community Wellbeing at NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. He wrote this commentary upon his departure from ESC.

As I reflect on my years at Empire State College and think about which endeavors I participated in that I feel will have lasting impact, one little “experiment” keeps coming to mind. I taught Social Science Research Methods as a study group at the Manhattan location (Hudson Street) several times, and the final project for that study was a comprehensive written research proposal/plan for a study designed by each individual student. Then I posed an offer to each student, that if 1) their research proposal was feasible and well designed¹ and 2) they wanted to pursue it, I would engage with them in a Research Practicum independent study and work with them to implement their research study. Several students took me up on this offer, and what emerged were multiple peer-reviewed, published articles in top-tier journals co-authored by an undergraduate ESC student and me.

I continue to work (outside the confines of a formal study at ESC) with several of these students, analyzing data, honing papers, revising based on peer reviews, etc. And I continue to watch these ambitious students gain acceptance into amazing graduate programs. Below are my thoughts about why faculty at ESC should be encouraged and supported to do what, for these purposes, can be described as traditional research.

It Beters Us as Scholars

First, this is not meant to apply to every single faculty member at the college. Scholarship looks different in different fields, and a flexible view of what constitutes scholarship seems to be a hallmark of Empire State College. However, we need to fight against the translation of “being flexible” to being “anti-traditional research.” Flexibility for our students and ourselves should include *options*, one of which should be traditional research.

In my own field of psychology, my identity is very much tied to what I *do* as a psychologist. I am a clinical psychologist with an expertise in assessment; so much of my identity revolves around the actual clinical work (therapy and testing) I do in my own practice and consultation. However, I also do a great deal of research in LGBTQ psychology, which has given me a scholarly community outside of ESC. Another hallmark of ESC is its inherent interdisciplinarity – sitting beside colleagues from the arts, law, business, and the humanities. I personally found it rewarding to immerse myself in discourse with these colleagues who have a very different view of the world than I do from my psychology/social science lens (though I will admit, I’m proud to have contributed to turning at least one of my humanities colleagues into a social science believer ...). However, I also found it difficult to deepen my identity as a scholar of psychology within the “walls” of ESC. I worked hard on multiple program development initiatives, like the psychology Bachelor of Science and a possible MS in mental health counseling, but as much work as each of those took, they still involved a relatively small amount of my overall time and mental energy. I taught pretty much exclusively within psychology, but at the undergraduate level, there was a limit to how much I could deepen my identity as a psychology scholar.



A. Jordan Wright

Speaking only for myself, it was from my more traditional research, understood easily by my field, that I was able to deepen myself as a scholar within psychology. Attending conferences was a start, but only when I presented at conferences, got peer reviews on articles, and was able to engage in discourse with other scholars from my field was I able to strengthen my scholarly muscles. This may be unique to my particular discipline (though I’m guessing it’s not), but it is much easier to gain entrance into and grow within a scholarly community when that community clearly understands and values the scholarly contribution you are making. For me, while I had lots of (what I assumed were) great ideas swirling in my head, very high quality colleagues started taking notice of me when I started publishing and presenting my more traditional research.

It Beters Our Students

This one is pretty much a given. While not all students are interested in the social sciences, those who are find themselves much better equipped for the “real world,” whether

it be graduate school, a helping profession job in which it benefits them to thoroughly understand the research literature on what is effective, or an actual job that includes some component of research, if they have had hands-on experience doing real research. Personally, while I learned about internal and external threats to validity in my graduate research methods classes, it wasn't until I began to design a real research study and discuss all of its problems (with people much more experienced than I was) that I truly understood how those threats to validity have real consequences when trying to draw conclusions or answer research questions. This is an example of how important hands-on experience is.

Beyond it being an excellent learning tool, there is also a mercenary truth: those students with real research experience, and better yet actual peer-reviewed publications, are much more attractive candidates for graduate programs (and while I don't have direct knowledge of this, I would suspect they are better candidates for relevant jobs, as well). I have sat on graduate admissions committees for years at excellent schools, and publications and actual research experience often mean the difference between getting an interview and not.

It Beters Us as Educators

Speaking for myself, immersing myself in a research project afforded me several unique opportunities as an educator. While my own work may not be every student's interest in my group and individual studies, it does provide the ability to "beat up" ideas in a very specific, concrete and genuine way. For example, my group studies in Applied Statistics at the Manhattan location utilized very real data that I collected to answer research questions. My students were, of course, saddled with the data I chose to collect (in this case, data relating to identity development and personality variables of LGBTQ adults), which may not be interesting to all, but we could spend a fair amount of time in class discussing *why* I chose the scales/variables that I did, what the data I had collected could and could not answer, what kinds of variables they would have chosen differently, etc. Many statistics classes use convenient data (a great deal are derived for

textbooks or specifically as teaching resources), but data are messy, just like the real world is messy. We could ask and answer statistical questions using actual data, more sophisticated statistical techniques (there were several instances when a student asked a much more sophisticated and interesting question than I had thought of, and I had to go off and use multivariate techniques to investigate, which I could then bring back to the class to discuss), and a great deal of critical thinking.

On multiple occasions, as a result of spending an entire term using my real data as an example in the statistics study, a student asked to work with me on analyzing some of the data I had collected in order to write up a publishable paper. For example, one student was interested in the role of spirituality in sexual minority identity development (I had collected data on these variables). Not only was the paper that emerged from this work published in a top-tier psychology journal, but the student won a distinguished student presentation award at the American Psychological Association conference (notably, she was the only undergraduate student to win this award; the other two awardees won for their doctoral dissertations). I know I keep repeating that this will not apply to all faculty, disciplines, fields, etc., but in my personal experience, using my actual research in class and with students made me a much stronger educator.

"... but in my personal experience, using my actual research in class and with students made me a much stronger educator."

It Beters the Field of Education

We at Empire State College claim to innovate. We claim that our models of education are excellent. What we don't often do is back those claims up. I would argue that even student retention and completion rates are inadequate to support our claims. We may come up with

some innovative ideas (I think of potentially Immersive Cloud Learning [which I still feel needs a better, less misleading name] or some of the ways we are using blended learning), but we are not systematic or rigorous about evaluating their effectiveness.

In the real world, randomized, controlled studies – while seen very often as the gold standard at understanding causality – are often unfeasible to orchestrate. At ESC, however, we have a fairly controlled environment! We have the opportunity to do such clear, well-designed studies. For example, if I wanted to understand if adaptive feedback throughout my Introduction to Psychology online course was helpful, harmful, or neither, I could certainly design a study to compare two versions of the course (with students randomly assigned to one or the other) that were identical except for this (innovative?) component. It's an easy study to design and implement, and it clearly answers the research question. Rather than assuming it's helpful to students, I can truly find out. I can look at subsets of students (is it more helpful for those students taking their first online course versus online "old pros"? For those with higher GPAs coming into the class versus those with lower GPAs? For younger versus older students?) to get a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the "innovative" component. And I don't have to rely on another researcher's conclusions, which may or may not apply to our nontraditional population. This example is a straightforward, easy one. But what about our mentoring model? We claim it is amazing and helps our students develop, complete their degrees, and gain supernatural powers (maybe too far?), and we may feel this to our core, but how do we know this? How do we convince other people in education that what we do is innovative and effective? Amassing evidence that what we're doing is good will ultimately better the entire field of education, and will help ESC's reputation as an innovator immeasurably.

However, It's Not Well Enough Supported

One final acknowledgment that not everyone wants to or should do traditional research at ESC. However, for those who *do* and *should*, there needs to be structural support at the college to facilitate it. While incomplete, my

thoughts go to two places that could certainly go a long way to help support traditional research. First is the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI). We have an excellent faculty with a great deal of expertise in varied fields, many of whom would like to innovate in education (and are well poised to do so). However, not all of us have the kind of social science/education, human subjects research training, and experience to design and implement a high-quality study. The scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) has developed sophisticated and interesting methodologies over a very long and storied history, and CMLAI could provide the guidance and leadership to ensure that all faculty who are interested in educational innovation have the resources to evaluate their innovations properly. This may mean providing professional development opportunities to improve research design, data analysis, or even social science writing skills. But it may also mean identifying social science research methodologists at the college (or elsewhere, ahem) who are willing (and eager) to partner with colleagues to co-implement studies. One of the more fulfilling aspects of my work at ESC was partnering with faculty colleagues who had research interests that were not my own, but who could benefit from my strong research and methodology background. For several years, I was the chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at ESC, and I saw several projects pass through that were similar in nature (e.g., which components of this blended class work better online, and which work better in person). CMLAI could build links between faculty who have

similar research questions, creating new partnerships that ultimately strengthen the work of all involved.

The other place that could work toward better supporting traditional research at ESC is the annual planning process (with whomever you do that). My experience in annual planning was generally a vague question about my plan for scholarship over the next year (and even one time tying that to my long-range scholarship plans), but questions about scholarship had very little to do with my overall workload (sorry, the “w” word). At best, I could work toward “front-loading” my teaching work to free up some time later on, or some such maneuvering. But everything always came back to mentoring and teaching (number of mentees and direct instruction credits), with some leeway for overseeing online courses. Seemingly always seen as less important than the other criteria, scholarship in my annual planning meetings was most often an afterthought. While I understand that starting to compare the amount of work (time and energy) from different aspects of our jobs is difficult and controversial (some argue that independent studies take more time, some argue that educational planning takes more time, some argue that online studies take more time, etc.), I would argue that engaging in traditional research that involves students is worth considering as “time and a half” (not arguing for a specific number, just a notion). Although I most often enrolled students in a research practicum independent study to do research with me, I personally spent a great deal more time and energy on these independent studies than on any other (in the end, if I want a paper with my name

on it submitted to a journal, a “B” paper is not acceptable, so I often went through many rounds of revisions on every paper, and this is after designing and implementing entire studies). If the associate deans (or whoever is helming annual planning) are much more specific about their questions about research and scholarship during the process, including asking what (in an ideal world) resources would help faculty accomplish even a single research goal for the year, faculty would be forced to think very planfully about their research work, instead of it being an afterthought. And if associate deans (or whoever) committed to acknowledging how traditional research can better the entire ESC community by negotiating some of the teaching and mentoring loads down in order to support the work, I believe a great deal more important research could be done at the college. And this doesn’t even touch on the potential research grants that could come to the college and provide extra money. ...

Note

- ¹ One of the teaching methods we engaged in during the methods class was to workshop all components of their research proposal/plan throughout the term, in both written form for my own feedback and oral form for other students’ feedback. This pretty much ensured that, by the end of the term, each study was well designed. However, being feasible within the confines of ESC and each student’s ongoing study was not a requirement. That is, proposals could be aspirational (e.g., dependent on a large grant).

Found Things

“From Traditional Students to Adult Learners”

Arthur W. Chickering and Associates, *Cool Passion: Challenging Higher Education* (2014)

In response to AAM #51, Arthur Chickering, SUNY Empire State College's founding academic vice president, sent us the following email on 13 April: "I am enjoying reading the latest issue of All About Mentoring. Your opening comments about history ["Editorial: A History, and Then What?"] prompt me to send you the attached pages, 200-204, from my recent Cool Passion book. Perhaps your readers may find them interesting." And, we did, and include them here with sincere thanks to Art Chickering for permission to reprint this excerpt in AAM, and to NASPA (the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Washington, D.C.), which published this book.

ESC Origins

For me, the key challenge, articulated by Ernie [Boyer, SUNY chancellor], was to create an institution that would serve adults throughout the state of New York. That was our mission. We were authorized to grant associate in arts, associate in science, bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, and bachelor of professional studies degrees. With those degree authorizations, and with potential enrollees diverse in race, ethnicity, national origin, and prior learning, it was clear that a batch processing, one-size-fits-all approach would not work. We needed individualized degrees pursued with individual learning contracts, just as Goddard [College] had for its undergraduate majors and in its adult degree program. With New York's diverse population and with the range of studies they would pursue, a norm-referenced, grading-on-a-curve approach to evaluating students' contracts also would not work. Goddard used narrative evaluations, and there was a small consortium of colleges that did so as well. That was the only way to capture the richness and complexity of the work undertaken in a learning contract.

It also would be foolish to assume that all learners came with the same levels of competence and knowledge in relation to the areas of learning they wanted to pursue. It was likely that many already had substantial learning from prior work and life experiences. We needed to devise a way to evaluate and recognize that prior learning so their Empire State studies could build on it, avoid redundancy, and be challenging enough to sustain interest and motivation. Traditional college courses forced all content and desired outcomes onto a Procrustean bed of 15- or 16-week semesters, typically delivered with 50-minute classes 3 times a week, or occasionally 3-hour classes once a week, for a total of 45 contact hours. It made much more sense to have the time fit the students' purposes, content, and learning activities, so contracts could be half time or full time and range from 1 to 6 months. Twenty hours per week was expected for half-time contracts and 40 hours for full time.

We were an open-enrollment college. Interested students were asked to answer five questions on their application: What do you want your life to be like 5 years from now? What do you want to learn? How do you learn best? What resources work best for you? What prior learning is pertinent to your purposes? We knew these would be challenging questions for our applicants and did not expect sophisticated answers. But we wanted potential students to begin thinking about themselves and their education in ways consistent with our approach. After being accepted for admission, 20 to 25 students were invited to an orientation workshop from 6:00 to 9:00 Friday evening, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday, and 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Sunday. These workshops aimed to help students understand Empire State College's educational approach and ascertain whether their purposes would be well served if they enrolled. Their responses to the questions on their application

were the starting points for the workshop. Faculty members responded to their questions and suggested how each person might proceed. A \$50 fee included Saturday lunch, and they did not make a final enrollment decision until after the workshop. The big question was often whether to enroll full time or half time. To aid participants in making the decision, we gave them each a blank calendar of the past 2 weeks and asked them to fill in how they had spent each day. Then, if they intended to enroll full time, we asked them to cross out activities to free up 40 hours, and if half time, 20 hours. We knew that time on task would be critical and we wanted these busy, ambitious adults to be realistic. Many students changed from assuming full-time to half-time enrollment, and some half-time students said they would come back after they were able to reorganize their lives to free up the expected hours. We ran these workshops monthly to build enrollments in our forthcoming learning centers. These were the key responses to the educational challenges set forth in Boyer's prospectus [referring to the *Prospectus for the New University College*, February 1971, which framed the structure and mission of Empire State College].

Then there was the organizational challenge of serving adults throughout the state. We needed small, human-scale units, where faculty members would know each other well enough to work together and where administrators would have close relationships with them. Roger Barker and Paul Gump's (1964) research for *Big School, Small School* documented the educational power of small schools, in the range of 200-300 students, especially for students who were not the best and the brightest. Goddard had 121 students on the Greatwood main campus [Plainfield, Vermont] in fall 1959, when I arrived. When the student population reached 250, we started a second Northwood campus. With teaching loads of 25 full-time-equivalent students per

faculty member, a learning center of 250-300 students could support 10-12 faculty members across disciplines in science, social sciences, and humanities, with a dean and associate dean. This was consistent with Barker and Gump's research. So that's how we started, with learning centers in Albany, Rochester, and Long Island. We were also asked by the New York Central Labor Council to start a unit in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers building on 25th Street in New York City, a request we could not refuse. After starting additional units at SUNY Rockland Community College, SUNY Purchase College, and in Buffalo, we created a statewide center based in Saratoga Springs. That center coordinated work by smaller units of one or two faculty members in a variety

of other locations in the state of New York: Binghamton, Plattsburgh, Oneonta, and Watertown.

We soon had several thousand diverse students enrolled in all these varied locations, pursuing creative degree programs and learning contracts. Their work not only included their own reading and writing, but also courses at other institutions and systematic use of ongoing experiential contexts that were part of their families, jobs, or community activities. It became readily apparent that quality assurance across all this diversity was necessary – the diverse student population, diverse educational contracts and programs, and diverse locations. To oversee this, we hired Al Serling to direct the Office of Program

Review and Assessment; Al had been at Educational Testing Service. Myrna Miller, a former faculty member, became the associate director. Their job was to review the degree programs and learning contracts that came to our central records office. If blatant problems recurred for particular faculty members, they called the appropriate associate dean and raised the issue. They could not second-guess or turn back approved contracts, but they could flag them and share the questions they had. This delicate and sensitive work helped even out the expectations across the institution without intruding heavily on local judgments by the deans and faculty members. These were the basic elements of Empire State College during the early 1970s.

Found Things

“Thanks for the Memory”

With Words by Unidentified SUNY Empire State College Mentors (undated)

“Thanks for the Memory” was composed by Ralph Rainger with lyrics by Leo Robin. Written in 1937, the song was included in the film, The Big Broadcast of 1938, starring Bob Hope and Shirley Ross. Many others (including Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney and Ella Fitzgerald) recorded it, as well. Here, we have a new set of lyrics (done decades ago) to that famous tune, found by our colleague, Xenia Coulter, written by some unknown ESC mentors.

Thanks for the memory
of student-mentor talk;
discourse without chalk,
portfolios and LCO’s and
students in the throes.

How lovely it was.

Thanks for the memory
of desks seldom clean,
the jammed Xerox machine,
BA degrees, BS degrees, and
memos from the dean.

How lovely it was.

Many the hours we were spending in
meetings that seemed never ending,
our ideas never quite blending;
few point were won but we had fun,
and thanks for the memory
of contracts by the score,
degree programs galore.

It might have been a headache
but it never was a bore.

So thank you so much.

Remembering Our Colleagues

We are so lucky to be a part of a community of mentors and teachers – a community of colleagues. So many people have offered our students, and given all of us, their ideas, energy, insights, care and knowledge. Here, in this necessarily limited way, we acknowledge those who have been so important to everything we try to do at SUNY Empire State College. We remember and thank them.

JOHN BENNETT

John “Bill” Bennett, a mentor at The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies between 1980 and 1995, died on August 15, 2017. John taught labor history at ESC and earlier at Indiana University, and was involved in the labor movement over many decades.

John was the labor historian for the Pioneer Valley Central Labor Council and an executive board member of Western Massachusetts Jobs with Justice. Later in his life, John donated a large collection of labor memorabilia to UMass Amherst that became The John W. Bennett Labor Memorabilia Collection.

GEORGE BRAGLE

George Bragle, who died on June 20, 2017, was a founding mentor of both ESC’s Center for Statewide Programs and Extended Programs, which served as the foundation for the college’s Center for Distance Learning. George came to ESC in 1973 and served on many college governance committees, including as chair of the senate. George was not only a Fulbright Scholar, but earned five masters degrees (including degrees in criminal justice and theology) and an Ed.D. in English education and curriculum from the University at Albany (SUNY). After his retirement from ESC in 1997, George taught in the theology department at Siena College, took classes in Hebrew, and went on a number of trips to Athens and Tirana to work with ESC’s International Education students.

MARGARET EVANS

Margaret “Marnie” Evans, longtime director of academic review at the then Metropolitan Center (Metro), died on June 10, 2018.

Marnie came to ESC as a tutor in European history in 1990, soon after became Metro’s assessment person, and, over many years (she retired in 2014), worked with students in the area of women’s studies. Marnie served as an educator at Kirkland College, Kenyon College, Hollins University, New York University and at ESC, and, for decades, was regularly engaged with local political causes and campaigns for social justice. Very significant was her work with The Church of the Holy Apostles community in New York City, especially its soup kitchen that she was so instrumental in forming and sustaining.

MARILYN GWALTNEY

Marilyn E. Gwaltney, longtime mentor at the then Niagara Frontier Center who came to ESC as a Lilly fellow in 1977, died on December 9, 2017. Marilyn earned her Ph.D. in philosophy from the State University of New York at Buffalo with a dissertation that focused on the concept of alienation in the work of Kierkegaard. She was a Fulbright Senior Scholar in India where she focused on Indian culture, particularly as it affected women. Her longstanding and deep interest in ethics led her to explore ethics and economic justice and, so presciently, the ethical implications of technology.

LESLIE JARVIS

Leslie Jarvis, retired (2013) mentor in Business, Management and Economics, and husband of our colleague Patricia Lefor, died on May 16, 2017 at home in St. Louis, Missouri. Leslie, who joined the college in 1986, was an economist who earned an M.A. at the University of Wisconsin, and a Ph.D. in econometrics from The New School for Social Research. He worked with students at both ESC’s Long Island and Albany locations, as

well as the college’s FORUM program (the first blended residency program at ESC, which sought to attract employees of business and public sector organizations).

TROY JONES

Troy Jones worked as a mentor at ESC’s Staten Island location from 2012 until his death on November 1, 2018. Enthusiastically dedicated to his students, Troy not only offered studies in many areas of education, as well as in children’s literature and statistics; he also developed informal internship programs in Harlem so that his students could have new learning experiences within the New York City public schools. He earned his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from Virginia Tech; previously taught at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina; and before that, in a Florida elementary school. Troy was a “reading” specialist whose dedication to his students was felt by all.

WILLIAM McCLARY

William “Bill” McClary, longtime former part-time mentor at Empire State College, died on May 28, 2018. Bill had been affiliated with the Center for Distance Learning and with International Education for more than 30 years, including time with ESC’s program in Cyprus in the 1980s. A school principal and, later, a General Electric marketing professional, Bill worked with students at ESC in the area of marketing. Bill was also a caring and enthusiastic spokesperson for the core values and practices of mentoring at a distance, and for attention to the interests and goals of each student.

ISAAC RABINO

Isaac Rabino was a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor and mentor in the biological and health sciences at the then Metropolitan Center. Isaac, who earned his Ph.D. in cellular and developmental biology, came to the college in 1985 and retired in 2009. He responded

to his students' interests by developing and facilitating an annual symposium focusing on science policy that drew upon experts in the environmental, health and public policy spheres. In 1996, Isaac received ESC's Foundation Award for Excellence in Scholarship, much of which focused on his studies on scientists' attitudes on the impact of their research on public policy and on controversial societal issues of the day.

MARJORIE ROBISON

ESC alumna and mentor Marjorie "Marj" Robison died on May 2, 2017 in New Haven, Connecticut. After obtaining an undergraduate degree in religion at Barnard College, Marj completed a second bachelor's degree in math at ESC, and in 1995, earned an M.A. in Social Policy. She soon began to work as a mentor with students in math, a commitment she continued for the Center for Distance Learning until just two weeks before her death. Marj was an important contributor to many early CDL courses and made significant efforts over many years to create innovative ways to teach online.

MEL ROSENTHAL

Mel Rosenthal, mentor in The Arts for nearly 40 years, and SUNY Distinguished Service Professor, died on October 30, 2017. Mel, whose Ph.D. was in English literature and American studies, co-founded ESC's photography program and, with his seminal book of photographs, *In the South Bronx of America* (Curbstone Press, 2000), became a significant American photojournalist. His many works on lives shaped by social change in the American city; on the world of immigrants and refugees; and on life in Nicaragua, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Vietnam have been shown in galleries and major museum exhibits. Mel, who retired in 2007, was also one of the founders of the Triage Project, a collective of photographers, doctors and writers documenting homelessness and the health care crisis in New York City. We are so pleased that some of Mel's important photographic work was featured in *All About Mentoring* #50.

Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of SUNY Empire State College reflect the commitments of a dynamic, participatory and experimenting institution accessible and dedicated to the needs of a richly diverse adult student body. These values are woven into the decisions we make about what we choose to do, how we carry out our work in all parts of the institution, and how we judge the outcome of our individual and collective efforts. More than a claim about what we have already attained, the core values support our continuing inquiry about what learning means and how it occurs.

We value learning-mentoring goals that:

- respond to the academic, professional and personal needs of each student;
- identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills;
- sustain lifelong curiosity and critical inquiry;

- provide students with skills, insights and competencies that support successful college study.

We value learning-mentoring processes that:

- emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study;
- support critical exploration of knowledge and experience;
- provide opportunities for active, reflective and creative academic engagement.

We value learning-mentoring modes that:

- respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests and circumstances;
- foster self-direction, independence and reflective inquiry;
- provide opportunities for ongoing questioning and revising;
- reflect innovation and research.

We value a learning-mentoring community that:

- defines each member as a learner, encouraging and appreciating his/her distinctive contributions;
- recognizes that learning occurs in multiple communities, environments and relationships as well as in formal academic settings;
- attracts, respects and is enriched by a wide range of people, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

We value a learning-mentoring organization and culture that:

- invites collaboration in the multiple contexts of our work;
- fosters innovation and experimentation;
- develops structures and policies that encourage active participation of all constituents in decision-making processes;
- advocates for the interests of adult learners in a variety of academic and civic forums.

SUBMISSIONS TO *ALL ABOUT MENTORING*

If you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you have presented, *All About Mentoring* would welcome it. If you developed materials for your students that may be of good use to others, or have a comment on any part of this issue, or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please send them along.

If you have a short story, poem, drawings or photographs, or have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, *All About Mentoring* would like to include them in an upcoming issue.

Email submissions to Alan.Mandell@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are no longer than 7,500 words.) It is easiest if materials are sent via email to Mandell as Microsoft Word attachments. In terms of references and style, *All About Mentoring* uses APA rules (please see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th ed. [Washington, DC: APA, 2010] or http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM_APA_update_2010.pdf).

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