

# CARLOW ROUNDTABLE 2008 PROCEEDINGS



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# Contents

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- 3** Preface  
*Mary C. Rothenberger, EdD, Carlow University*
- 4** Introduction  
*Sister Sheila Carney, RSM, Carlow University*
- 6** Assessing Catholic Identity and Mercy Heritage at a Mercy Institution  
*E. Suzanne Lee, PhD, Saint Xavier University*  
*Pamela Klick, MA, Saint Xavier University*
- 15** Hill Street Blues: Are You Serving Your Underserved Population?  
*Christina Shorall, EdD, Carlow University*
- 27** Demonstrating the Mercy Mission and Applying Service Learning through  
A Community-Academic Partnership  
*Kathleen Zajic, RN, MSN, College of St. Mary*
- 31** A Signature of a Mercy Education: The New Gen Ed Curriculum at Gwynedd-Mercy College  
*Thomas Gilmore, MEngr, Gwynedd-Mercy College*
- 40** Reflecting the Hallmarks of Mercy Education through a Structured Mentoring Program  
*Constance J. Hardy, Saint Xavier University*
- 44** Implementation of Mission and Core Values into Clinical Teaching  
*Pamela Klick, MA, CCC-SLP/L, Saint Xavier University*
- 55** Fashioning Voice/s: Dialogue, Reflexivity, and Disorienting Dilemma  
*Martha H. Ezzell, PhD, Carlow University*
- 62** Sharing Your Voice: Building Community through the Use of Self-Disclosure in the  
Feminist Classroom  
*Ellen J. Dehouske, PhD, Carlow University*  
*Dee Griffin Flaherty, PhD, Carlow University*

# Preface

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MARY C. ROTHENBERGER, EdD, CARLOW UNIVERSITY

Carlow University, the first Catholic, women-centered, liberal arts university in Pennsylvania, prepares their primarily female students for competent leadership and compassionate service in personal and professional life. Carlow University is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas through the Conference for Mercy Higher Education. This Conference comprises 16 Mercy sponsored colleges and universities and was created for “the preservation and development of the core Catholic identity and mission of Mercy higher education in accord with the spirit, mission, and heritage of the Sisters of Mercy.” (CMHE Mission Statement)

The Carlow University Round Table was conceived in May of 2007 as an opportunity for collaboration and collegial exchange among Mercy institutions. Although each Mercy institution has its own culture, every Mercy institution shares the same heritage. The second Carlow Round Table was held in May of 2008 and addressed the question: “*How does our pedagogy reflect the hallmarks of Mercy Education?*” For both conferences, we returned to our founding roots in Ireland.

Presenters at the 2008 Round Table were invited to submit an abstract addressing one of the four hallmarks of a Mercy education as outlined in the *Conference for Mercy Higher Education White Paper: Culture and Characteristics*, 6/13/2006. These hallmarks are as follows:

1. Regard for the dignity of the person
2. Academic excellence and lifelong learning
3. Education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit
4. Promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children

The writings in this publication reflect an exchange of ideas, information, and methodologies among scholars from diverse disciplines and research backgrounds who hold a common interest in Mercy education.

Mary C. Rothenberger, PhD  
Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School  
Carlow University

## Introduction

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SISTER SHEILA CARNEY, RSM, CARLOW UNIVERSITY

“In the long ago in Ireland, there lived a famous warrior named Fin mac Cumhail.” With these words, participants in the 2008 Carlow Round Table were introduced to the legend of the Salmon of Knowledge. In this tale, Finn is sent to study with a famous teacher who lives on the shores of a lake. In this water swims a magical, elusive salmon and the person who catches and eats it is promised the wisdom of the world. One day, the teacher finally catches the salmon and entrusts it to Finn to cook, carefully warning him not eat of it. But Finn burns his finger on the fish, absentmindedly puts the finger to his mouth, and receives the gifts of magic, insight, and the power of words. With this story, participants entered the experience of tasting and savoring the knowledge and insights that each contributed to Round Table.

This mythical approach continued as Marie Martin, from Omagh, Northern Ireland, adjunct faculty at Carlow University presented her keynote address, “Learning by Wandering, Using Technology to Nourish the Spirit.” In a context of tales and images from Irish folklore, Marie raised the question of how can we allow technology to take us to new places and new visions in service of learning; how can we use technology to express the longings of our spirits? Her challenge to Mercy educators was to recapture the sense of spirituality as the basis for education.

The round table was gifted by a return visit from Sister Thomasina Finn, RSM, a member of the leadership team of the South Central Province of the Irish Sisters of Mercy. The spiritual dimension of education was a primary theme of her presentation as well, as she reflected on the role of education in serving the country’s spiritual needs and expressed concern over the commoditization of education for economic purposes.

Presentations by participants covered a range of topics in response to the question at the heart of the roundtable: How does our pedagogy reflect the marks of a Mercy education? This question was prodded through reflections on listening and finding voice through qualitative inquiry and through self disclosure in a feminist classroom, on serving underserved populations, on methods of assessing our Catholic identity and Mercy heritage, on bringing Mercy values to the study and practice of speech pathology, on the creation of a culture of compassionate caring, on partnerships which provide practical experience of living our values with one’s field of study, and on how a Gen-Ed curriculum can be structured to reflect what is at the core of a Mercy education.

A presentation on the life and spirit of Frances Warde, a tour of St. Leo’s Convent of Mercy, and tea with the sisters there enlivened the understanding of the Carlow roots of the participating institutions. Gracious and welcoming as always, the sisters regaled the group with stories to supplement the information given on the formal tour. Reflecting on this visit, one participant remarked that she felt she had been “in the presence of greatness.”

Another dimension of the round table experience was a “field trip” in the literal sense—visits to a stone circle and a dolmen which quietly attest to their prehistoric origins from the fields in which they are situated.

This day also took the group to Glendalough and the remains of a 5th century monastic city associated with St. Kevin—one of the mystical “thin places” of Ireland where the barriers between the natural and supernatural worlds are permeable and allow easy passage back and forth between these realms.

The days in Carlow came to an end with reflection on the experience of gathering from Mercy sponsored colleges and universities and plumbing together the varied and creative ways that participants have been able to infuse their courses and activities with the spirit and values of Mercy education. Reflection led to imagining new modes of collaboration and of strengthening one another in the role of Mercy educator. Among the suggestions that surfaced were:

- shared study abroad programs
- online courses offered in a virtual “Mercy” environment
- lobbying for “education friendly” legislation
- faculty exchanges either semester long or virtual visits through video conferencing
- virtual collaborative learning communities
- collaborative purchasing group
- student exchanges
- shared low-residency programs

In the long ago in Ireland there lived a woman named Catherine McAuley. The round table began with the legend of a mythic hero and ended in an experience with the founder of the Sisters of Mercy. Participants traveled to Dublin for a morning at Mercy International Centre where they had the opportunity to tour the building that Catherine built to house her ministries, visit her grave, and share tea with the sisters there. In the story of Finn mac Cumhail, the great salmon swims in a lake waiting to be found. The rill that flows through the garden at the Centre reminded us of how the gift of Mercy education, which began in this holy place, has flowed forth, providing enrichment and opportunity that we have all savored and that we seek to enliven and renew through our efforts. The following papers offer insights into some of the myriad ways in which that is happening throughout the world of Mercy education.

# Assessing Catholic Identity and Mercy Heritage at a Mercy Institution

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E. SUZANNE LEE, PhD, AND PAMELA KLICK, MA, SAINT XAVIER UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

The University Mission and Heritage Committee at Saint Xavier University conducted focus groups across campus to measure the extent to which faculty, staff, and administrators experienced Catholic identity and Mercy heritage. By including all employees of the University, the Committee attempted to respect the dignity of each person's role and contribution to the institution, regardless of rank or status. The primary goal of this project was to utilize a scholarly process to produce research-based evidence so changes could be made toward a more just and caring working environment reflective of Catholic identity and Mercy heritage. Queries pertained to individuals' expectations prior to employment at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage, experiences that matched individuals' expectations, experiences that did not match perceptions of what is expected to happen at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage, and ideas for perpetuating and creating an environment reflective of the best of what a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage has to offer. Following completion of the focus groups, data were thematically analyzed and compiled into a report presented to each division of the University. This process embodied characteristics of academic excellence and set the stage for continuous assessment feedback loops to promote institutional lifelong learning. This presentation will consist of the following: 1) Formation of the Mission and Heritage Committee; 2) Methodology: Assessing the Catholic tradition and Mercy heritage within the University; 3) Analysis, Outcomes, and Implementation; 4) Benefits experienced by the University Mission and Heritage Committee as a result of this process; and 5) Future Directions.

## BACKGROUND

Estanek, James, and Norton have noted that assessment has been a primary focus of universities and colleges in America over the past thirty years as a result of initiatives set by the United States Department of Education (1999). According to these authors, the emergence of accrediting associations for institutions of higher learning and for specific disciplines within those institutions has resulted in requirements for specification of outcomes of teaching and learning. Institutions have been ultimately required to collect and analyze data to ensure that identified goals were being achieved and to demonstrate the means through which this was being accomplished.

Consistent with this emphasis on assessment in secular universities and colleges, Estanek, James, and Norton reported that Catholic institutions of higher learning were also urged to review their assessment processes and, specifically, to identify the unique characteristics that defined their Catholic identity (201). This renewed interest in defining the Catholicity of Catholic universities and colleges surfaced in the mid 1980s and was further emphasized through the publication of a number of documents, most notably, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the papal encyclical published by Pope John Paul II in 1990.



## BUILDING BLOCKS OF A VISION—A LIFE UNFOLDING

Historically, the overwhelming presence of men and women religious in administrative and academic roles on college campuses had maintained institutions' Catholic identity and spiritual culture. Because of the declining enrollment of new members in religious communities and the aging of those already committed to religious life (two factors that specifically characterize the founding organization of our own University, the Sisters of Mercy) Catholic institutions can no longer rely on the religious presence alone to maintain Catholic identity. (Morey and Holtschneider<sup>20</sup>).

Pope John Paul II further addresses the issue of Catholicity in his encyclical, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, in which he prompts Catholic institutions to maintain a majority of Catholic faculty members, a "critical mass," in an effort to sustain Catholic identity. Sullins supports the idea of critical mass, affirming that a majority of committed Catholic faculty members improves the religious identity of a university (99). Maintaining a majority of Catholic faculty, however, has been a challenging endeavor for Catholic institutions for a variety of reasons. McGreevy suggests that the small number of tenure-track faculty identifying themselves as Catholic is an issue in maintaining a critical mass (6). In addition, Aheame-Knoll conjectures that religious affiliation does not guarantee knowledge of Catholic precepts, understanding of Church teachings, or even a willingness to support the Catholic traditions of the institution (22).

Bonewits states that many Catholic institutions of higher learning have engaged faculty, administrators and trustees in meaningful discussions to address this issue of Catholic identity (68). For Catholic colleges and universities, these discussions frequently resulted in revisiting the religious heritage of the institutions, as well as revising organizational mission statements, creating Catholic identity statements, and identifying core values. Bonewits further notes that an organization's mission statement is closely tied to its culture (71) and that ultimately, the heritage and governing documents of a university lead to a refinement of the unique culture of an institution.

## SUSTAINING THE CULTURE

The question remains, however, as to who will sustain the culture of Catholic institutions of higher learning. Bonewits purports that "organizations cannot simply incorporate spirituality in a mission statement: it must exist in practice" (79). Furthermore, Morey and Holtschneider propose that "lay professionals will need to internalize the spirituality and the culture of the founding "community" as well as "to become the bearers who nurture, sustain, and pass on the tradition" (20). These authors also purport that "if Catholic institutions want a nonsecular future, they must construct serious and sustained formative experiences for their lay faculty, staff, and administrators" (23).

Sheridan states the following:

"If there is to be a Catholic future in Catholic colleges and universities, those concerned and involved must be able to do three things: 1) Differentiate the elements that constitute a rich coherent Catholic culture from those that dissipate it; 2) Be adept at identifying new actions or strategies that will strengthen the Catholic culture; and 3) Be capable and willing to promote these new actions and strategies over a long period of time within their institutions" (Morey and Piderit, as cited in Sheridan [118]).

Gentry-Akin references Morey and Piderit in their discussion of “distinguishability” and “inheritability” as the “two minimum conditions necessary for sustaining any culture” (112). “Distinguishability” is defined as “the readily apparent differences between a specific culture and other competing cultures and a necessary condition for a vibrant culture” and “inheritability” is defined as the ways of acting in a specific culture that assure authentic cultural assimilation by new groups that enter that culture” (Morey and Piderit, as cited in Gentry-Akin [112]).

In summary, in order for Catholic institutions to maintain their Catholic identities, those institutions must identify the unique characteristics that qualify the Catholicity of the institution; they must discuss that identity with all members of the university community, including administrators, faculty, and staff; and individual university members must work together to perpetuate an institutional culture that is truly reflective of its mission and heritage.

## **AN INSTITUTION’S RESPONSE: FORMATION OF THE UNIVERSITY MISSION AND HERITAGE COMMITTEE**

In light of the need for a broad-based university assessment of institutional mission and core values, and, subsequently, the need to engage the University community in discussions of Catholic identity and Mercy heritage, the vice president of the Office for Mission and Heritage at our University convened a committee to address these issues. She envisioned a membership that consisted of faculty and staff representing all schools/colleges of the institution as well as a cross section of the remaining units of the organizational chart. The committee began with finding a leader with experience in assessing Catholic institutional mission so that the committee goals could be actualized. The vice president articulated the committee goals as follows:

- Take inventory of what is currently being done on campus to further mission and core values
- Articulate what SXU would be doing if it were fully living out its mission and core values, and
- Develop a means by which we can assess our movement toward fully living out our mission and core values

Once the goals were established, the vice president, in collaboration with the newly appointed chair of the University Mission and Heritage Committee, sought to identify possible community members who had shown an interest and/or inclination toward such work. Thus, five individuals representing the faculty and staff came together to conceive of the best means to accomplish the defined goals. The members articulated ways in which they personally experienced or did not experience the core values, Catholicity, and Mercy tradition of the institution. These experiences were shared during committee meetings and documented to track the extent and variation of expression of core values, Catholicity, and Mercy tradition. Each committee meeting was structured to include a planned formal reflection consisting of a reading, poem, story, scripture, or meditation. The reflection was designed to meet members’ needs to express their emotional and spiritual selves, to build community and connection among the members, and to put other thoughts and distractions aside to focus on the work at hand. The original membership felt strongly that this process aligned with their vision of how a meeting should begin in an institution identified as Catholic and Mercy. The reflection was followed by an oral review of the committee goals as stated on each agenda. Following the review, each committee member shared their experiences since the last meeting, identifying ways in which they did and/or did not experience the core values, Catholic identity,

and Mercy heritage at the institution. The committee came to the conclusion that all members of the University community, including faculty, staff, and administrators, should have a similar format to share their experiences of core values, Catholic identity, and Mercy heritage. The focus group format was easily identified as a vehicle not only to allow the participation of the University community, but also to collect data that would ultimately be used to affect change to further the Catholic identity and Mercy heritage at the University.

## **METHODOLOGY: ASSESSING CATHOLIC IDENTITY AND MERCY HERITAGE**

### **Focus Group Process**

To educate all committee members about focus group protocol and procedures, the committee chair provided a chapter describing focus groups for all members to read for discussion. The major facet of focus group format that was identified by the committee was that each session would be facilitated by one member of the committee and that member, when possible, would be assisted by a second member who was responsible for copious note taking of participant responses. Guidelines identified for the facilitator included restricting comments to reflect participants' contributions, rather than imparting personal judgments about any of the responses to the questions. In addition the facilitator was to ask questions for the sole purpose of gaining clarity and/or for probing for additional information. Reflective listening was discussed as a strategy for the facilitator to utilize to gain additional information and insight into the participants' experiences. All focus group participants were ensured that the facilitator and recorder would keep all information gained during focus groups confidential.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The committee utilized the University's organizational chart to ensure that all members of the University were offered the opportunity to share their experiences. The seven divisions of the University's organizational chart included: Student Services; Business and Finance; Academic Affairs; University Advancement; University Relations; Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment; and Mission and Heritage. The committee provided a space for the focus group meeting where participants could be honest and open about their experiences. The confidentiality of the participants was protected. The groupings were arranged by a committee member and with the vice president of each division. It was critical to identify University members of similar status who were able to work together amenably, in an effort to limit any potential feelings of judgment or animosity.

### **Focus Group Questions**

The committee created the questions that would be asked of each focus group. The questions centered on personal experiences and feelings about Catholic identity and Mercy heritage. The committee identified follow-up probes for each question to ensure that both Catholic identity and Mercy heritage would be considered. The following five questions were identified:

1. What do you expect when you work at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage?

2. Have your expectations been met? If so, how?
3. Even if you did not have an expectation of what it would be like to work at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage, what have you experienced that you think is indicative of what one should expect at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage?
4. What have you experienced that is not indicative of what you should expect when working at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage?
5. What should SXU do to enhance your positive experiences and/or decrease your negative experiences so that your work here is indicative of what you think it should be, given we are a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage?

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Each focus group was asked to complete a form documenting demographic data at the conclusion of the focus group. Completion of demographic sheets was voluntary and confidentiality was ensured as participants placed the sheets face down in the middle of the table prior to leaving the session. The demographics included: years of employment; age; ethnicity; religious preference (practice and tradition); and faith-based, Catholic, or Mercy experience.

## ANALYSIS

The University Mission and Heritage Committee conducted approximately 40 focus groups within the seven major divisions of the institution. Upon completion of each focus group, the facilitator or recorder for that group compiled the data into a document to be shared with the other committee members. Once all focus groups for a particular division were completed, committee members began thematic analysis. The Office for Mission and Heritage sponsored a two-day retreat in order to complete the first round of analyses. The retreat provided a venue for separation from the routine demands and distractions of university life. The agenda of the two-day retreat included meditation, reflection, fellowship, rest, and sharing of meals, which fostered the relationships of the committee members and enhanced personal growth. Ultimately, the retreat agenda allowed the time for thematic analysis to be clear, focused, and highly productive. Themes and patterns were identified for each question, and the committee generated each division's report. The report was then reviewed during a University Mission and Heritage Committee meeting. This process of analyzing the data was done in a similar fashion for each division. Two divisions were combined, thus producing five distinct reports reflecting the experiences of the University community as a whole.

Once the reports were reviewed and finalized, the vice president for Mission and Heritage set up meetings with the division vice presidents. Committee members along with the vice president of Mission and Heritage assumed responsibility to meet with individual vice presidents in small groups for the purpose of sharing the results from their respective divisions. Cover letters and written reports were disseminated to each division to identify the most positive and challenging issues for the division. Each vice president received their report at least one week in advance of the meeting.



## OUTCOMES OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The results of this process identified people's expectations, factors that were already in place to celebrate positive aspects of the institution, areas of need that if addressed may better fulfill the Catholic identity and Mercy heritage of the University, and possible changes to increase identity and heritage. All division meetings resulted in potential ideas for programming and focus for that division. The vice presidents were considerate of the information and truly concerned that the employees under their direction experienced the best of what it could mean to work at a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage. Examples of use of the reports included but were not limited to the following: 1) using the report during staff meetings to discuss issues and concerns; 2) sending the report to the leadership team for that division to share the data and brainstorm regarding each team member's area; 3) considering ways in which his/her staff might increase their understanding of Catholic identity and Mercy heritage; and 4) looking at ways to continue the feelings of community and family that were articulated as positive for the employees in that division. The University Mission and Heritage Committee was clear in each meeting that the Office for Mission and Heritage was available for programming and assistance and would consistently and consciously continue support and collaboration with the division in order to further Catholic identity and Mercy heritage.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE MISSION AND HERITAGE

In addition to the desire for the results to be utilized by each division, the committee and the Office for Mission and Heritage were committed to responding to themes drawn from the data across campus. To that end, many strategies were implemented throughout the course of the data collection and in response to the analysis.

Strategies for enhancing the positive experiences and decreasing the negative experiences of members of the Saint Xavier community were initially explored and implemented by the committee members in order to better align the community with the University Mission, Catholic tradition, and Mercy heritage. The committee agreed that early implementation was important to verify to members of focus groups that positive actions and modifications were occurring as a result of their participation and contributions. Therefore, the first action plan was completed simultaneously with the completion of the first focus groups. The committee members discussed various actions that would benefit a large number of University members, and that would also enlighten the community about the work of the committee. As a result, a daily reflection is posted each morning on the Saint Xavier University Web page designed to provide employees with information about the University. Reflections could be in the form of a prayer, poem, devotion, or reading, and are invited from University community members on a regular basis. The committee felt that this format would involve individuals within the community and also serve to touch individuals on a regular basis. Submissions are made to a designated committee member who collaborates with the University Web master to add the reflection to the daily posting of *Saint Xavier Today*. That committee member is responsible for collecting and reviewing the submissions, as well as selecting the daily posting. The committee discussed numerous options for a title for the project, and decided that *Illuminations of the Heart* appropriately reflects the spirit and purpose of this endeavor. The project has resulted in both overwhelming participation of faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as positive feedback to the committee.

Additional suggestions from focus group participants were also put into practice. Examples of actions included but were not limited to the following: 1) expansion of the Staff Orientation Program to provide information specific to the Catholic tradition and Mercy heritage of Saint Xavier University; 2) ensuring that crosses are displayed in every classroom, as opposed to a small selection of classrooms; 3) posting of prayer boards on which University employees could list names of family, friends, or acquaintances who may be in need of spiritual support; and 4) coordination and participation in additional events for Mercy Day—particularly events that emphasize the tradition and heritage of the University. The committee agreed that the implementation of suggestions should be an ongoing responsibility for the committee and strategies for fostering the Catholic tradition and Mercy heritage have continued to be initiated at Saint Xavier University.

## **BENEFITS EXPERIENCED BY THE COMMITTEE**

As the committee and the Office for Mission and Heritage worked to increase the profile of what it means to be Catholic and Mercy, the committee members recognized many benefits that were natural byproducts of participation in this project. The building of relationships among the committee members and throughout the University community was a bonus to assessing the Catholic identity and Mercy heritage of the institution. The committee members were able to deepen their relationships as they spent hours dialoguing about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences while facilitating and/or recording the focus groups, processing the responses, and analyzing the data. Committee members were aware that they would not have met so many individuals from across the university had they not been involved in this research. They frequently commented about how they felt fortunate to meet members of the University community regardless of how they differed by division, rank, or status. Each focus group shared insights and personal experiences that caused committee members to pause and consider ways in which others were experiencing the institution. Their reflective pauses helped them to become increasingly aware, empathetic, and concerned when the institution was not living up to what one might expect in the best of Catholic and Mercy, and likewise, increasingly aware, joyful, and thankful when the institutional experience was living up to and/or surpassing what one might expect in the best of Catholic and Mercy. In hearing both positive and negative experiences, the committee members were cognizant of their responsibility in these relationships to respect anonymity and confidentiality and to share the commitment of the committee to respond to some of their concerns. This common experience, the commitment to the research approach, and the belief in the relevance of the project, coalesced and appeared to strengthen the bonds of the many relationships that developed.

The content of the project continued to bring each of the committee members back to what it meant to be Catholic and Mercy. Consequently, this forced them to identify ways in which they were and/or were not experiencing expectations of a Catholic institution with a Mercy heritage. Many of the conversations of the committee members involved comparing and contrasting their own experiences and beliefs with those of other people in the University. This reflection led to an inner deepening and personal spiritual considerations. The building of relationships was an outward sign of the benefit of the project, whereas the inner reflection and consideration of thoughts and feelings was an inward sign of the benefit of the project.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To date, focus groups have been offered to all administrators, faculty, and staff employed at the University, data have been analyzed and strategies have been implemented; yet, the work of the committee continues to evolve. Regular meetings continue to occur for the purpose of identifying additional areas of need within the University and exploring additional methods of implementing suggestions from the data for increasing positive experiences and decreasing negative experiences. The committee continues to brainstorm alternative strategies for addressing the outcomes of the project. One of the major projects to be developed in the future is exploration of a means to include student data. As a result, the committee is considering the logistics of offering participation in focus groups to students at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. This may be a challenging task as the Saint Xavier student body has traditionally included a large number of students who commute, as well as students who reside in various on-campus and off-campus housing facilities. The committee continues to abide by the philosophy that all members of the University should have a voice in sharing experiences and ideas for fostering the Catholic tradition and Mercy heritage, and thus, it fully anticipates that this goal will be addressed during the next academic year.

Finally, as the work of the committee has evolved, so too has the committee membership. The vice president for Mission and Heritage continues to stress the importance of limiting terms to a three-year maximum and to the importance of providing members with a choice for continued participation. Additionally, the committee strives to maintain a balance of faculty and staff members, as well as to include faculty from the various schools and colleges. Since the inception of the committee, three of the original members have moved on to other institutions, and two additional members are scheduled to rotate off of the committee to pursue other areas of scholarship and service. The committee continues to extend invitations to University employees who may have an interest and commitment to fostering Catholic identity and Mercy heritage at Saint Xavier University.

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# Hill Street Blues: Are You Serving Your Underserved Population?

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CHRISTINA SHORALL, EdD, CARLOW UNIVERSITY

## INTRODUCTION

Academic prowess is no longer the hallmark of the college-bound individual. As increasing numbers of high school graduates come to realize that a higher degree is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of living, university faculty are often faced with academically unprepared populations. I teach in the location that inspired the television series *Hill Street Blues*. Many of my students come from low-income or impoverished households or are single mothers living in poverty. While most are motivated to change the course of their lives, many do not have the skills necessary to succeed academically.

Most institutions of higher learning have made an effort to serve the academically underserved student. Programs for academic success and remediation exist to assist students with difficulties in the basics of comprehension, writing, and study skills. While laudable, these efforts in and of themselves are not enough. Course instructors play a fundamental role. By observing students, professors can assess students' level of motivation and take adequate measures to encourage and provide opportunities to increase this fundamental aspect of learning.

Ideally, motivation to succeed should be intrinsic. Educators create this by providing assignments that enhance self-worth, encourage autonomy, and capitalize upon the human need for relatedness. By definition, underserved populations' interests and needs have not been met in the traditional academic realm. By using assignments that tap into students' distinctive culture, background, or area of expertise, teachers heighten motivation propelling students further into academic endeavors.

## UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS: ESTABLISHING THE NEED

Underserved populations are traditionally those who receive inadequate care from the health system due to geographic, demographic, or economic circumstances (Weitz, 2000). Higher education also has underserved populations: individuals who arrive at the institution without the necessary prerequisite skills, supportive role models, and required cultural capital essential to graduate. These are the at-risk students, who due to their resiliency, managed to persevere academically through the K-12 system. In the K-12 setting, poverty is most frequently the culprit. School performance correlates with socioeconomic statuses (SES). Students with high socioeconomic status are more apt to have higher academic achievement; those with low socioeconomic status are at risk for dropping out (Lee and Bowen, 2006). Students with low SES fall further and further behind their more wealthy peers as they progress through the grade levels (Jimerson, Egeland, and Teo, 1999). When researchers track achievement discrepancies among students from various ethnic groups, the differences in their socioeconomic status, as opposed to their cultural and ethnic differences, are to blame (Murdock, 2000).

Underserved populations often also experience cultural mismatch with regard to their home environment and the university setting. This psychological inconsistency further deters students who may already be struggling academically. The graduation rate nationwide for African American students in higher education is 43 percent below the 63 percentage rate for white students (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2007). Latinos graduate at a rate of 47 percent and Native Americans 37 percent. Most of the first-time, degree-seeking students who manage to graduate from a four-year institution take six years to complete their program of study (Carey, 2005).

Nationally, the focus of education during the 21st century rests upon the ability for the United States to compete in the global economy; therefore, the failure of possible graduates comes at an inopportune time (Spring, 2007). While America previously provided the most educated workforce, our current rate of graduation has not notably increased. Meanwhile, Canada, Great Britain, Japan, and Korea, countries that traditionally ranked below the United States in terms of college graduates, now have significantly increased the rate of those graduating from higher education institutions with a BA. The well-compensated jobs that require extensive knowledge and skills may now, for the first time, be possible careers for those in countries that previously lagged behind us educationally (Carey, 2006).

## **MOTIVATION AFFECTS SUCCESS**

Eminent psychiatrist Dr. S. Blanton stated, “The truth is that all of us attain the greatest success and happiness in this life whenever we use our native capacities to their greatest extent (Blanton, 1958). Educational psychologists would credit the correctness of this phenomenon to motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Humans typically choose to engage in activities in which they excel, and excellence in achievement is significantly impacted by prior knowledge (Sternberg and Detterman 1986). The more individuals know about an undertaking, the more intelligently they will behave. The more personally satisfying that experience, the more apt one is to pursue similar experiences in the future (Ormrod, 2008).

Underserved populations have characteristically not had the educational experiences that lead to success. Their past experiences often lead to rejection of formal schooling, as opposed to its pursuit (Martin, Marsh, and Debus, 2001). However, educators can create learning opportunities that capitalize on students’ backgrounds by drawing upon the three key factors which impact psychological well-being: self-worth, autonomy, and relatedness. By linking students’ prior experiences with these three basic psychological needs, educators can profoundly impact their students’ motivation, well-being, and success.

## **CARLOW’S POPULATION**

Carlow University is a primarily women’s centered institution in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1929, the goal of the school was to continue the mission of Mercy founder, Catherine McAuley. McAuley, who was herself a victim of poverty after the death of both of her parents, became the fortunate recipient of a fortune at the age of 44. With her inherited wealth she built a house that was used as both a school for children and a shelter for girls in need.

McAuley's belief that education could enhance the lives of women and children living in poverty continues to this day at the 16 Mercy educational institutions. Approximately 95 percent of the women attending Carlow University receive financial aid. A portion of those recipients reside in Pittsburgh neighborhoods that are categorized as poverty stricken and characterized by crime. The Hill District, romanticized by the '80s television show *Hill Street Blues*, is one such neighborhood. Single mothers and their children who reside in the Hill, and neighborhoods like it, make up the majority of what is termed underserved populations. Without an education, these women and their offspring will continue to reside in environments of poverty and violence. In the fall of 2007, 452 of Carlow University's full-time undergraduates received federal Pell Grants. This represented 39 percent of Carlow's total full-time undergraduate population that semester. Pell is the foundation of federal student financial aid and is awarded to the neediest students, based on a review of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. These students who have managed to enroll and participate in a post secondary education exhibit a quality known as resiliency. Resilient students obtain coping skills and characteristics that assist them in overcoming their difficult circumstances (Werner and Smith, 2001). Through the Carlow School of Education's Urban Educator's Program, several of these low-income and underserved students hope later to be role models for their K-12 students. This is one method of how the Mercy Mission can change society.

Merely getting into college, however, does not guarantee that the dream of a better life will materialize. Academic success often hinges on students having adequate support. Carlow's Center for Academic Achievement offers tutoring and assistance with study skills to academically underprepared students. The Department of Campus Ministry at Carlow provides for students' pastoral and spiritual needs. It provides opportunities for service, as well as worship, which reflect the values of the University. Carlow's Student Life Division employs a variety of education and student developmental models to integrate commuter and resident student activities, provides meaningful opportunities for learning professional leadership skills, and places student activity programming into the hands of students. While these opportunities provide support, Dr. Blanton might advise that success is more likely to occur when individuals continually use their native abilities. By meeting students' basic needs in the classroom, professors motivate their students academically and model the methods with which they, in turn, can later inspire their future underserved students.

### THREE KEY MOTIVATIONAL COMPONENTS IN LEARNING

Human beings have a variety of needs that must be met in order for them to perform optimally, physically and mentally. Early educational theorist Abraham Maslow (1973) theorized that the following hierarchy of needs exists: physiological, safety, belonging, and self-esteem needs. Maslow believed that when these needs are not met, humans are less apt to actualize their potential. With the exception of physiological needs, Maslow's hierarchy encompasses psychological requirements, a desire to feel content and comfortable. In the educational environment, psychological well-being plays a critical role in the motivation to learn.

What support can instructors provide to ensure these at-risk populations graduate? All students are motivated by something. Learners can find inspiration in subject matter, social interaction, challenging activities, or even extracurricular activities. By tapping into students' interests, educators encourage motivation. Three facets of motivation can be of particular use to those serving underrepresented and at-risk students in the classroom: self-worth, autonomy, and relatedness.

## SELF-WORTH

Self-worth in the classroom manifests itself through students' desire to preserve their sense of self-efficacy (Covington, 2000). Learners want to believe they are competent and have self-worth (Ormrod, 2008). This desire for students to believe that they are capable of overcoming obstacles and mastering their environment can be especially deficient in underserved populations. Factors which play a role in self-worth are: judgment by others, approval by others, and regularly achieving success.

Under-prepared students often employ certain behaviors in an attempt to preserve their self-worth. Professors might witness failure avoidance, a behavior typified by students devaluing assignments. Students may also forecast their probable failure or simply refrain from engaging in an assignment to avoid acknowledging they cannot perform the task. Self-handicapping is yet another method students use to maintain their self-worth. It manifests itself in the following behaviors: extending little effort into an activity so failure is predetermined; setting unattainable goals; overextending oneself; and, procrastination or cheating. By utilizing these methods, students can avoid having to admit that they may not have the intelligence or ability to perform a task.

Educators can employ six methods to enhance self-efficacy and encourage self-worth in the classroom: gradually building students' skills, ensuring that adequate support is available; identifying successes and strengths so their students reflect and take stock in their abilities; using other students with similar backgrounds to demonstrate that success is possible; monitoring and providing feedback for students' performance to ensure increasing success and avoid failure; utilizing small group activities for challenging assignments to provide scaffolding from peers; and allowing for revisions and retakes so that students can learn from their mistakes.

By gradually building students' skills and making sure students have the proper support and tools to accomplish the tasks, motivation for learning is increased. Students attending college from low SES circumstances often do not have the necessary academic support from their home environment to persevere and succeed. To mitigate this situation, professors can provide additional support to ensure their success. Referral to University programs such as Carlow's Center for Academic Achievement (CAA) provides tutoring and editing services. The instructors in the CAA program frequently work with at-risk populations and become adept at understanding culturally relevant circumstances and providing culturally relevant models. Professors as well can draw upon students' prior experiences and knowledge to increase motivation and success. Students behave more intelligently when they can draw upon past experiences. By capitalizing on students' strengths, their motivation is increased (Sternberg, 2004). Finally, instructors can decrease anxiety and improve students' confidence by clearly explaining classroom expectations and assignments. For those individuals who have had a less than rigorous education prior to college, well-defined parameters increase confidence and predictability reduces anxiety (Juvonen, 2006).

When professors identify successes and strengths so their students reflect and take stock in their abilities, motivation increases. As early as kindergarten, many of us had our successful assignments posted on the refrigerator. This form of recognition provides the confidence students need to excel in the future. While, at Carlow, we do not post tests at on appliances, there are other methods the instructional staff uses to recognize and highlight achievement. Using students' products as models for assignments, providing extensive feedback regarding increased proficiency, and encouraging students to engage in peer tutoring, all convey the message of recognition and appreciation of competence.



Relevant models can impact students academically (Powers, Sowers, and Stevens, 1995). When professors use other students with similar backgrounds to demonstrate that success is possible, underserved students will be more inspired to persevere. This is particularly important for those serving low-income students. Because the majority of successful professionals are middle to high-income white men, professors must make an effort to expose students to those that they perceive to be similar to them (Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele, 1998). One can accomplish this by linking students from similar backgrounds, selecting readings that showcase similar others achieving success, or using mentors and speakers who students perceive as being like them.

Monitoring and providing feedback for students' performance to ensure increasing success and avoid failure increases self-efficacy and worth. Repeated failure is more apt to occur when instructors do not frequently evaluate students' progress. This can easily be accomplished through frequent evaluation and the use of small assignments that build to produce larger products. By identifying students' mistakes and misconceptions early in the learning process, professors keep them from continuing to build upon faulty practices. This method also provides instructional guidance for professors. By frequently critiquing student progress, instructors have regular and reasonably accurate information with which to make decisions that guide instruction (Goldenberg, 1992). When final grades are due, multiple smaller assignments provide a more accurate portrayal of student understanding than a few exams. Multiple assessments also compensate for the potentially flawed reliability and validity of a single assignment (Ormrod, 2009).

In the classroom, small group activities can provide students with additional support for particularly challenging activities. Instructors encourage participation and risk taking through collaborative efforts. The student who is shy during whole-class instruction has an increased opportunity to contribute without the anxiety that often accompanies large group interaction. Risk-taking, or attempting activities which may provide a challenge to an under-prepared student, is more comfortable with the support and endorsement of a group (Clifford, 1990).

One of the most effective ways to increase self-worth is to ensure students achieve success. By allowing students to revise assignments and retake assessments, they have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. While many in education believe grades motivate learners, grades are defined as external motivation. Research suggests that the goal-driven behavior produced by grades focuses students on the grade as opposed to the task itself (Ormrod, 2006). At-risk learners are best served by allowing them to revise and correct their initial unsuccessful attempts. By allowing students to amend their work, educators teach the critical next lesson essential for academic success, locus of control. Underserved populations frequently have a history of exhibiting an external locus of control: students who blame or credit their performance to factors outside of their control. To improve this situation, instructors must provide students with sufficient autonomy so that they realize the relationship between choice, effort, and success. By designing challenging activities and ensuring that students have the proper tools to succeed, students will experience positive outcomes and be able to take credit for their success. After several such occurrences, motivation for future endeavors is increased.

Educators who have high rates of success with at-risk students tend to be helpful, concerned, and respectful, all qualities that encourage self-worth (Pianta, 1999). When students believe they can experience academic success, they focus their energy on future endeavors rather than past difficulties (Alderman, 1990).

## AUTONOMY

Most individuals want to believe that they have a certain amount of control over their environment. Intrinsic motivation is diminished when learners feel as if others are controlling the decisions that affect them. Underserved populations, by definition, have often not been in control of their circumstances due to socioeconomic factors. In the classroom, the following factors can impact a sense of autonomy or self-determination: choice; value to the learner; topics for study or reading; goals for learning; various aspects regarding assignments such as due dates or design; the format of the class and how the information will be presented; and the evaluating criteria for assignments or tasks.

Choice plays a critical role in motivation. When a learner's sense of self-determination of autonomy is diminished, intrinsic motivation is undermined (Deci, 1992). By providing choice, however, both the students and the instructor benefit. Students who make decisions regarding classroom functioning or activities gain a sense of ownership (Schraw and Lehman, 2001). In addition, they are also more apt to be interested in and work conscientiously toward completing their assignments (Turner, 1998). This sense of engagement also influences classroom behavior in a positive manner (Dunlap, et al., 1994).

Students find value in topics that relate to their own lives. Determining what motivates individual students will differ depending, in part, on the standards and conduct their culture or ethnic group supports (d'Ailly, 2003). For this reason, students are more motivated when professors can create academic content and activities relevant to students' lives (Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields, 1990). Ideally, course content should include authentic, or real world, tasks relevant to the learner's environment. In order to draw attention to domestic violence, for example, Carlow University professors from several academic programs sponsored an interdisciplinary project where victims were memorialized and information was disseminated.

An effective way to provide choice to students is through self-selection of topics for study. Students who select their own subject matter typically dedicate more attention and are more intellectually engaged (McDaniel, Waddill, Finstad, and Bourg, 2000). This method of motivating students often results in more meaningful knowledge construction. Students who select their own topics frequently do so because of their prior knowledge with the topic. This prior exposure allows students to more easily organize information, relate ideas, and draw inferences (Pintrich, 2003). By utilizing these cognitive processes, the potential for success increases (Garner, Brown, Sanders, and Menke, 1992).

Ideally, instructors hope that learners will exhibit a level of autonomy in the classroom that will serve them as they go out into the world to make choices that will guide their lives. One way in which professors can encourage this autonomy is by allowing students to set their own goals for learning. At the university level, students' values and expectations become mutually dependent. Topics and activities in which students excel have increased value due to the positive feelings resulting from achievement. On the contrary, students devalue subject matter in which they perform inadequately (Wigfield, 1994). By creating opportunities for students to set goals for their learning in areas where they perceive they have competence, professors prepare them for the goal setting that will later guide their lives.

One final aspect of encouraging student autonomy includes allowing input into daily aspects of classroom routines. Due Dates, assignment designs, delivery of information, and evaluating criteria

all impact students. When students feel they have a voice in the selection of fundamental course features, they become stakeholders as opposed to pawns. Most critical of these choices, and often the least accommodated, is evaluating criteria. While standardization is important for reliability and validity, research has proven that because it limits an instructor's ability to make accommodations for diversity, debilitating anxiety can result especially for those from minority groups and low-income backgrounds (Phillips et al., 1980). When students take part in test preparation through study groups or guides, it can assist students in conquering test anxiety and provide them with the skills necessary to master course content (Tryon, 1980).

When students have input into the teaching/learning process they must then assume some responsibility as well. By providing students with a certain amount of autonomy, we are also asking them to accept a degree of responsibility. When students realize the part they play in the connection between choice and outcomes, they will develop an internal locus of control. They can then truly take credit for their successes and assume responsibility for their failures.

## RELATEDNESS

All people have a basic need to feel socially connected to others. The security of acceptance and respect of others satisfies our need for relatedness (Connell and Wellborn, 1991). The need for relatedness can negatively impact schooling. When students feel a lack of acceptance by their peers, their focus may shift away from scholastics. In the K-12 setting, the high priority placed on acceptance from peers often ruins academic careers (Dowson and McInerney, 2001). The phenomena of undercover honor students discussed in *A Hope of the Unseen* chronicles the academic odyssey of Cedric Jennings from an inner city high school in Washington, D.C. to Brown University. Although Jennings, who is African American and from a low income background, perseveres through Brown's rigorous coursework to graduate, he continually refers to his inability to connect with those who do not share his background. This inability to relate causes him on numerous accounts to question if college is an environment within which he will ever feel comfortable (Suskind, 1998).

Instructors at the post secondary level can employ the following methods to meet their students' need for relatedness: provide opportunities for students to interact with each other; allow students to assist each other with tasks; design group-based activities such as discussions, debates, role playing, cooperative learning, or games/competitions among teams of equal ability; highlight talents and contributions of class members; express an interest in students' outside hobbies or talents; and, encourage students to collaborate with others who share their interests.

While most of the suggestions listed are self-explanatory, educators need to model for and instruct students on how to maximize the positive potential of activities that involve student-to-student interaction. Educators must exhibit respect for diverse opinions and solicit multiple perspectives for student groups to appreciate what can be gained from such behaviors. Group members should be encouraged to scaffold for members who may lack certain skills instead of merely compensating. While the skills from a course collaborative activity may be useful in particular situations, the resulting social skills gleaned from group interaction will serve students for a lifetime.

Just as homework can pose a problem for those who lack adequate resources and support at home, group activities that occur outside of course time can pose a particular hardship for

underserved populations (Heymann and Earle, 2000). Many of Carlow's students take multiple modes of transportation to arrive at campus. This fact, coupled with work schedules and family responsibilities, can erase the positive social aspects of collaborative work. To alleviate this potential hardship, instructors can provide classroom time for such endeavors or employ the use of technology for students to exchange their ideas.

While many think of relatedness only in the sense of student to student, at the post-secondary level students' relationship with their instructors can be equally important. Students who believe their professors truly enjoy being with them and are concerned for their success achieve at higher rates (Patrick et al., 2002). Educators can also provide frequent feedback to students regarding their increased competence to enhance the feeling of relatedness between instructor and learner.

## **WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH USING MOTIVATION AS A MEANS TO SERVE UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS?**

Dr. Maxwell Maltz (2001) suggested, "Study the situation thoroughly, go over in your imagination the various courses of action possible to you and the consequences which can and may follow from each course. Pick out the course which gives the most promise and go ahead." While Catherine McAuley and Dr. Maltz were not contemporaries, I believe their philosophy regarding action and consequence were similar. If we want to improve the plight of the poor, we must first meet their needs. This article is an attempt to improve the academic experience of underserved and under-prepared college students by capitalizing on the three key factors which impact psychological well-being: self-worth, autonomy, and relatedness. However, as Dr. Maltz recommends, possible consequences must be acknowledged.

One concern would be whether we are setting students up for later disappointment when we cater to their needs in school. When our underserved students emerge from the college setting and again join the world that previously slighted them, will they be better able to cope with the inequities? Will they become part of the solution or will they become bitter?

Another concern is with legal implications. Does a system that supports underserved candidates slight students from dissimilar backgrounds? In 2003, several programs at the University of Michigan were taken to court over an affirmative action system that awarded additional points necessary for admission to minority students. African American, Hispanic, and Native American candidates earned 20 points on the basis of race out of a 150-point system. The University claimed that the resulting diversity due to the point system provided a better education for their students. The goal of the program was to open access and break down barriers. Many, including the president of the United States, disagreed with the practice stating that the Constitution protects the rights of individuals not the rights of racial groups. White students who failed to be admitted were victims of discrimination, their lawyers claimed, because minority candidates took their place (Greenhouse, 2003). One might have to consider then, does the practice of drawing upon students' backgrounds inadvertently slight typical students? This concern is still being actively discussed today.

Finally, can universities expect their teaching staff to consider student well-being? Is it not enough to impart the information? This question rests on whether the institution employs a sink or swim standard upon its students. Carlow University has as its mission:



*“...engages its diverse community in a process of lifelong learning, scholarship, and research. This engagement empowers individuals to think clearly and creatively; to actively pursue intellectual endeavors; to discover, challenge, or affirm cultural and aesthetic values; to respond reverently to God and others; and to embrace an ethic of service for a just and merciful world.”*

This being the mission of Carlow, it follows that the instructional staff ratifies the importance of diversity that requires that the faculty embrace and support all students.

While these concerns are valid, one must consider the outcome of meeting students' motivational needs in the university classroom. Does it result in a more prepared student who can better navigate the workplace upon graduation? Through such modeling by instructors, will students graduate to using some of the same motivational techniques with others in their lives? The Sisters of Mercy teaching faculty believes that if it can enhance the life of one student through pedagogical methods, it can potentially affect the lives of those who later come in contact with that student. In this way, Carlow University furthers the mission of its founder.

## USING STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

Have my methods met with success? How does an educator measure her success? I believe success is a dynamic quality which waxes and wanes with relationship to the agent's sensitivity and attentiveness to her students. I practice the following in order to meet my students' needs: respond to students' feedback concerning assignments and classroom activities; allow students to make suggestions and changes in the learning content and environment; and embrace the concept that if one's curriculum is student-centered, then the course must be designed to adjust each semester to the current community of learners. Through these methods, my students know that I value them, respect autonomy, and revere community. The Ester Sestilli Excellence in Teaching Award is presented yearly by Carlow University to one faculty member. Student votes determine the recipient. I received the Award in 2007. While the University's acknowledgment was satisfying, knowing that my students recognized my efforts to meet their needs and expectations eclipsed all else.

Although the census tries to use one term or another to define populations, ultimately our students are individuals. For this reason no one method or strategy will ensure their academic success (Janosz et al., 2000). However, by creating a classroom environment that acknowledges economic and racial diversity and provides support for underserved and under-prepared students, educators increase the likelihood of success (Christenson and Thurlow, 2004). In the repertoire of support, instructors should capitalize on motivation, a key element in the drive for academic success.

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# Demonstrating the Mercy Mission and Applying Service Learning through a Community-Academic Partnership

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*“I have learned to be aware of my own feelings. I have also learned the importance of slowing down and looking at my clients, not to just assess them, but to really look them in the eye which is hard when our lives are in a constant state of rushing.”*

—BSN student

## INTRODUCTION

“There are many lessons college educators want students to learn that cannot be fully grasped through texts and lectures alone” (Reed-Bouley and Zajic, 2006). How can students fully understand the concepts of poverty and other social issues without experiencing these issues first, hand? And how then can students apply and integrate what they have learned into their personal and professional lives?

In response to the above need, the College of Saint Mary (CSM) and Mercy Housing Midwest formed a partnership to provide needed services to residents of Mercy Housing’s apartments in Omaha, NE. According to Foss, Bonaiuto, Johnson, and Moreland (2003) “collaborative interagency partnerships offer a time honored method to maximize limited resources of professional academic institutions and community agencies.” The partnership enables students to apply and integrate theoretical concepts while reflecting and internalizing potentially life changing experiences. Mercy Housing residents also benefit from the experience by receiving individualized services which assist in meeting the family’s physical, social, and emotional needs.

*“The student’s help has been invaluable to my family. We began as strangers but ended as friends. I know the relationship with the student will never be forgotten. I cannot express in words how fortunate and blessed we are to have gotten to know an angel on earth.”*

—Mercy Housing Resident

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Foss, Bonaiuto, Johnson, and Moreland (2003) in their article “Using Polvika’s Model to Create a Service-Learning Partnership,” proposed a Conceptual Model for Service-Learning Partnerships. This model is based on Polvika’s Model and the nine principles characterizing collaborative Campus-community partnerships published by the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (1996). The partnership between the College of Saint Mary and Mercy Housing will be discussed in accordance with this model (Figure 1).





## PREPARTNERSHIP CONDITIONS

A collaborative partnership was established between the College of Saint Mary (CSM) and Mercy Housing in 2004 as a response to academic and community need. Before entering into the partnership several factors were assessed and discussed. First, did a need exist for both the academic institution and the community agency? Second, would specific academic departments (in this case nursing) fulfill needs of the agency while meeting required course objectives? Third, how would the partnership be beneficial to both institutions? Finally, who would assume primary roles in developing and evaluating the partnership? Representatives from CSM and Mercy Housing were deeply committed to the development of the partnership and careful consideration was given to all aspects of the partnership with special attention aimed at developing a positive relationship.

## ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP

In the Conference for Mercy Higher Education White Paper “Culture and Characteristics,” Dr. Maryanne Stevens RSM, President of College of Saint Mary, addresses four hallmarks of Mercy Education:

1. Regard for the dignity of the person
2. Academic excellence and lifelong learning
3. Education of the whole person: body, mind, and spirit
4. Through action and education, promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children

College of Saint Mary incorporates service-learning throughout its curricula which is consistent and demonstrates the College’s mission: academic excellence, scholarship, and lifelong learning, regard for the dignity of each person, attention to the development of body, mind, and spirit, and compassionate service to others. Both CSM and Mercy Housing representatives recognized the importance of fulfilling the mission of Mercy Institutions and were diligent in addressing all components of the mission to ensure integration and consistency.

In order for the partnership to succeed a mutual trusting, respectful, and committed relationship needed to develop among all involved. Representatives from both organizations met regularly to brainstorm about possible programs, identify strengths and weaknesses, and to discuss additional academic program involvement. This relationship would not have succeeded without clear, open, and honest communication. Also, those involved in the partnership were accessible to one another in order to provide support, freely exchange ideas, and discuss problems when needed.

Mercy Housing sponsors several housing units throughout the metropolitan area but for the Community Health Nursing course the faculty felt one in particular would provide the best learning

environment for students. Mason apartments house the poorest residents, who earn an average of \$8,000 annually and have an average family size of seven. Over half of the residents at Mason are Sudanese refugees. “Mason is a true place of refuge, not just a place to live, but a home” (Reed-Bouley and Zajic, 2006). The Community Health Nursing course affords students an opportunity to provide service-learning at Mason. Under the direction of faculty, students provided home visits, which included conducting family assessments (physical, social, and psychosocial), advocacy, and referrals to community resources as needed. Upon completion of the semester, any unmet needs that students or families identified were discussed with Mercy Housing for continued follow up. With the help of community agencies students also offered health fairs to families and supplied each with an informational health care package.

One project that remains in progress is a photo narrative project which is a joint venture between the nursing and fine arts departments. Nursing students met with and gathered family history narratives from five Sudanese families living at Mason and Crestview apartments. All were identified as possible participants by Mercy Housing and all consented to participate in project. Each family was given several cameras with instructions to photograph their lives. Students enrolled in Art, under the direction of faculty, will develop the pictures and frame/mount each in preparation for a gallery showing. The purpose of the project is for families to share their stories through narratives and photography in hopes to educate, enrich, and enlighten the community.

## RESULTS OF PARTNERSHIP

Over the last four years the partnership between College of Saint Mary and Mercy Housing has evolved to include a variety of academic programs. This evolution was a result of assessment and evaluation of various housing units/resident needs. Representatives continue to meet regularly to discuss ongoing and possible new programs while maintaining the primary focus on residents of Mercy Housing. All academic programs representatives, administration, and Mercy Housing continually seek and implement service-learning grants in order to better serve this population, paying particular attention to not duplicating services or providing services which are no longer needed. It is my hope that by using community, culturally, and socially based strategies within the context of families’ everyday lives, societal disparities will decrease and the quality of care health care workers provide will increase.

Ongoing reflection and evaluation remains a vital part of service-learning activities. Students are given opportunities to reflect on their service verbally and in writing in the form of journals. Revisions to courses, are frequently made as a result of student, resident, and organizational input. The partnership between CSM and Mercy Housing gives students the opportunity to apply theory to real life situations as well as help a population that for too long has been overlooked or forgotten. “When students find joy in their service, then service-learning has contributed significantly to both students’ education and the common good” (Reed-Bouley and Zajic, 2006). The following are reflections by students, program representatives, and Mercy Housing in regards to the service-learning activities at Mercy Housing:

*“Not only did I find a new energy this semester, but I also found a new love of nursing.”*

—BSN student

*“I have never had to worry about fitting into a society that is very different than my own and as a result of participating in service-learning have learned a lot about myself.”*

—BSN student

*“Service-learning educates the heart because it puts a human face on social, economic, and political issues.”*

—Myrna Grandgenett, PhD

*“Collaborating with the College of Saint Mary service-learning program has enhanced Mercy Housing’s Resident Services. It brings a level of expertise to our residents that create a healthier community and living environment.”*

—Gina Freimuth, MS, Resource Development Coordinator Mercy Housing

## CONCLUSION

We are very fortunate at the College of Saint Mary to have an administration that is not only supportive but encouraging of service-learning opportunities for faculty and students within and outside the classroom. I am reminded on a daily basis of the legacy of Catherine McAuley and feel that we in higher education should challenge one another to remember, *“Catherine McAuley connected the rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed, the influential to those of no consequence, the powerful to the weak, to do the work of God on earth.”*

In times when resources are diminishing for academic institutions and community agencies, community partnerships offer a way to increase needed resources to carry out the mission and goals of institutions. The community partnership between College of Saint Mary and Mercy Housing is working because those involved are committed to the partnership and recognize the value the partnership provides for not only students and residents but for the community as a whole.

## RESOURCES

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# A Signature of a Mercy Education: The New Gen Ed Curriculum at Gwynedd-Mercy College

THOMAS GILMORE, MEngr, GWYNEDD-MERCY COLLEGE

The significance of the curriculum in a student's particular major in college is obviously very important. However, in many of our institutions the courses in a student's major represent roughly half of the entire college degree. Keep in mind this is a modern phenomenon, it is only recently that college degrees evolved from strictly liberal arts to include preparation for a particular occupation. However, today the focus appears to be more on the major, probably for two reasons: one, because the political clout of an entire major is significantly larger than that of a selection of courses from a variety of fields; and two, today students view a degree in a particular major as the entry requirement to a particular profession. In our Mercy institutions this notion of career preparation, particularly in the fields of Education and Health Care, coincides favorably with our Mercy Mission. But that very same Mercy Mission compels us to engage our students intellectually, socially and spiritually in response to contemporary issues. It also compels us to promote the development of informed caring global citizens that will exhibit integrity, compassion and mercy. For discussions sake let's define these attributes as characteristics of a "distinctive Mercy graduate." A fair question is where in our Mercy Institutions does this preparation happen?

At Gwynedd-Mercy College when we asked ourselves this question we found we really couldn't identify where this happened. For the most part we felt we were preparing "distinctive Mercy graduates" but that it just happened naturally in the course of a student's stay at our college. When, as in years passed, there were more Sisters of Mercy teaching on the faculty an informal exposure for students was certainly more likely than it is today where a student could actually complete their entire degree and not have a Sister of Mercy for a professor. At Gwynedd-Mercy College it was time to review our general education to assure and insure that we truly were preparing distinctive Mercy graduates.

## THE PROCESS

At Gwynedd-Mercy College (GMC) we have a long history of attempting to change our general education. In fact numerous attempts have been made over the last 30 years, all of which have failed. To effect a change in the curriculum at GMC requires a majority vote of the full time faculty. Clearly the faculty at GMC felt very strongly about the general education, and any proposed changes would be closely scrutinized. It was President Woodrow Wilson, once president of Princeton University that said, "It is easier to move a graveyard than to effect a change in curriculum." Nonetheless, internal and external pressures were mounting compelling us to address numerous issues in the existing curriculum. A task force with broad representation was formed in the Fall term of 2004 and charged with the responsibility of studying the general education curriculum (Gen Ed) and producing a new Gen Ed curriculum that included a three-credit First Year Experience and addressed the issue of consistently preparing graduates that fit the description of the distinctive Mercy graduate. An additional stipulation in the charge was that the total number of credit hours allocated for the general education remains the same at 48 credits. In an effort to keep faculty

informed and to allow them to participate in the process progress reports were given and related issues were discussed at every faculty meeting. Periodically open forums were held to present the current state of the proposed curriculum. Surveys were conducted and the results were used to modify the proposal. Constituent groups had the opportunity to meet with the task force to address the specific concerns of that particular group. And in the Spring 2006 term a new general education curriculum was approved by the faculty.

## THE ISSUES

The charge to the task force produced several daunting issues:

- Where would the three credits for the First Year Experience (FYE) come from?
- Who would develop the FYE?
- Where would the faculty to teach the FYE come from?
- How could we provide a common educational experience for our students that incorporates Mercy values and:
  1. meets certification requirements for specific content (i.e. U.S. History),
  2. would be transferable to another institution if a student decided to leave GMC,
  3. would not adversely effect students trying to transfer courses into GMC.
- How would a new Gen Ed be implemented, and of course many other operational issues too numerous to mention.

## THE SOLUTIONS

The task of developing an FYE was so large that a separate task force linked to the Gen Ed Task Force was formed to work on just the FYE. This group produced the design for a two credit component of the FYE addressing: college, personal and academic issues pertinent to first time freshman and a one credit service learning component. The FYE would have its own full time director, a staff position and be taught by volunteer faculty or by qualified staff members being remunerated following adjunct pay scales. The three credits for FYE came through a painful decision to reduce the philosophy and religious studies component of the Gen Ed from 12 credits to 9. This was timed with a semi-retirement of a faculty member.

The solution to a common educational experience that did not negatively impact certification requirements or transfer students is a hybrid of a core component and a distribution component. Six courses (core) were identified to be what we termed Signature Courses one in each of the following disciplines: fine arts, history, philosophy, psychology/sociology, religious studies and science and technology. These signature courses are characterized by a theme rather than specific content allowing for discussion not just of content but also of contemporary issues. The titles of these courses are descriptive of their themes:

Eng 2000 Arts and Imagination

His 2000 Conflict and Consensus in History

Phi 2000 Encountering Ethics

Soc 2000 Society and Global Diversity



RS 2000 Sacred Writings  
 Sci 2000 From Telescope to Microscope

Since these courses maintained their discipline designation (i.e. Eng 2000) they could be transferred without loss if a student decided to leave. Students transferring into GMC are required to take fewer signature courses depending on the number of credits transferred. However, three would be the minimum number of signature courses students would be required to take. In addition, a capstone course integrating the general education and a student's particular major is included as a culminating and integrating experience. The rest of the courses in the Gen Ed would be distribution courses. (For specifics see the appendix.) Additionally, the Gen Ed Task Force recommended the development of a new standing committee chaired by a faculty member, designated as the director of Gen Ed, and consisting of representatives from each academic unit and a representative from: FYE, registrar's office and academic affairs. Voting privileges on the committee were reserved for full time faculty only. An evaluation and feed back loop was also designed to allow for annual modifications to the Gen Ed if necessary.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION

The new Gen Ed was phased-in effective for incoming freshman for the Fall 2007 term. Eighteen sections of the FYE were offered, two thirds of which were taught by members of the full time faculty, the rest by qualified staff members. Nine sections representing four of the six signature courses were implemented in the Spring 2008 term. Scheduled for the upcoming Fall 2008 term are sixteen sections representing all six signature courses along with 21 sections of the FYE course.

## APPENDIX

Gwynedd-Mercy College  
 General Education Curriculum  
 Growth through Mercy Connections

In order to prepare the distinctive mercy graduate as a self-sufficient lifelong learner who is an informed, responsible, caring citizen of a diverse global community, the College has established a common educational experience in its required curriculum of general education. This general education curriculum is a beacon guiding students toward the development of habits of thought and behavior that will serve them in the search for truth in all its complexity. This curriculum promotes the development of humane values that incorporate the ideals of integrity, compassion, and mercy. The signature course component of the general education curriculum offers us the opportunity to communicate to our students what is distinctive about Gwynedd-Mercy College as a Catholic, Mercy institution by embracing as a theme The Hallmarks of a Mercy Education:

1. Regard for the dignity of the person
2. Academic excellence and lifelong learning
3. Education of the whole person: body, mind and spirit
4. Through action and education, promotion of compassion and
5. Justice toward those with less, especially women and children

## GOALS OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

**Building on the College's seven learning outcomes, the curriculum has been designed to ensure that students will be able to:**

1. Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural, and ideological traditions;
2. Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research, and the communication of ideas;
3. Evaluate historical, political, economic, and scientific data while recognizing the interrelatedness of events and processes;
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of technology on society;
5. Reflect upon the relationship of the Divine to the human experience;
6. Examine and understand the dynamics of individual and group behavior;
7. Demonstrate an understanding of quantitative reasoning; and
8. Engage in constructive activities of service to the community in light of the Gospel tradition as experienced through the Mercy charism that shapes the College.

## SIGNATURE COURSE TEMPLATE

The signature courses' syllabi will follow the best practices set forth by the College's Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee. As part of these best practices, each signature course will list the course purpose and course goals as listed later in this document.

Signature courses are developed, refined, and taught using a team approach. Faculty involved in these activities can expect team meetings of a preparatory nature prior to the courses being offered, as well as team meetings during the semester. Each faculty member teaching a signature course is expected to submit a copy of his/her syllabi to the Gen Ed Committee prior to the start of the semester for the purpose of review. Syllabi will be reviewed for adherence to the stated expectations of signature courses.

Signature courses are expected to contain a significant writing component. Whether this is in the form of letters, journals, reaction, or research papers is determined by each individual faculty member.

Where possible signature courses will require readings from primary texts and will employ modern pedagogical techniques, such as seminar style interaction, to better promote the intellectual development of each individual participant.

In signature courses, active student participation must contribute significantly to the student's final grade. This participation is evidenced by a student's preparation for each class and participation in that class through whatever method is appropriate. How participation is factored into the grade is determined by each individual faculty member. After each semester, teachers will meet to evaluate the experience and design improvements and/or consider new ideas.

## GROWTH THROUGH MERCY CONNECTIONS SIGNATURE COURSES

### I Skills for Exploring

- FYE 1000 3 credits
- English 101 3 credits

### II Exploring Society and Global Diversity

- SOC 2000 – Society and Global Diversity 3 credits
- HIS 2000 – History Signature Course 3 credits
- 2 or 3 additional courses emphasizing society and diversity 6 – 9 credits

### III Exploring the Natural and Scientific World

- SCI 2000 – Science, Math and Technology 3 credits
- 2 additional courses in the sciences, mathematics and computer science 6 credits

### IV Exploring the Spiritual World

- RS 2000 – Religion Signature Course 3 credits
- PHL 2000 – Philosophy Signature Course 3 credits
- 1 additional RS or PHL elective 3 credits

### V Exploring the Arts and the Imagination

- ENG 2000 – The Arts and the Imagination 3 credits
- 2 or 3 additional courses focusing on aesthetics, literature, rhetoric, music or foreign language 6 – 9 credits

### VI Integrative Reflections on the Exploration

- CAP 2000 – Senior Capstone or 3 credits
- Capstone experience within the major integrated with the Academic Explorations 0 credits

(credits will come from the major)

- **Credits** **TOTAL 48**

## I SKILLS FOR EXPLORING

### Signature Course

- FYE 1000 3 credits

### Purpose

To establish or enhance skill sets for academic excellence, service and leadership to society, active contribution to the student's chosen profession, and lifelong learning habits.

### Goals

- Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural and ideological traditions
- Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research and the communication of ideas
- Engage in constructive activities of service to the community in light of the Gospel tradition as experienced through the Mercy charism that shapes the College.

## II EXPLORING SOCIETY AND GLOBAL DIVERSITY

### Signature Courses

- SOC 2000 – Society and Global Diversity 3 credits
- HIS 2000 – History Signature Course 3 credits

### Purpose

To expand students' understanding of the historical, political, psychological, and social dimensions of global communities, while learning to relate to and interact with those of different viewpoints and experiences.

### Goals

- Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural and ideological traditions
- Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research and the communication of ideas
- Analyze historical, political, economic and scientific data while recognizing the interrelatedness of events and processes
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of technology on society
- Examine and understand the dynamics of individual and group behavior

### III EXPLORING THE NATURAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORLD

#### Signature Course

- SCI 2000 – Science, Math and Technology 3 credits

#### Purpose

To understand science as a way of knowing the physical universe. To use quantitative and scientific thinking in order to make wise and responsible applications of emerging technologies.

#### Goals

1. Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research and the communication of ideas
2. Analyze historical, political, economic and scientific data while recognizing the interrelatedness of events and processes
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of technology on society
4. Demonstrate an understanding of quantitative reasoning

### IV EXPLORING THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

#### Signature Courses

- RS 2000 – Religion Signature Course 3 credits
- PHL 2000 – Philosophy Signature Course 3 credits

#### Purpose

To provide opportunities for personal and spiritual growth by examining the interrelation and interdependence of all beings through an exploration of philosophical and theological traditions. Students are encouraged to further develop intentional and articulated moral and ethical values.

#### Goals

1. Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural and ideological traditions
2. Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research and the communication of ideas
3. Reflect upon the relationship of the Divine to the human experience
4. Examine and understand the dynamics of individual and group behavior
5. Engage in constructive activities of service to the community in light of the Gospel tradition as experienced through the Mercy charism that shapes the College



## V EXPLORING THE ARTS AND THE IMAGINATION

### Signature Course

- ENG 2000 – The Arts and the Imagination 3 credits

### Purpose

To understand and appreciate the roles that various forms of creative expressions play in culture. To offer students the opportunity to connect with, as well as to express their own creative capabilities.

### Goals

1. Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural and ideological traditions
2. Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research and the communication of ideas
3. Analyze historical, political, economic and scientific data while recognizing the interrelatedness of events and processes
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of technology on society
5. Reflect upon the relationship of the Divine to the human experience

## VI INTEGRATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPLORATION

### Signature Course

- CAP 2000 – Senior Capstone or 3 credits
- Capstone experience within the major integrated with the Academic Explorations 0 credits

(credits will come from the major)

### Purpose

To demonstrate habits of mind through integration and application of concepts from the Mercy tradition as these relate to the student's chosen field of study and/or communities. To complete the portfolio aimed at guiding students to reflect upon, integrate and share the knowledge acquired throughout their Mercy education, which distinguishes them as Mercy graduates.

### Goals

1. Express an appreciation and understanding of a variety of aesthetic, literary, cultural, and ideological traditions
2. Engage meaningfully in a community of scholarship through inquiry, research, and the communication of ideas
3. Evaluate historical, political, economic, and scientific data while recognizing the interrelatedness of events and processes

4. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of technology on society
5. Reflect upon the relationship of the Divine to the human experience
6. Examine and understand the dynamics of individual and group behavior
7. Demonstrate an understanding of quantitative reasoning
8. Engage in constructive activities of service to the community in light of the Gospel tradition as experienced through the Mercy charism that shapes the College

## Reflecting the Hallmarks of Mercy Education through a Structured Mentoring Program

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CONSTANCE J. HARDY, SAINT XAVIER UNIVERSITY

Since 2000, Saint Xavier University School of Nursing (SXU SON) in Chicago, Illinois, has included a structured mentoring program, a unique initiative developed by its faculty and incorporated in the undergraduate curriculum. Catherine McAuley would recognize many of the elements of this group mentoring program, including the focus on shared community, the nurturance of protégées, and the emphasis on communication between mentor and mentees through written journals.

Catherine McAuley established the House of Mercy on Baggott Street in Dublin in 1827. It was not a religious convent, but a night-refuge for homeless poor girls and servant women, a school for poor children and a residence for lay women who wished to join Catherine in these works of mercy. Catherine demanded justice for the poor. While most contemporary religious orders remained in their convents, the Sisters of Mercy often were called “walking sisters.” They professed a vow of service to the poor, sick, and ignorant. (“Who We Are”). So began the tradition that is still present in Saint Xavier School of Nursing today. It is called a Culture of Intentional Caring and it requires an exceptional response to individuals in need.

Consistent with the “walking sisters” notion, Catherine sent out her protégées to establish new foundations in the new world. Francis Warde and a group of Sisters of Mercy arrived in Chicago in 1846 and opened the Saint Francis Xavier Female Academy. They opened a hospital in 1851 which spawned a nurse’s training school. The affiliation between that hospital and the Academy established the first school to develop bachelor’s prepared nurses in the State of Illinois. Today SXU SON proudly boasts that it is the oldest bachelor of nursing program in the state.

As the oldest program, SXU SON embodies another hallmark of a Mercy education. Through action and education, promotion of compassion and justice towards those with less, especially women and children, the School of Nursing serves a diverse student population 90 per cent of whom require and receive financial support to complete their education and 40 per cent of whom are from underrepresented minorities.

In 2007, SXU SON was awarded the National League of Nursing’s prestigious designation as a Center of Excellence. The *Excellence in Nursing Education Model*,<sup>©</sup> requires the school of nursing to demonstrate aspects of eight core elements:

- Clear Program Standards and Hallmarks that Raise Expectations
- Well-Prepared Faculty
- Qualified Students
- Well-Prepared Educational Administrators
- Evidence-Based Programs and Teaching/Evaluation Methods
- Quality and Adequate Resources
- Recognition of Expertise
- Student-Centered, Interactive, and Innovative Programs and Curricula

The structured mentoring program, based on the culture of intentional caring, is one of the many aspects that established SXU SON as a Center of Excellence and is the focus of this paper.

The initial idea for the structured mentoring program began with Voices Day. Voices Day came out of pedagogical research conducted by Dr. Nancy Diekelmann, herself a Saint Xavier University School of Nursing graduate. Annually at Voices Day, faculty and students gathered to listen to each other's stories focusing on teaching and learning experiences. Students' stories provided valuable qualitative data as a perspective of what had supported their learning...and what had not. Many of these stories focused on the notion of relationships between faculty and students. In response to these stories regarding the significant benefit of informal mentoring, a formal structured mentoring program evolved.

In 2000, as part of the undergraduate curriculum revision, the mechanics of incorporating this idea ensued. By deleting a core course, not required in the general education guideline, a one credit hour course for each of the last four semesters was created. The objectives of the mentoring classes are:

- to set aside time and create a caring milieu for faculty and students to come together
- to develop a relationship that provides support and guidance to both faculty and student
- to have the conversations and dialogues that socialize students into the nursing profession
- to ultimately provide support to retain students in the program.

The foundation of the mentoring program is a dynamic relationship between the novice (student) and the expert (faculty). As a central concept in the school of nursing's philosophical belief statement, "caring" was selected to be the mentoring efforts' fundamental tenant. Benner and Wrubel's (1989) caring principles in *Primacy of Caring* served as the basis of the course development. The courses are required throughout the undergraduate program. Faculty members facilitate the entire sequence, working with the same student group as it advances through the program. The emphasis is on process rather than content. Although there are syllabi, there are no prescribed content, assignments, or exams.

Catherine McAuley would recognize many of the elements of the group mentoring program including the focus on shared community, the nurturance of protégées, and the emphasis on communication between mentor and mentees through written journals. Students journal in each session and submit their journals for the faculty member to read and respond as appropriate. This process often provides the vehicle for students or faculty to share through the written word, issues which individuals may not wish to share openly with the group. This process further provides a pathway to caring.

One of the challenges to the mentoring program is the focus on process rather than content. The traditional faculty role is content oriented rather than process oriented. This change in focus is a hurdle for many faculty. Two of the SXU SON faculty, Carol Kostovich and Kay Thurn, (2006) explored faculty members' perceptions of assuming the role of a group mentor. Four themes emerged from their research. Kostovich and Thurn defined those themes as:

1. Uncertainty
2. Evolution
3. Milieu
4. Mutuality

Uncertainty is demonstrated in four areas: group process, role ambiguity, class structure, and the value of mentoring.

- Expert faculty who are comfortable with structure and content driven classes are less comfortable with group process.
- Faculty struggle with simultaneous roles of theory instructor and mentor. The mentee might be enrolled in a theory class taught by the faculty mentor which requires faculty to hold the student to a rigorous academic standard, while the mentoring environment requires the faculty member to be an encourager, supporter, and confidant.
- Mentoring was implemented as a curricular revision, and faculty are required to assume the role of mentor. Some faculty feel forced to be a mentor as a workload issue rather than a choice.
- As faculty were asked to reflect on their perceived value of mentoring, three responses were apparent: total valuing, valuing with trepidation, and non-valuing. Those total valuing mentoring had implemented the course effectively, the trepidatious faculty questioned their own skill, and the non-valuing voiced continued resistance to the concept.

Over time the second theme, evolution, surfaced.

Faculty attitudes shifted as they experienced mentoring. Over time the faculty recognize that meaningful relationships form, and the group becomes more cohesive. Bonding and trust develop as the group demonstrates their commitment to confidentiality.

The third them Kostovich and Thurn referred to as milieu:

- An atmosphere of safety is created by setting ground rules from the beginning. This enables students to express themselves freely. Students then feel respected and valued regardless of the information they share with the group.
- Group size and composition impacts the effectiveness of a mentoring group. Eight to 10 is the ideal size. Larger groups seem to break into smaller sub groups purely out of time and ability to focus on an issue. Changes in group membership disrupts the group process. The addition of new mentees requires the reestablishment of the trust relationship. Reassignment of a student to a different mentoring group is done only under special circumstances and after discussion with the particular student mentee and faculty mentors.

The last theme notes mutuality.

- The development of mutuality is somewhat affected by the faculty's comfort with group process. The faculty mentor doesn't always connect with every student. Initially most faculty believe they are engaging in mentoring to impact the students and then come to realize that the relationship with the students impacts themselves as well.

Exit interviews show that Saint Xavier University School of Nursing's structured mentoring program has been instrumental in student retention. While high faculty-student ratios make 1:1 mentoring impossible, this is a viable alternative. Preparing faculty for the formal mentor role is



essential. Introduction to the mentoring process is included in new faculty orientation. At the start of each academic year, faculty members who have conducted mentoring courses meet with new faculty to share strategies such as practical ideas like ice breakers, establishing ground rules, tips on establishing trust, and solicitation of student ideas to promote involvement.

“There is no singular prescriptive process for the mentoring relationship. Yet when we see it or experience it, we know what it is. Mentoring is largely born out of a desire to grow and learn, is fostered by mutual trust and respect and is fueled by common values and goals” (Klein and Dickenson-Hazard, 20). There is no more poignant experience of the mentoring relationship than the pinning ceremony which is conducted at the end of every semester. A tradition in nursing education is the symbolic welcoming of the newly graduated nurses into the nursing profession. In keeping with the Mercy heritage, the SXU SON pins are dedicated with water drawn from the well on Baggott Street in Dublin, Ireland. Each mentor then pins each mentee as his or her name is called. It is a fitting culmination of the two-year faculty student relationship as it evolves into a professional nurse to professional nurse relationship.

When Catherine McAuley founded the religious community of the Sisters of Mercy, its dual mission was to combine love of God and neighbor with the spiritual initiative of continued interior renewal linked with active service to God’s people, especially the poor, the sick, and the uneducated. SXU SON continues to pursue that dual mission by providing a mentoring milieu that supports a continuing interior renewal for students and faculty as both engage in active service to the poor, the sick, and the uneducated.

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# Implementation of Mission and Core Values into Clinical Teaching

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding student and faculty perceptions of institutional mission and core values based on experiences during clinical education. The study also aimed to define practices that clinical faculty employ to impart this information to students. Surveys utilizing checklists and open-ended questions were designed to obtain this information. The surveys were disseminated to clinical faculty and staff within the Communication Sciences and Disorders Program at a middle-sized Catholic university in the Midwestern United States. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, rankings, and thematic trends. Results indicated that the majority of clinical faculty was familiar with the institutional mission and core values, while students, as a group, had less familiarity. Practices for implementation of the mission and core values were indirect in nature as opposed to directly targeted within clinical teaching. Implications of this study suggest the need for more uniform practices to ensure faculty and student familiarity with mission and core values, increased discussion among clinical faculty about practices for implementation, and review of departmental mission statements for alignment with mission statements of the institution as a whole.

## INTRODUCTION

Current literature suggests there is a need for faculty in higher education to communicate information about institutional mission and core values to students during the course of their college educations. The purpose of this study was to examine faculty and student awareness of institutional mission and core values within a clinical education program, and to define ways in which this information is imparted from faculty to students. The following is a review of current studies in this area.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF MISSION STATEMENTS AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

An increased focus on organizational mission statements and subsequently related core values of institutions of higher education surfaced in the late 1980s following the National Commission on Excellence in Education Report in 1983 and the Carnegie Commission Report in 1987 (Estanek, James, and Norton, 2000). These reports led many universities and colleges to examine and revise their organizational mission statements in order to ensure that the statements adequately reflected the targeted educational goals and outcomes of the institutions. This process was further invoked in Catholic-based institutions by the publication of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* by Pope John Paul II in 1990. As a result of this document, Catholic colleges and universities, specifically, were required to adopt mission statements that identified features unique to their institutions of higher learning and particularly those components that comprised their Catholic identity. In the mission statement

of institutions of higher learning, the principles and values of a Catholic education are publicly articulated (Estanek, James, and Norton 205). Thus, a mission statement of an institution should define its uniqueness and individuality.

## **MISSION STATEMENTS AND SPIRITUALITY**

Konz and Ryan further suggested that the mission of an institution represents an expression of its spirituality (205). Bonewits defined spirituality as a search for meaning and a deeper understanding of human experience regardless of whether that search occurs in secular institutions or institutions tied more specifically to individual faith traditions (70). Rogers and Love reported that the quest for meaning, purpose, and values in post-secondary education aligns itself with the current trends of society as a whole to search for spirituality (90). Furthermore, Rogers and Love postulated that many traditional college students are engaged in this spiritual exploration and expect that their colleges or universities will assist in exploring the understanding and expression of their personal values (90). These latter movements have ultimately resulted in educators' search for connections between spirituality and learning.

## **UNIVERSITY CULTURE AND THE EXPRESSION OF CORE VALUES**

A mission statement is closely tied to the culture of an institution (Bonewits 71). Estanek, James, and Norton assessed the mission statements of 55 randomly selected Catholic colleges and universities within the United States. These statements were analyzed to determine common themes and, ultimately, to identify student outcomes. Student outcomes identified in this study included the following: intellectual development, social justice, religious or spiritual development, service, leadership, moral development, personal growth, education of the whole person, citizenship, international perspective, professional competence, and lifelong learning (Estanek, James, and Norton 208). These outcomes mirror many of the core values expressed by Catholic universities and colleges throughout the United States.

## **COMMUNICATING SPIRITUALITY AND VALUES TO STUDENTS**

Love and Talbott contended that “spiritual development can be either fostered or inhibited by the environmental context in which students live, grow, and develop” (366). Based on a survey of practices within the field of student affairs, these authors supported the idea that spirituality needs to be incorporated into faculty-student interactions. Love and Talbott suggested that faculty from student affairs programs need to explore their own values and spirituality in order to effectively communicate the values and spirituality of the institution to their students. In addition, the authors suggested that faculty members need information about spiritual development and training in methods for fostering the spiritual development of students (368). Murray and Murray investigated the question of whether or not values should be overtly taught in institutions of higher education. These authors devised “sustainability training” workshops consisting of a series of five distinct activities fostering awareness of personal values, sharing individual perspectives about values, reflecting on personal attitudes, and collaborating in a problem-solving activity requiring application of values. A case study incorporating the workshops was conducted with construction students at

the University of Pittsburgh. The results of this study suggested that activity-based learning and discussion were effective in promoting values within educational programs in contrast to direct teaching of mission and values (Murray and Murray 294).

Bonewits conducted 26 in-depth interviews with participants of a conference entitled “Companions in Mission.” The purpose of the conference was to explore the direction of Jesuit institutions, and specifically to reflect on organizational mission statements. Analysis of the data revealed that some participants were unfamiliar with their mission statement, while most participants learned about the mission indirectly as a part of the culture of the institution. Additionally, a majority of the persons interviewed expressed a renewed awareness of the mission statement and an interest in exploring new ways of living out the spiritual mission on campus as a result of the conference. This research suggested a need for institutions to continually review their mission statement and its actualization in the university community (74-80).

In summary, the review of the literature indicates that information on institutional mission and core values may be useful in fostering the spiritual growth and development of students in higher education.

## **PURPOSE**

The literature suggests that there is a need for faculty in higher education to communicate information about institutional mission and core values to students during the course of their college educations. There is a lack of research, however, exploring the implementation of mission and core values specifically within the realm of clinical teaching. The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding student and faculty perceptions of institutional mission and core values based on experiences during clinical teaching. The study also aimed to define practices that clinical faculty employ to impart this information to students.

Specifically, the study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Are clinical faculty familiar with the institutional mission and core values of the university?
2. What practices do clinical faculty use to implement the institutional mission and core values of the university into their clinical teaching?
3. Are students in clinical programs familiar with the mission and core values of the institution?
4. In what ways do students perceive that they receive information about mission and core values from the clinical faculty?

## **METHODS**

This project was completed in a mid-sized Catholic university located in the regional Midwestern United States. Specifically, the project was conducted within the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Participants included all faculty members in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders who participate in clinical teaching. For the purpose of this study, clinical teaching

was defined as any instruction of students that takes place within the realm of supervised clinical speech, language, or audiology practicum experiences whether those experiences are preventative, diagnostic, or therapeutic in nature. Subjects included full professors, associate professors, associate clinical professors, assistant professors, assistant clinical professors, instructors, half-time faculty members, and adjunct faculty members. Participants also included all graduate students participating in on-campus clinical practicum during the time of the study.

Surveys were designed for both faculty and students using a combination of checklists and open-ended questions. The institutional mission statement and the core values were included on the survey to ensure faculty and student familiarity with these documents. Demographic information gathered for faculty included the university role (e.g. associate professor, adjunct faculty) and the number of years of service. Student demographics included academic status (e.g. first or second year graduate student) and semesters of clinic completed.

Surveys were distributed to all faculty members in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders who participate in clinical teaching and to students participating in clinical practicum courses during the time of the study. A total of 20 faculty surveys and 62 student surveys were distributed via faculty and student mailboxes on campus. All surveys remained anonymous in that no codes or identifying information were included. Participation in the project was voluntary in that surveys were completed and returned at the discretion of each individual participant. If the participant chose to complete the survey, it was returned to the primary researcher in an unmarked envelope. Surveys were separated from envelopes in order to ensure further anonymity of responses. At the completion of the project, all surveys were shredded.

Data were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics (group means) and rankings regarding the least and most frequently reported activities to provide comparative information between students and clinical faculty. In addition, open-ended questions were analyzed for common trends. Demographic data were compiled and summarized through the use of descriptive measures in order to provide an overview of the sample. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed to identify trends in the current practices in implementing the institutional mission and core values in clinical teaching.

## RESULTS

The return rate of faculty surveys was nine out of twenty distributed, or 45 percent while the return rate for student surveys was 25 out of 62 distributed, or 42 percent. Faculty who responded represented the roles of full professor, assistant professor, assistant clinical professor, associate professor, associate clinical professor and adjunct faculty member. The years of service ranged from 1 to 30.

All faculty respondents indicated that they were familiar with the mission statement of the university but had learned about it in a variety of ways. The majority of respondents reported that they were given copies of the mission statement from the department chair or clinic director, or had read the mission statement online at the university Web site. Others had received a copy of the statement at orientation, heard the statement read at a faculty meeting or university gathering, received verbal information from the department chair or clinic director, conversed with fellow faculty members about the statement, or received information during university committee meetings.

In contrast to the 100 percent of faculty respondents familiar with the mission statement, 48 percent of the students indicated having some awareness of the mission statement. Student respondents indicated that they obtained knowledge about the mission statement through various means including: reading the statement online at the university Web site, receiving a copy at the graduate orientation, reading the statement in the graduate handbook, receiving the mission statement from a faculty member in the department, receiving verbal information about the mission statement, and receiving information in an undergraduate course.

When asked about the main facets of the mission statement that are fulfilled by clinical experiences in the program in Communication Sciences and Disorders, 100 percent of faculty respondents indicated that the following components were fulfilled: to think critically, to communicate effectively, and to serve wisely and compassionately in support of human dignity and the common good. In addition, 77 percent of the faculty group indicated that the program fulfills the goal of searching for truth. Similar results were obtained from the student respondents. Students indicated that the program fulfills the following components: 100 percent agreed that thinking critically was addressed; 96 percent agreed that communicating effectively was addressed; and 88 percent agreed with serving wisely and compassionately in support of human dignity and the common good. Analogous to the faculty results, searching for truth yielded the lowest number of positive responses with 60 percent of the students agreeing that this component was fulfilled in the program.

Participants in the study were also queried about the practices through which the mission is fulfilled specifically within their clinical experiences. The following tables indicate faculty and student perceptions regarding the practices used by faculty to implement the mission into clinical practicum experiences:

Table 1. Faculty and Student Percentage of Responses for Individual Practices

Practices	Faculty Rankings By Percentage	Student Rankings By Percentage
Evidence-Based Practice	100%	88%
Student/Supervisor Meetings	100%	84%
Active Clinical Problem Solving	100%	88%
Evaluation of Client Performance	88%	84%
Evaluation of Student Performance	88%	68%
Parent Conferences	88%	92%
Serving a Diverse Client Population	77%	72%
Fostering Client Self-Advocacy Skills	77%	76%
Written Clinical Reports	77%	60%
Family Involvement in Therapy	77%	92%
Data Collection from Sessions	55%	68%
Role Playing	55%	44%
Modification of Lesson Plans	44%	56%

Analysis of the results revealed that faculty perceived the top three practices for implementing the mission statement to be evidence-based practice, student/supervisor meetings, and active clinical problem solving. Students selected parent conferences and family involvement in therapy as their top choices, with evidence-based practice and active clinical problem solving ranking equally as third



options. Both faculty and student groups ranked role-playing and modification of lesson plans as the least significant ways that the mission is implemented in their clinical practica.

Further information about faculty and student perceptions relative to the practices of implementing the mission statement into clinical experiences was obtained through open-ended questions targeting each of the four components of the mission. In response to “searching for truth,” the highest incidence of both faculty and student responses related to obtaining additional information through journal articles or books, or specifically evidence-based practice. The second highest rate of responses for both groups focused on obtaining more accurate information about clients through assessment via formal evaluation or more complete case histories. Additional faculty responses included attending workshops or classes, helping students self-evaluate to set goals, keeping accurate data, using developmental norms for planning treatment, and encouraging students to be “true” to the type of services they were offering. Additional student responses involved giving clients and families accurate (true) information and searching for better ways to teach.

The second component of the mission statement probed was “to think critically.” The primary theme observed in both faculty and student comments related to critical thinking in planning and executing therapy sessions for clients. Comments centered on selecting appropriate materials, activities, and procedures for clients based on individual differences in skills, performance, and ethnic backgrounds. A second theme that emerged from the data was “thinking critically” to solve problems. Faculty discussed encouraging students to use problem-solving skills in finding answers about client progress, behavior, and diagnosis. Students discussed the importance of “not accepting everything at face value” and using literature to foster better decisions. Evaluation was a final theme with more responses by faculty than students in this area. Faculty cited student self-evaluation of sessions and reports as well as evaluation of clients during therapy and assessment sessions. One student referred to evaluation of client performance. Additional comments in this area included adjusting student expectations based on skills, and thinking critically in meetings with supervisors and in discussions with peers.

The third area of focus of the mission statement is to “communicate effectively.” Two similar themes emerged from analysis of both faculty and student responses. Those themes were communicating with clients and communicating with families. Regarding communication with clients, faculty cited active listening and responding, asking appropriate questions, demonstrating sensitivity during interactions, responding honestly, and demonstrating an openness to communication regardless of time constraints. On the other hand, students repeatedly gave responses, such as, “Therapy is communication!” and “This is our field!” suggesting that communication is the main goal of all client-clinician interaction. Regarding parent and family communication, faculty again provided more specific comments, such as training students to conduct initial interviews with families, encouraging students to modify communication based on family responses, always acknowledging families, responding to family members’ questions, and communicating during family conferences. Students gave more general responses to this item primarily referring to parent/family conferences. Faculty also noted communication with students, colleagues in the department, and other speech language pathologists. Students remarked on communication with supervisors and peers.

The final facet of the mission statement is “to serve wisely and compassionately in support of human dignity and the common good.” By far, the vast majority of faculty and student responses centered on serving and supporting the clients. Faculty noted these facets: respecting clients’ dignity regardless of speech and language disorder, race, or ethnicity; acting with kindness; providing information

and resources about disorders; involving clients in goal selection; and delivering quality services to clients. Student remarks about clients in this area included: supporting clients, demonstrating compassion, listening to clients' concerns, providing the best possible services, and respecting client diversity. A small number of faculty comments highlighted service, respect, and support for students. Conversely, a small number of student comments referenced respect and support for their peers. One student commented on supporting staff. Miscellaneous supervisor comments noted confidentiality, donations, and support for coworkers.

Faculty unanimously reported that they had never directly targeted the mission statement during clinical practicum experiences with students; and, with one exception, students concurred that faculty members had never directly discussed the mission statement during clinical interactions. One student reported that the mission statement was directly addressed during an undergraduate class; however, this experience occurred during academic coursework as opposed to clinical experiences.

Finally, when asked about indirectly targeting the mission statement with students, all but two faculty participants (77 percent) indicated that they did indeed do this within clinical practica. One faculty member denied targeting the mission statement indirectly, while one faculty member did not respond. Analysis of student responses revealed that 56 percent felt that the mission statement had been targeted indirectly during clinical experiences, while 44 percent reported that it had not been targeted.

The second part of this study focused on student and faculty perceptions and practices of implementation of the core values of the institution. The core values of this institution are respect, excellence, compassion, service, hospitality, integrity, diversity, and learning for life. Sixty-six percent of faculty responses noted familiarity with the core values, 22 percent indicated that they were not familiar with them and one person did not respond. Faculty cited various avenues for gaining this knowledge. The largest number of faculty respondents reported hearing the core values read at a faculty meeting or other university gathering. Other respondents indicated that they gained familiarity with the core values via verbal or written information from the department chair or clinic director, talking to other university faculty members, and reading the core values on the university Web site. One faculty member noted receiving a copy of the core values at a faculty orientation, while one other faculty member reported receiving a bookmark with the core values listed on it.

Fifty-six percent of the students reported familiarity with the core values and 44 percent reported that they had no knowledge of these values. Of those students indicating familiarity, the following venues were cited: reading the core values online at the university Web site, receiving a copy of the core values at graduate orientation, reading the core values in the graduate handbook, and receiving information in an undergraduate course. No student reported receiving a verbal or written list of the core values from any faculty member in the department.

Faculty and students were further probed about the practices used within clinical experiences to provide information about the core values. That information in relation to each of the individual values will be discussed below.

The first value addressed was that of respect. The primary theme of faculty responses was respect for students, specifically respect for their ideas and opinions, individual differences, needs, strengths, and feelings. Additional themes were respect displayed in the treatment of clients and families, and

ultimately, respect in the treatment of all persons. Student responses were characterized primarily by comments involving respect for clients regardless of their disability, culture, or ethnicity. Three students also extended this respect to faculty, staff, peers, and families.

Many faculty members responded to the value of excellence in relation to their role as a clinical supervisor, referencing excellence in performance of their professional responsibilities. Other comments referred to the level of excellence faculty expect students to exhibit in their roles as student clinicians. Some of the responses could be attributed to excellence as either faculty or students; examples of cross-referents include providing services with integrity, demonstrating excellence in therapy, generating appropriate lesson plans, and producing professional reports. Like faculty, students primarily responded to excellence relative to their personal roles in the program; thus, students cited excellence in clinical skills with the greatest frequency.

Empathy for clients and families was a common theme of both faculty members and students when asked to elaborate on their experiences suggesting fulfillment of the virtue of compassion. Both groups also discussed understanding of client and family members' needs and feelings. Student and faculty participants also cited support, whether as an active listener in responding to shared challenges or in more formal support groups, such as those offered for parents of nonverbal children or clients with fluency disorders. Faculty noted empathy for students in recognizing their personal commitments and relationships as well as their academic and clinical responsibilities. Students remarked on showing compassion toward their peers.

Responses to the core value of service yielded results that fell within two primary themes in both the student and faculty groups. One theme focused around the type of service that is provided in the context of speech and language therapy and diagnostic evaluations associated with clinical assignments. Many commented on serving clients in the campus clinic by treating clients to the best of their ability and with the highest quality of service possible. Other comments related to this theme were associated with responsible service, such as punctuality, helping those in need, and maintaining materials. A second theme that emerged from both groups' responses related to service beyond the normal clinical practicum experiences. Those services included community speech and language screenings, participating in fundraisers and charity events to support persons with disabilities, and serving in professional organizations.

The value of hospitality was overwhelmingly associated with welcoming by both faculty and student participants. Both groups included welcoming of clients and families into the clinic. Faculty responded with comments about welcoming new students, clinic visitors, and other professionals. Students discussed a welcoming attitude and general hospitality toward faculty, peers, and staff during everyday activities. One faculty member noted that hospitality is tied directly to the heritage of the institution.

Ethics was a common theme in student and faculty responses to the value of integrity. Both groups noted ethical services, ethical decision-making, and ethical reporting of information. Several respondents specifically remarked on adhering to the ASHA Code of Ethics. Other respondents stated that honesty was associated with integrity, and that honesty could be the result of evidence-based practice, or could be displayed in relationships between students and supervisors, students and clients, or students and families. Others related integrity to maintaining confidentiality of clinical information, providing quality services, and exhibiting professionalism.

The value of diversity yielded responses from both groups about respecting and accepting differences in disorders, ages, ethnicities, and cultures. Students primarily addressed the diversity of the clients that they service in their clinical work. Faculty noted the client population as well, but also remarked on the diversity of the student population. One faculty member indicated that the need to be “diverse in thinking and teaching” in order to be an effective educator.

Learning for life was directly tied to the changing world and, specifically, the changing profession as a theme of faculty responses to this final core value. As a result, faculty cited the need for continued research, reading of professional materials, collaborating with other professionals, and attending formal continuing education activities, such as workshops, conventions, and presentations. Faculty noted the importance of joining and actively participating in professional organizations on the local, state, and national levels. Student responses also acknowledged the need for lifelong learning but responses were more closely tied to learning within their clinical experiences in the program and in the near future. Students noted learning more advanced skills in problem solving, teamwork, application of therapy techniques, and searching for information outside of their academic courses. Two students discussed formal opportunities for learning, such as continuing education workshops and field-related activities.

When asked about teaching of core values within clinical education, 100 percent of the faculty participants indicated that they had never directly discussed core values with their students; however, 77 percent reported that they addressed the core values indirectly. Likewise, 100 percent of the students reported that clinical faculty had not provided specific information about core values within clinical practicum. Forty-six percent indicated that information about the core values was indirectly provided, while 54 percent reported that the core values were not targeted during clinical courses.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study explored faculty and student awareness of institutional mission and core values, and implementation practices within a clinical education program at a middle-sized Catholic university in the Midwestern United States. The findings from this sample indicated that faculty members involved in the clinical education program typically have familiarity with institutional mission, and that some faculty members, but not all, also have an awareness of the core values. Conversely, approximately half of the students in the clinical education program are familiar with the institutional mission statement and one-third of the students are aware of the core values. No faculty members in this study reported direct teaching of mission or core values; however, a majority reported that they indirectly target these components within clinical teaching. Similarly, no student in the study reported receiving direct information about the mission or core values at the graduate level; approximately half of the students indicated that mission and core values were indirectly targeted during clinical experiences.

In targeting mission and core values during clinical teaching, faculty indicated a variety of implementation practices with the most frequent being evidence-based practice, student/supervisor meetings, and active clinical problem solving. Students also indicated a variety of practices that faculty used to target institutional mission and core values with the most frequent in that group being family involvement in therapy, parent conferences, evidence-based practice, and active clinical problem solving.

## IMPLICATIONS

Implications from this study suggest the need for more consistent strategies at both the institutional and departmental levels for ensuring that faculty and students receive information about the institutional mission and core values. While a variety of means of disseminating this information may be useful, institutions and programs may want to focus attention on one or two strategies to ensure that all faculty and staff are familiar with these documents.

Secondly, discussions about mission and core values among faculty within the institution and/or department may be warranted to enhance familiarity and understanding of the various facets of the mission statement and the individual core values. Additional discussion should address practices for implementation of the mission and core values via direct as well as indirect instruction. Specifically, clinical faculty may discuss the differences in implementation practices based on clinical education and experiences as opposed to more academically based classroom instruction.

Finally, discussions about institutional mission and core values may prompt departments to review and revise departmental mission statements to ensure that individual components of those documents align with and support the institutional mission and values.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study was based on a small sample of faculty and graduate students in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at a Midwestern university. Additional research is warranted to study the awareness and implementation of institutional mission and core values at other institutions of higher learning, as well as awareness and implementation in academic coursework, and in other fields of study with a strong clinical component, such as nursing, physical therapy, and social work.

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# Fashioning Voice/s: Dialogue, Reflexivity, and Disorienting Dilemmas<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

While the title of this essay is “Dialogue, Reflexivity, and Disorienting Dilemmas,” the subtext is integrating three theories. The theories concern listening and finding voice, repeated reflection in interpretive inquiry, and transformative learning. I use this integration in the courses I teach in the Graduate Professional Leadership Program at Carlow University. Our population is primarily women whose ages range from late 20s to early 60s. The learners all have experience in the workforce and nearly all are working fulltime while completing the Master of Science degree.

The primary direction of our program is for learners to find meaning in both personal and professional lives. In our program leadership is considered a “journey inward” (Ambrose). Students must reflect on pivotal life experience and attempt to apply the voices resulting from this reflection to leading both self and others. With Bakhtin we believe that we discover our voices only through dialogue with differing voices. The dialogue can be with differing voices of classmates, texts, people in different circumstances, music, paintings, teachers, dramas, videos, films, or anything else that takes one out of the restrictive prison of one’s own views and ideology (Jameson). When a learner is liberated from the narrow confines of her own thinking, she can be transformed to have, or at least to see and recognize, the value of another view, perspective, or worldview. In our philosophy, comprehending and valuing the views of others is fundamental to leading.

I teach Principles of Qualitative Research, Communication for Leadership, Instructional Design, and Instructional Implementation. In order to facilitate learners attending to all the voices in the room, I often use principles and techniques from qualitative interpretive inquiry to promote learners fashioning their voice and, in some cases, to enable transformation in their thinking. Interpretive research encompasses study, inquiry, exploration, examination, and reflection at every point in the process...all of which are expected of all learners in their conduct of studies. Thus, I find research, in general and qualitative interpretive inquiry, in particular, to be foundational to learning, and especially connected to regard for the voices and ideas of others. The techniques I describe help learners become better students and leaders, and provide a lifelong method for dialoguing with others and fashioning one’s own voice/s in response.

## VOICES IN DIALOGUE

Many complexities dwell in the delineation of voice. Per Linell, a Swedish discourse scholar, maintains “the concept of voice involves at least three important dimensions (a) material or physical embodiment (of utterances), (b) personal signature, and (c) perspectives on topics and issues” (164). Thus we may consider voice to be speech or writing, identity, and point of view. Since each of these aspects is closely aligned with the idea of the self, it is not surprising that voice appears often in the literature of feminist pedagogy, adult learning, interpretive studies, and therapy. In these areas the metaphor of voice is often used to signify a person’s development of new perspectives.

In 1987, in *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, Belenky, and Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule interviewed 135 women about their experiences as learners and knowers. Interestingly, the themes they found form around listening and voice. The themes are 1) silence, in which the learner/knower is totally dependent on the voice of authority, 2) received knowing, where the learner/knower listens to the voices of authority and reproduces that voice, 3) subjective knowing, where the learner/knower listens to one's self, but not to others, 4) procedural knowing, in which the learner/knower either engages in a) connected knowing, finding truth only through empathetic listening to other voices or b) separate knowing, listening to other voices by relying solely on reason, and 5) constructed knowledge, in which the learner/knower integrates one's own voice with the voices outside of the self. The authors maintain this is not a stage-related model. The importance of the categories for this essay is that they strongly suggest a confluence of voice, knowledge, and self. This convergence fits with my 35+ years of experiences in the classroom.

In the classroom, when we encourage learners to find their own voices and to write in their authentic voices, what do we really mean? Laurie Finke posits that when teachers in feminist classrooms ask students to "discover their own voices" they often actually want students to "discover" the authoritative voice of discipline, not their voices in relation to the discipline (16). I think Finke's critique of the teacher's desire to have students appropriate the 'authoritative voice of the discipline' is correct. We all want students to be able to use the proper voice of the discipline we are teaching. However, this is not the only voice/s we should wish them to locate within a discipline. To truly learn and to be able to apply that learning one must dialogue with the discipline, text, topic, issue, or question and with others about that subject. Otherwise one has a single, narrow interpretation, perhaps 'received knowing,' perhaps 'subjective knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule), absent voice that has been honed through reflection on the thoughts, ideas, and perspectives of others.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin views voice as inseparable from dialogue. He writes, "A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (252). With Bakhtin I want to place voice directly within the learner's dialogue with the theory, text, classmates, and opposing voices. It is only then that a learner can begin to construct her own opinions and shape her voice regarding the issue at hand. I use qualitative interpretive inquiry in encouraging learners to craft their voices in reference to those of others.

## REFLEXIVITY IN INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY

Qualitative research is a large, sprawling field currently used in many disciplines. It is a patchwork quilt of methods, thus, it is difficult to precisely define. However, qualitative research can be broadly divided into interpretive inquiry and critical studies. In each, voice is paramount. Interpretive studies attempt to understand a phenomenon from the perspective or voice of those being interviewed or observed. The purpose of critical studies is to "critique power in societies" (Locke, Silverman and Spirduso 149). Interpretive studies include, but are not limited to, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative, linguistics, hermeneutics, rhetoric, and case studies. Critical theory research includes feminist, Marxist, Foucauldian, deconstruction, post-modern, and post-structural inquiries; both interpretive and critical research may use print materials, and documents. While I will deal primarily with the principles of interpretive inquiry in this essay, I am currently working on a method of applying the principles of critical theory in the classroom to enable learners to better grapple issues of social justice in their course work and life work. Recently, Norman Denzin, the

editor of the new *International Review of Qualitative Research*, called for submissions to the journal of both traditional and critical forms of qualitative inquiry that address social justice (IRQR 3). Denzin is a guru of qualitative research and his call will influence more interpretive studies to move toward a social justice orientation. This orientation is emblematic of the Professional Leadership Program and of Carlow University.

There are several philosophical principles on which most interpretive researchers agree:

- The researcher is the instrument of interpretive inquiry (Guba and Lincoln; Reinharz 3).
- Interpretive research is an inductive process through which the researcher attempts to understand the voice, context, thoughts, emotions of the participant (Richards and Morse 30).
- Knowledge is inseparable from the knower, therefore reflection on the knower's voice is fundamental (Hesse-Biber and Levy 14).
- Interviews are often conversations or dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Richards and Morse 113), emphasizing the importance of reflecting on the voice of each.
- Interpretation of the knowledge gathered in research is co-created by the researcher and the participants (Guba and Lincoln 269).
- All researchers carry with them their subjectivity, therefore, reflection on their own voice throughout the study is vital to the inquiry process (Charmaz and Mitchell 193–215).
- representation of the voices of those studied and the researcher's own voice should be subjected to repeated reflection/reflexivity (Hertz vii–viii).

From this list, it is obvious that interpretive inquiry is characterized by voice, dialogue, and reflection.

Because of the subjectivity involved in interpretation, interpretive researchers must be very conscious of what they bring to an interview, to the interpretation, and to the representation, of the voices of those interviewed. Position, class, experience, subjectivities, emotions, biases, and worldviews exist for both interviewer and interviewee. For interpretive researchers, there is no attempt to pretend that these issues do not exist. Rather, the researcher recognizes these subjective elements and interrogates them to see exactly how they are distorting the questions asked, the answers recorded, the interpretations made, and the writing of the notes of the interview. In qualitative research this is called reflexivity. This is what I ask graduate students to do in my classes when they have a case study to analyze, a presentation to prepare, or a paper to write.

Whether the student is enchanted by or is having a particularly difficult time with a theory, reading, issue, or idea from a classmate, I request that they ask the following questions: What am I bringing to this situation? How do my beliefs, point of view and experiences keep me from engaging with this idea? How does my “baggage” affect my interpretation of what is happening? What are the other voices in the room saying? How do my preconceived ideas affect my representation of this issue in writing and speaking? This is difficult reflection for most students. They prefer to call it reflection, but I insist on the term reflexivity. The process goes beyond much usual reflection which

requires their looking at their behavior and reflecting on what occurred, why it occurred, and what improvements might be needed. However, enormous learning may take place with this method.

An example of this type of change occurred in my Communication for Leadership class last term. During the course the students were asked to respond to a case study in which the manager allowed the new technology group that was working many overtime hours to order a foosball table for breaks in the long days and nights and to help team building. The CFO became angry with the manager because other departments were calling and asking about the purchase. In spite of the fact that the president and owner of the company had given the manager complete discretion to do whatever needed to be done to make the technology group a high-functioning team, and despite the evidence that they were performing well, most of the members of the class went into the “fear of authority” mode. They were certain the manager would be fired, the foosball table would be returned, and the team would implode. When one person asked, “What do you think you are bringing to this case that makes you see it that way?” there was complete silence. Then somebody said, “That is the way things are. There are rules!” A lively dialogue followed about a text we had read earlier in the term which addressed the dangers of leading (Heifetz and Linsky 9-48), going beyond your authority (20-26) and organizational changes that cause people to learn new ways of being (13-20). Through listening to other voices and examining her own worldview, each student advanced her thinking and found new aspects of voice. Activities of this type forward academic excellence for the student and give her a process she can use in her lifelong learning.

It is the dialogue that allows the learner to hear a voice other than her own. She is not just listening to the voice of authority, reproducing the voice of authority, or focusing only on her own voice as in Blenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule’s silence and received knowledge. I always hope a learner, using heart and mind, will interrogate and dialogue with other voices (i.e., texts, students, teachers, etc.) and from this discourse will construct her own knowledge apropos the issue.

Much is written about reflexivity in the representation or writing about interpretive research. Writing always has the voice/s of the author as well as the voices of the participants in the research. According to Alvesson and Skoldberg, text production or writing must be monitored as closely as knowledge construction (6). In relation to reflecting on one’s writing, they go on to say, “... the main point is to “lift” the project, to generate more interesting, innovative, and qualified results (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 286). They suggest that the researcher might continue to reflect on a research project after it is completed “to reinterpret earlier descriptions and ideas and to put them in a new context, thereby developing new knowledge” (286).

Lincoln and Guba maintain that “writing is not merely the transcribing of some reality...rather writing of all the texts notes, presentations, and possibilities is also a process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes the problem itself) and discovery of the self” (279).

I want the students in my classes to engage in the process of discovery through their writing. I want them to lift their project through dialoguing and questioning their papers and presentations during the preparation, and to continue to dialogue and question them after the assignment is completed. The question must always be as follows: How is the voice I am using reflective of all the voices I have heard on this topic? Why have I selected this voice? Which voices am I choosing to include, and which am I not including? Why? What am I learning from writing this paper or preparing this presentation/poster/recording, etc.? What more do I need to learn? Now that the assignment is over, how am I changed by reflecting on my work? The primary point of this procedure is for students to

“consistently consider the various basic dimensions behind the work of interpretation” (Alvesson and Skoldberg 6). In so doing they develop a process of constantly dialoguing with new voices, sometimes refashioning their own voice.

If the issue is grand enough, refashioning one’s voice can be tantamount to drastically changing significant ideas and opinions. In adult learning, we call this type of change transformative learning, the topic of the final piece in this essay.

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING OR RADICAL ACTS

I think learning ought to be a radical act. It should result in great change in the learner. From this view, teachers facilitate rebellious behavior. If we are careful we can help learners oppose received knowledge that does not support social justice, human dignity, community building, and collaboration. Thus, teachers are radical activists. Qualitative interpretative inquiry and critical studies can be complicit in such revolutionary activity also.

Transformative learning refers to a person changing their “meaning perspective” or how they make sense of a certain experience (Mezirow 50). According to Mezirow, transformation may occur when someone encounters a “disorienting dilemma.” If the dilemma is disorienting enough the learner will critically reflect upon her assumptions about the focus of the dilemma. If the reflection shows clearly that her assumptions or frame of reference seriously restrain her way of seeing this particular issue, she may begin to transform her perspective of the idea (167). This is truly learning as a radical act!

How can such a radical act occur? In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, bell hooks says her teaching style is confrontational, meaning she expects students to fashion their voices under pressure. She says students may not enjoy her class, but they learn and change as a result of the course. From a different viewpoint, Megan Boler writes of a pedagogy of discomfort in which teachers must engage in learning how to see and hear, and presumably use their voices differently in the classroom. I, too, need to reflect on the baggage we bring to class about our position in relation to students. What baggage am I carrying and how does it affect learning in the classroom? I need to be reflexive about the voices I employ in class. I must reflect on how I represent the voices of learners in my mind. I need to repeatedly reflect on our interpretation of learners’ work, and on our comments regarding that work. In this reflexivity I may have a disorienting dilemma and transformative learning experience of my own.

Transformative learning eclipses the received knowledge model which merely transmits knowledge from teacher to student. It also outshines the transactional model of respecting adult students’ vast experience and setting up an interactive classroom. Transformative learning is a fundamental change in the way a learner constructs meaning about a significant area. It is exactly what I hope will happen with learners in my courses. Transformation of large areas of perspective is rare in the duration of just one course, but I believe fashioning voices through dialogue and insisting on reflexivity produce smaller changes in “meaning schemes” (Mezirow 50) that may lead to transformative learning.

This essay has brought together three processes: the dialogic process of listening, negotiating meaning, and voicing perspectives; the use of interpretive reflexivity to enhance dialogue; and the prospect of transforming perspective as a result of dialogue and reflexivity. Many voices compete for



students' attention during the act of learning. Learning can only be truly radical when the learner can listen carefully enough to all the voices at every intersection of thought and engage her own reactions and feelings. Then she must repeatedly reflect on what she has heard, and decide what to incorporate into her own voice. While a learner can demonstrate her knowledge through dialogue, her perspective of that knowledge is changed through the discourse.<sup>2</sup> This is the radical act of learning!

## ENDNOTES

The idea of dialogue used here is based on M. M. Bakhtin's understanding of voice as dialogic ... addressing and addressed, thus forever changing. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 1984).

The term, reflexivity, is a specialized term coming from interpretative qualitative research. It refers to the researcher's repeated examination and reflection concerning how they created the account of the inquiry they constructed. Disorienting dilemmas is a term taken from Mezirow's idea of transformative learning (Mezirow, Jack. *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: 1991.

<sup>2</sup> I was struck by a "disorienting dilemma" of my own after having three people read this paper in order to give me feedback. Each person focused on totally different areas that should be revised. This was disorienting! I listened carefully and attempted, through reflexivity, to allow their disparate voices to inform mine. I learned a great deal from this experience. I changed my "meaning schemes" in relation to the points they made. I hope I have allowed their voices to be integrated into my voice successfully.

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# Sharing Your Voice: Building Community through the Use of Self-Disclosure in the Feminist Classroom

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## INTRODUCTION

As women who teach in a woman-centered university, we embrace a feminist pedagogy as both the philosophy and the practice of our teaching. Pioneered by women such as Gilligan and in voices such as Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, and Terule, feminist pedagogy focuses on the creation of an inclusive environment for all learners in the classroom.

Primary to the feminist pedagogical model is the promotion of community building that establishes trust. Democracy, gender equity, and minority equity are also established. Critically important is the discovery and development of each learner's voice. In terms of the learner, both professor and student are learners. There is a positive interdependence as every learner recognizes her part in the learning experience. Also, there is individual accountability as each learner is responsible for her own learning.

The literature provides a great deal of discussion about the classroom community, but gives less attention to how an instructor might go about building that community. Although there are many aspects of that process, our purpose here is to explore one means of community building: the conscious use of self-disclosure.

In this paper, we provide a case study in which we consider the self-disclosure of both the professor and the students and the impact that each had on the other. It is not our intention to advocate for a particular kind of disclosure or a specific level of openness. Our hope is to explore the frequently unnoticed effects of self-disclosure so that instructors might mindfully share their own stories and invite stories of their students with equal intentionality. By consciously using self-disclosure, we can be present in an appropriate and authentic manner, while allowing the strength of our narratives to move the group into a community.

## COMMUNITY BUILDING IN A HIGHER EDUCATION CLASSROOM

Community is important to establish in higher education because it models what needs to exist in an early childhood or elementary classroom. On the higher education level, community establishes a class that is caring and that promotes dealing with the hard questions like why learners are choosing this profession (Gould). These pre-service teachers who experience community will come to know classrooms that are caring, maintain respectful relationships, show value of all learners in the class, provide a safe space for learning, challenge learners, and encourage self-expression (Booker, Gould, Weidner, Dehouske). Learners who participate in a classroom with enthusiasm have a greater sense of belonging, closeness, support, trust, and motivation (Booker, Weidner, Dehouske). Active learning promotes engagement in the class (Booker, 2007 Weidner, Dehouske). Diversity is encouraged in a classroom community and individuality and uniqueness are supported (Booker, Weidner).

Teachers and mentors have acknowledged that learning does not really happen except in a caring environment where relationship occurs (Beck, Dehouske, Noddings, Gilligan). But there must be a balance between learner-centered and content-centered experiences (Findley). In establishing community, the two most important traits for teachers are relieving anxiety and a willingness to listen (Gould), as well as providing a safe and predictable environment that increases self esteem and provides for empowerment (Gould). This model replaces the patriarchal model with a partnership model and integrates teaching and learning (Weidner). Interestingly enough, American schools have done poorly at showing children that teachers are “real people” (Wyett).

## THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Ellen used two art classes from the spring 2008 semester for this case study. One was a graduate course on the master’s level, and it was called Aesthetics as Learning. There were 13 learners (11 of whom were women) in the class. Ellen was the 14th additional learner. The second class was an undergraduate class of 21 women learners called Integrating the Arts in the Early Childhood and Elementary Education Curriculum. These were both three-hour classes. It was her hope that these two independent classes would experience inclusion and community among the learners in their respective classes. Ellen also hoped that each learner’s learning was enriched by communication with the other learners, including her.

Ellen assigned seats in alphabetic order so that no one was likely to sit with a friend. She wanted to help each learner break out of her comfort zone as each got introduced to new people. Seating was in groups of three or four and each group faced each other either by seating around a circular table or by facing in three or four desks.

Each class had a number of small group experiences and discussions as well as several safe and non-threatening large group discussions. By the end of the first class, each class seemed like a busy unit of activity and energy.

Since both classes were in the arts, they had similar activities and experiences. The graduate class had much more reading. Each class began with a guided imagery and a journal entry. Ellen gave the topics. The journaling was discussed in small groups and in the large group. Ellen never read the journals, but they could be used in the final reflective paper. They reviewed the readings for the day. The classes had biweekly writings. Ellen told the learners that it was important to keep up a regular dialogue, and, for the most part, the learners passed in their papers when they were due. Ellen gave all papers back the next week with comments. Visual art and writing were the two art forms mainly studied in the classes. The learners were invited to write about an aspect of the readings or about anything else read or mentioned in class as the stimulus. The tasks were very process-oriented in general.

During each class, they discussed readings about the arts; however, that theme is not the emphasis of this paper so it will not be discussed unless it ties in with the theme of community and self-disclosure.

Soon, they discussed individual early experiences with learning art. They talked about criticism and encouragement, caring and trust, and copying artwork versus individual expression. Each learner recalled a special teacher and that teacher’s traits. Ellen also read her essay, “Memories of a Catholic School Girl,” which introduced her many losses in her young life and the nurturing nuns

who taught her. The essay included her wish that someone would have talked to her about her losses. Both classes of learners seemed to listen very attentively but needed thinking time. They were moved along so that the learners each had an opportunity to draw individual six-block coats of arms to introduce each other to the members of the small group. They seemed to enjoy the process and the sharing. In addition, they read and discussed a brief article by Ellen called “Relationship and Learning,” and all agreed that there can be no learning that occurs unless there is a relationship of trust between the teacher and each child. In the graduate level aesthetics class, talk flowed back and forth on these topics; both Ellen and the learners seemed to feel comfortable. However, in the undergraduate Integrating the Arts class, the learners listened attentively as shown by their facial expressions, but there was sparse dialogue. This class seemed to need to think about this further.

A class day later, Ellen read a story that was published in a student journal, Carlow’s *The Critical Point* titled, “A Mother’s Note on a Green Envelope.” It is autobiographical and tells the story of her mother who became mentally ill after Ellen’s birth, who was placed in a state psychiatric hospital and who stayed there for 13 years, starting in 1945. Ellen’s father died when she was two. Her grandfather cared for Ellen and her sister for five years until he died. An aunt and uncle cared for them for three years until her aunt went to a mental hospital. And a last aunt and uncle took care of them until they graduated from high school. Ellen’s mother came out of the hospital, lived as a boarder in another person’s house, kept to herself after some visits to her sisters and brothers and worked as a waitress and later as a cook. She saved and bought a house in Cleveland. In 1988, Ellen began sending monthly notes to tell her mother how she and her sister were doing. Ellen’s mother saved money and wrote a note on a green envelope saying that she wanted to buy a house for Ellen, her sister and her to live in together. Ellen’s mother died in 1995, without sharing any of this. But Ellen did find out that her mother did read all the notes from her. Her mother had a savings account that held \$150,000—which Ellen and her sister shared. Ellen bought a nice little townhouse for herself.

The learners listened quietly.

Ellen told them that she, too, has a mental illness—she is bipolar.

In the graduate class, one learner spontaneously said, “My mother’s bipolar. I think it’s from after my dad got murdered, and a year later, her favorite brother got murdered. It was too much.” Ellen agreed and felt saddened. In contrast, the undergraduate learners listened, quietly and attentively but were silent. Then, Ellen proceeded to tell the classes that she read her story and told them about herself so that they could see that with supportive friends, medicine and good therapy, a mentally ill person can live a decent life and have a job as a teacher for 39 years. And that Ellen feels very fortunate. A graduate student told Ellen that she should feel brave for telling this story because it is so important.

The undergraduate class welcomed the return to the work of their class. This was to be a constant difference between the graduate and undergraduate classes. The graduates went with the personal disclosure and were open about it with the class. The undergraduates communicated about personal issues to Ellen in writing but the class proceeded on topic. The learners in both classes were asked to respond to the story about Ellen’s mother if they wanted to. Nearly all learners responded to the story, and half wrote about painful incidents that happened to them or their family because of Ellen, who had the courage to speak of hers.

Later, for example, one task the class did was four-block thumbprint stories using watercolors for thumbprints. They were engaged in conversation in their small groups and seemed to enjoy the experience. Each learner read her story aloud to the whole class. All listened and seemed attentive to the stories and thumbprints. It was fun for everyone.

As classes progressed, Ellen spoke about Julia Cameron's book, *The Artist's Way*. She introduced both classes to the concept of the censor. To be free to do the arts, each of us must free ourselves of the judgmental censor. The learners seemed to appreciate knowing about a censor and using that concept to their advantage. It is an important concept to these classes. In fact, in later classes, the learners articulated how liberating it was to give the censor a name and form.

Then, for example, one group in the graduate class created an interwoven form of clay going upward with a cup they called supported by "Dr. Dehouske." This was very conscious. Another group did a tree, a red bird, and water. The third group did an apple and blueberries in a bowl with a knife. These last two groups just named the objects but did not share an interpretation.

The undergraduate learners enjoyed the process of using the clay for experimentation, and it went on for quite awhile. They were not interested in making much out of the clay. And that was fine.

Another example is that in both classes the learners did four individual "Feeling Poems." They are poems with six cued lines that do not control content—only structure. The top of the paper was reserved for a non-representational drawing in the color of the feeling. One feeling assigned was anger and the second was love. The remaining two poems were their choices of feelings. The learners seemed to enjoy doing them and reading one aloud to the whole class. Many members of the class wrote how they liked the poems and thought that they would be very good in teaching in order to get to know the learners.

## RESULTS

We asked the classes two questions to help them describe their experience with creating an atmosphere of building community through self-disclosure. We wanted some information that suggested that what seemed to be appearing really happened. We first wanted to know the impact in class of Ellen's early telling of her story.

Students submitted papers which reflected upon the readings and experiences that they had in their course. Towards the end of the course, students wrote answers to the two specific questions: How did my telling about my mother and my house impact your experience in this class? How did your sharing, either in your paper or in your small group, impact this class?

Our analysis process involved both of us reading these papers several times. From our multiple readings and the discussions in between, we were able to distinguish four themes that emerged in their writings. These themes were: instructor as role model, developing self-knowledge, creating community, and applications to teaching. Summaries of these themes follow.

## **Professor as Role Model**

As students described their experiences in Ellen's classes, one theme that emerged clearly was Ellen as a role model for a different kind of instructor than they have known in most places. They described themselves as more connected to Ellen at a deeper level and touched personally by her story. As a result of that deeper knowing they described her as brave, strong, secure and an example of resilience and hope. They were moved by the fact that Ellen has peace with [her] self. They felt that she respected and trusted them.

## **Developing Self-Knowledge**

Through the process of sharing that was established in this course, learners not only got an opportunity to know Ellen, they got to know themselves. This self-knowledge was significant to them in several ways.

First, Ellen's courage in telling her story unleashed the courage inside of many students. They felt that they had the courage to tell and to open up. They described events and feelings that they had never talked about before. They openly shared their own stories seasoned with loss and fear, pain and confusion. Secondly, as a result of their own telling, students began to lose their censor and "find their voice." They felt that they took time to search themselves and learned to express [them] selves more clearly. Thirdly, they were moved by the experience of telling and listening in a place without judgment. Fourth, they learned that in their class, and in every class, there are multiple outlooks. It is in the describing and claiming of those outlooks that we get to know ourselves and others. They came to know that everyone has a story. Fifth, several students talked about being able to relate to suffering. Some had specific examples of mental illness in their own families. There was a freedom for them in knowing that Ellen told her story with courage and hope in her ability to attain great professional goals.

## **Establishing Community**

A third theme that we analyzed from the learners' writings was that of establishing a community in the classroom. The learners described a number of qualities and processes of that community. Many learners reiterated this belief: Sharing experiences in this class I believe opened everybody to be able to talk about their own experiences. Many described their fellow learners as real. As a result of this openness, learners were stretched to experience others who were different from themselves. Many of the learners believed that they were cooperating and collaborating for the common good. They were working in a community because it's important to get along with classmates and coworkers and because everyone has something to contribute.

## **Application to Teaching**

There was a fourth theme that emerged: the learner's application to her/his own future teaching. There are a number of specific applications to their own teaching that learners gleaned from this experience. They talked about the value of allowing learners to know the instructor. "I believe that students who are more comfortable with their teachers and feel that they know their teachers a little better can communicate better in class and in assignments. . ." And, "teachers need to develop a student/teacher relationship and understand the diversity amongst various types of students...students



learn in different ways.” Another learner stated, “You gave us a concrete example of relationship in teaching and learning.”

Ellen’s sharing of her story empowered others to see the value in their own stories. One learner stated, “I realize that my life experiences as well will impact my teaching philosophies.” Another wrote, “I feel [Ellen’s story] encouraged me even more to use my problems as a basis for teaching. I want to help others so maybe they won’t have to go through such hard things alone.” And, they were motivated to see the power of the community. “After a few classes, I want my class to unite as a community of learners, as a whole unit.”

## DISCUSSION

### Mental Health as a Subtext

We know that Ellen’s classes exist in our greater culture in which issues of mental health are largely a culturally taboo topic of conversation. We would also suggest that having an esteemed faculty disclose her own bipolar disorder to her classes might be seen as shocking or inappropriate to some. Further, we recognize that writing this paper and uplifting this process might be viewed as a radical act. We want to frame and explain this issue in theory and context.

We move to the literature that states that optimal self-disclosure is both necessary for mental health and is the means for achieving that mental health (Sinha). Certainly, having solid mental health about the issues of mental health might be a helpful goal. Talking about mental health might be a way to normalize these issues. Although the classroom is not the only place where these discussions can occur, offering class discussions as fertile soil for understanding and being understood might be a helpful part in the process. Students wrote of the mental health issues in their own families and indicated some relief that others understood.

Ellen has a great deal of awareness about herself and is sensitive to her learners. She does not use her classes as a dumping ground; she works on her internal issues in another place. This may seem like a fine point but is important. As the instructor of this class, Ellen is mindful of her responsibility to her learners. She shares her story as a way of creating safety and transparency which leads to community building and ultimately to learning. She never loses sight of the fact that her sole purpose is to facilitate learning. We are focused on the conscious use of disclosure. That consciousness includes mature discernment about what stories might be helpful to the learners and which ones would get in the way of learning.

The norm of reciprocity (Berg) was evidenced through this experience: Ellen’s disclosures invited similarly intimate stories from other learners. Ellen was very clear that some of those situations required further counseling. She was careful to direct learners to the university counseling center when they expose situations that were troubling.

For many reading this paper, mental health issues would not be a part of your story. We are suggesting that consciously using your own story can be an important part of the learning experience. But because Ellen’s bipolar diagnosis is a part of her story and thus a part of this paper, we offer that information clearly and directly, hoping that the writing of this issue contributes to the creation of safety around mental health issues in the greater community beyond the classroom.

## **A Change in Classroom Culture**

It was a wonderful experience to see the growth of the learners over the course of the semester. The learners changed, and the classroom changed. The learners were delighted to discover feminist pedagogy, their voices, and a community of learners. They wrote about and talked about this occasionally during the semester and in most of their final reflections. Also, the invitation to self-disclose received a strong response. Most of the learners shared their stories right after Ellen's story was presented. In addition, the learners felt free and safe to tell their stories throughout the semester as a whole story or as a part story to support a point in an essay. Ellen always responded to their essays and sometimes made suggestions for referrals for support. The classrooms were alive and filled with energy, enthusiasm and wonder—wonder at where they would journey next. For example, there were daily arts experiences that were process-oriented. The learners grew to enjoy them and wonder what they might show about themselves and each other.

## **Stories Used in Education**

Tisdell asserts that personal and private stories are used in education in feminist pedagogies. These stories are transforming and enable women to become authors of their own lives. Ellen wanted this story to influence the class—if it was going to—as soon as possible. She ended her second class with the story and by telling the learners that she, herself, was bipolar. Ellen said that she wanted them to know that you could have a mental illness and still have a career like teaching for 37 years as long as you've got a good support group, good help, and stay on the medicine. The learners began telling their own stories in writing and became authors of their own lives.

## **Voice**

Tisdell talks of one important theme in giving voice to these women, i.e., the way talk gives identity, power, and expression. The learners thought about their voices differently at the end of classes and examined how they each gave voice to ideas. This voice gave authorship and was transforming.

## **Building Community**

Both in general higher education and in feminist pedagogies, there is an emphasis on building communities. Booker, Gould, Weidner, and Dehouske speak about the consequences of community as caring, having respectful relationships, valuing all learners, challenging scholarship, providing a safe space, and encouraging self-expression. Also as the learners stated, belonging, closeness, support and trust were developed, and commented on by them in an ongoing way in written and spoken language. In fact, feminist pedagogies refer to the classroom experience as a community of learners. The learners in Ellen's classes found a safe space that promoted respectful and caring relationships among all learners. And, the learners wrote most of their final reflections on the community of learners that they valued being a part of and that they would establish in their own classrooms.

## **CONCLUSION**

Feminist pedagogy suggests that learning occurs best by creating a safe community. Both the learning and the safety of that community can be carried through storytelling. The gap in the existing literature is in describing how that community might be developed.

In this case study, all of the learners, including the professor, shared their own stories throughout the semester. The professor took the risk of initiating her stories and modeled acceptance of varying experiences and points of view. The learners mirrored her model spontaneously and at their own pace. In time, they were active in openly sharing their own stories and accepting the diverse positions of other learners. This community-based classroom embraces the hallmarks of the Mercy tradition such as regard for the dignity of the learner, education of the whole learner, creation of a culture of respect, and justice for diverse learners.

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Carlow University, a Catholic, women-centered, liberal arts institution embodying the heritage and values of the Sisters of Mercy, engages its diverse community in a process of life-long learning, scholarship, and research. This engagement empowers individuals to think clearly and creatively; to actively pursue intellectual endeavors; to discover, challenge, or affirm cultural and aesthetic values; to respond reverently to God and others; and to embrace an ethic of service for a just and merciful world.





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