

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

A Publication of the Empire State College Mentoring Institute



EMPIRE STATE
COLLEGE

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Issue 10 • Spring 1997



Issue 10, Spring 1997

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From the Editors: Preparing for the 21st Century: Empire State College Style

Those of us who are history buffs know that something weird happens, at least in Western societies, as each century moves toward its close. Millennial movements spring up, seers of every stripe crank out predictions that tend toward the apocalyptic, and as civilizations become increasingly organized and bureaucratized, the future of institutions becomes a primary focus of concern. Thus, we are subjected to dissertations on the end of welfare "as we know it," the collapse of social security, the transformation of the world economy... all familiar stuff. If you can achieve a certain detachment, these treatises do have great entertainment value, and sometimes even contain a grain of truth. But in most cases their shelf life is limited as societies and organizations fall back on the familiar pattern of muddling through in lieu of being transformed.

At Empire State College, we seem, at least to date, to have resisted the centenary transformative urge. In its place, we have two conversations afoot which hold the promise of a reasoned evolutionary approach to institutional change. These conversations occur under the banners of "one college" and "distance learning." In our darker moments we may feel that either of these themes could lead to wrack and ruin, of course... But if we assume a thoughtful, community-wide discussion of each theme, anchored in a recognition of what we already do well, then each has the potential to contribute to a "second act" at Empire State College where students remain the focus of our concerns, where mentors continue to exercise some control over the quality of their work lives, and where abundant learning resources and multiple learning modes are available to every student.

One College

All of us recognize that barriers to the sharing of learning resources across the College ought to be eliminated. Each of us would like to be able to call on the expertise of colleagues without regard to their regional center affiliation. And nobody would argue that the regional boundaries that have evolved and solidified over the past quarter century deserve our undying fealty. And while we're hacking away at bureaucratic undergrowth that impedes student progress, we might also want to reconsider a budgeting process that seems to pit centers against one another, that rewards the currently strong and punishes the occasionally weak... and that seems to see line reallocation as the appropriate response to all news, whether good or bad.

As we move toward "one college," we also want to keep in mind that local autonomy, the recognition and celebration of differences, the ability to respond quickly to complex local realities are the hallmarks of success within the College. The question then becomes, how do we become more efficient and more fully integrated while preserving the integrity, creativity and willingness to take risks that characterize our most successful units? How do we become "one college" from the perspective of the student while preserving the local responsibility, autonomy and control that must surely characterize the "slimmed down" Empire State College of the future?

These are not new issues, and we do not need to discover the answers from scratch. Organizational theorists know how to analyze institutional purposes to determine which are best carried out centrally and which locally. We need to make sure that this knowledge is used in resolving these thorny but important issues.

Distance Learning

If we can escape equating distance learning with high technology, and if we concede that all independent learners are, in essence, distance learners, then the promise of distance learning may become more apparent to those of us committed to mentoring. Even if we stipulate that there are some students who will only survive in a "face to face" environment, it remains true that others, and perhaps more students in the future, will thrive in a distance learning environment. Most students would likely rely on some combination of study options, as they do now. Surely, it is true that the combination of distance learning and mentoring holds a great deal of promise and must be explored.

Once we agree that distance learning does indeed have a future at Empire State College, many vital questions remain. How ought we to perceive of the role of technology in course delivery? How do we decide whether to develop courses ourselves or "buy" them? How do we balance the appeal of economy and the urge to respond to the particular needs of individual students?

If a quarter century's mentoring experience is any guide, our goal in pursuing distance learning ought to be to increase the richness and diversity of learning resources available to our students. Distance learning, in the form of a CDL course, a SUNY Learning Network course, a distance tutorial or a cross registration with the University of Wisconsin Extension, ought to enrich the array of learning options available to every student at every center and unit. The availability of these options ought to ease the planning process for mentors and facilitate our ability to respond to the needs of students whose physical or geographic circumstances have imposed limits on their ability to study in more familiar ways.

Mentoring

The key to Empire State College's future lies neither in an administrative reorganization nor in a technological fix. It lies in the preservation, articulation and celebration of what makes us unique and what has assured the success of our students: mentoring. Mentors... the real people students meet and talk to at centers and units, the staff of the College who treat them like whole people, share their stories and visions, and guide them through the intricacies of enrollment, educational planning and assessment, these are the vital resources that concepts like "one college" and "distance learning" may help to liberate and empower. If the move toward "one college" enables a mentor and student to work more smoothly across institutional and geographic boundaries, it will serve us well. If a focus on distance learning results in a wider array of learning resources being realistically accessible to many students in many locations, it will serve us well. The Empire State College of the 21st century will thrive if we have the wisdom to distinguish between the tools and the trade, between methods of communication and the process of learning, between novelty and innovation.

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Hummers in the Workplace

John Spissinger, Plattsburgh Unit

Sorry, but this won't contribute anything to the spate of messages about the faculty chair position controversy. Still, the matter about which I write is equally momentous.

Our Unit staff spent a little time yesterday afternoon reviewing CDL's course offerings for the Spring term. We were appalled to see that CDL is offering a two-credit course called, "Topics in Communications: Humor in the Workplace." What an absolute waste! We can't imagine our students wanting to spend their hard-earned tuition dollars on a course that's largely a joke.

I mean, after all, everyone knows that humor in the workplace, like diversity, is an intrinsic and extrinsic good. If you study, analyze or try to figure it out, you ruin humor's intrinsic value. And humor's extrinsic values are so obvious why bother to study them? Everybody knows that humor helps lighten the day, keeps working relationships cordial, eases the passage of time, etc. etc. Study this stuff? Why?

We in the North Country have a new and better idea. Cognizant of the fact that Empire State College students want to learn things that provide them with real solutions to real world problems, we have decided to offer an exclusive distance learning tutorial called "Hummers in the Workplace."

"Hummers?," you ask. That's right, "Hummers." Everybody knows that Hummers in the workplace are annoying. They get on your nerves real quick. You come into work; you have reports to write, you have appointments and meetings, sometimes you have to think and even be productive. You set about these things but then you hear an irritable noise in the office on the other side of the partition. Your colleague, a Hummer, has arrived, and the sounds he is making totally distract you from the work at hand. Clearly, Hummers really are problems in our workplaces.

It's hard to say what makes Hummers so annoying. Maybe it's because Humming is somewhere between mumbling and whistling, or even singing. Some Hummers, who have a pre-existing speech impediment like a lisp, are especially obnoxious because they sound like an angry, hissing goose.

Also, Hummers are a gender neutral and multicultural annoyance. They come in assorted genders, of different races, religions, etc. We have noticed that lady (womyn?) Hummers have a higher pitched tone which grates on the inner ear; but, they are usually more melodious than their male counterparts and that's good. Some Hummers hum all the time but some, like the one we have here, is a seasonal Hummer. He comes in humming hymns of the season, which would be OK except that he blends Jingle Bells with Silent Night. When Hummers screw up like this, they are absolutely intolerable, causing you to leave work early which then translates into a loss of productivity.

So, there are plenty of reasons for our students to want to take a course like "Hummers in the Workplace." Since the problems of, and mysteries, surrounding Hummers are broad, deep and complex, our course qualifies as an upper level study (unlike, we hasten to point out, CDL's "Humor..." course).

Two credits of our course on Hummers will count as liberal arts, thus helping business students. That's because we've built in a historical component and a linguistic/etymological component. Hummers go all the way back in prehistory. Hummers in caves caused echoes which is why our earliest ancestors repeated themselves often in their fledgling speech-acts. During the Medieval Period, Hummers were, for some unknown reason, especially numerous. The expletive, "You're a royal pain in the..." originated in Medieval times and was used often by lords and serfs alike in their condemnations of the Hummers in the royal environs. We could go on and cite more historical data on Hummers, but this should be enough to establish that a half of our course should qualify as a liberal study.

The other two credits in our course will represent applied learning. That's because the emphasis will be on how to deal with Hummers: either to silence them, teach them to sing or to extirpate the species. There's some interesting stuff here too.

For example, the Swiss have a tradition of recruiting and training an elite corps of people known as "Die Dingers" to round up and control the Hummers. Die Dingers were an inventive group who used everything from avalanches to crossbows to accomplish their mission. Whenever a Dinger dinged 10 or more Hummers, he/she might be nominated for the prestigious "Der (or Die) Hummerdinger des Jahr Unterschied", a.k.a. in English as "The Hummerdinger of the Year Distinction." Among other things, then, our course will look at the techniques employed by the Hummerdingers to rid blue and white collar workplaces of the problem of Hummers. Some students might have difficulty with this component, especially when we take up Husserl's Hummer-Squasher technique of eidetic reduction, a procedure that roughly approximates a phenomenological lobotomy.

There are no required texts for our course. Instead, we'll provide handouts for the reading assignments. There is a lab fee however, but its cost will vary considerably from student to student, depending on what instrument they select to ding Hummers in their final projects. Blunt instruments used to silence Hummers are less costly and are covered by financial aid; more high tech devices like nukes and lasers will of course be more expensive and lethal.

The Plattsburgh Unit will begin accepting pre-registrations for the course immediately. Spaces are limited and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. We hope we'll hear from you soon, and we're especially pleased to provide this exclusive opportunity to our beloved CNYC students. The course promises to be a real Hummerdinger!

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Teaching Self-Assessment

Thad Curtz, Evergreen State College

This article, printed with permission of the author, who is a faculty member in humanities at Evergreen State, was originally published in the newsletter of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education.

If the point of evaluating students' work were only to rank them, or to give the teacher a lever for encouraging their efforts, or even to describe the strengths and weaknesses of what they produced, then it would seem clear that teachers should do it by themselves. After all, teachers generally know more about the subject and how to deal with it than students do. They have seen lots of similar work. They can draw on wider experience to establish comparative standards. We hope teachers are more objective and less personally involved in the outcome than each student is. However, the deepest reasons for asking students to formally assess their own work have little to do with a particular piece of work. They have to do with the students' development over the long run. If we want to emphasize not just what the student did, but what the student learned, and how his or her capacity for work in the future has been affected, then the situation changes. For one thing, now the student may well know some things which are relevant to this new focus of assessment which the teacher does not know, and has no way of knowing unless the student says something about them. If they have learned how to write a paper without agonizing over the first paragraph for hours, or if they now pay a new kind of attention to clouds when they go for a walk, or think about the late Roman Republic when they watch the news, these changes may say more about the student's education in literature or physics or history than their essays or exams do. Yet this learning may be invisible to a teacher. To make it clear that this learning matters, assessment should contain a space devoted to it.

Of course, we expect pleasure, enduring interest and the ongoing illumination of experience by ideas to affect the quality of students' academic work as well. We would be dubious about claims of such gains if they weren't eventually reflected in products in some way. And in fact, students need to practice self-assessment to improve the quality of their objective work as well as to remind everyone involved (their teachers, any others who read the self-evaluations and the students themselves) of the importance of relatively subjective gains such as those I just listed. The practice of self-assessment is a central way for students to acquire the reflective habits of mind which are essential to their ongoing capacities to do good work, and to progressively improve their work over time.

Growth in intelligence or thinking, is precisely growth in the capacity for ongoing reflective self-assessment. This point is the center of Dewey's analysis of the difference between mere activity and educational experience in *Democracy and Education*:

Change is meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it. ...Being burned is a mere physical change, like the burning of a stick of wood, if it is not perceived as a consequence of some other action (p.140).

Thinking...is the intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something which we do and the consequences which result, so that the two become continuous (p. 146).

Things would be simpler if students really were clear about what their work was like. The problem with self-assessment is not simply that students exaggerate or somehow misrepresent what they produced. And it isn't that students are insufficiently willing to blow their own horns. Many beginning college students are simply not in the habit of reflecting on their own work. In the freshman program I taught last fall, "Reflections of Nature," we asked students to write short cover letters to accompany their work. They wrote four or more short pieces a week about their field observations and the readings for seminar discussion, and their first letter was supposed to select what they judged the two best entries in their accumulated work for five weeks. They were asked, as well, to explain their reasons for selecting those pieces as the best ones, in a couple of sentences each. The striking thing about these first cover letters was how many of the students didn't or couldn't do the second half of this assignment.

Very often, even those who did say something about why they picked the pieces they did seemed incapable of separating their experience in producing the work from some judgment about the results. They said things like, "I picked this as my best reflections entry because I had a good time writing it." (Readers who are interested in emotional and cognitive development can no doubt produce various explanations for why the reflective distance and discentering called for in this assignment should be difficult or incomprehensible for many 19 year olds. Those of you who are more interested in the sociological and political functions of the American high school will probably simply note that most American students are never asked to judge their own work; only to submit it to somebody else and to accept that authority's grade as settling the question of how good it is.)

So how can teachers support the development of students' capacities to assess their own work? First, we can assign ongoing practice, beginning with small exercises like our cover letter, and progressing to more demanding ones. Second, we can create contexts where alternative or even conflicting assessments are offered. In our program, students frequently participated in small group sessions in which the group looked at and discussed some sample of each student's work in turn. We can also include student self-assessments as an element of our formal evaluation processes. At Evergreen, narrative evaluations are given instead of grades. Both the faculty member and the student write approximately one page of narrative describing the accomplishments of the quarter. Student self-evaluations and end-of-quarter conferences between faculty and students are an integral part of the College's evaluation system. In the evaluation conferences, there are always two assessments to be compared - one by the student and one by the faculty member. In anticipating such a conference, one tends to wonder, "What will the other evaluation say about that?" That question leads to asking, "How would my work look to someone else, as something independent from me, on its own in the world?"

Through these experiences of reflection, writing and discussion, students gradually learn that there are variances in judgement for which reasons can and should be given. They learn that they themselves have to sort through those, and that their own view of their own work may be habitually inflated or severe. The other important feature of teaching self-assessment, in my view, is mutuality. Everybody should judge. Everybody should be judged. In our program, in which a small group looked at its members' work, it looked at everybody's in turn; and, at least some of the time, it looked at the teacher's version of the assignment too. In evaluation conferences, students were not just asked to assess their own work, then submit their judgements to a "superior" review and critique.

Students write assessments of the faculty member's work and of the program each quarter. Evergreen faculty members write self-evaluations of their own work each quarter; and faculty members write evaluations of each other.

This certainly is not a perfectly symmetrical process. Many faculty members do not trade their self-evaluations with students at final conferences, though I think they should. In most conferences, much more time goes to discussing the student's work than the faculty member's. Nonetheless, in my view, the structure of this process is valuable, even when nothing exciting emerges from a particular exchange. The fact that the faculty are engaged in a similar process is important, and often surprising, to the students. The opportunity to read the teacher's own view of the strengths and weaknesses of a program and of his or her own quarter's work makes the process of assessment a mutual one, and locates the teacher as a finite figure, engaged in furthering his or her own education as well as his or her own teaching. For both teacher and student what is at the center of this process is thinking in Dewey's sense: developing the capacity for the self-reflective assessment of one's activities. This is essential not only in examining and improving the process of teaching and learning, but in understanding the subjects themselves.

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Three Poems
Maureen Kravec, Central New York Center

Invisible Friends

My mother used to tell me stories
about the wood nymphs who lived
behind the knotty pine
on the other side of the kitchen wall.
No longer only an only child,
I'd knock on the big knot over the towel rack,
then hear a faint answering rat-rat-rat.
Or I'd find a tiny thank you note
for some sweater or pudding I'd made for them:
They enjoyed very much the colored photo of a garden
I'd taped to the blue tile inside the pantry.

And when the faint tinkling of our neighbor's piano
wafted over the back pasture into my bedroom window,
my mother told me my invisible friends
were dancing in the Druids'
fir tree ring.

Today, my mother's long gone,
the piano man, too, is maybe in Hades,
and the wood in my living room panels is fake.
When I go home, I never knock
on the little door above the towel rack.

But I still have invisible friends
who slip between the cracks of the system,
who live behind transparent walls
where rational men refuse to acknowledge their presence.

At the Sign of the Green Lantern

"I am a Berliner." - John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Bearclaws and Berliners,
Bolagna and macaroni salad,

Halfmoon cookies riding like galleons
or medallions in their glassy trays
glinting flashes of green.

That summer we moved to the country.
We missed our favorite bakery:
We seemed to be in a wholly different world.
One day, my mother told me
the claw marks I saw on that tree trunk
at the edge of the woods could've come from a bear.
Like us, she must have had a sweet tooth
Was looking maybe for bee-guarded honey.

That night I dreamed
that big black bear lumbered the road to town
by the light of the half moon:
she passed through the Green Lantern's door
the way bears move in dreams
and ate her fill, unharmed,
her paws sticky with Berliners,
her Grendel eyes glittering in the green light.

Rules of Subordination

The pretty, quiet Native American woman,
a mother in her early thirties,
sits facing me in her small plastic student's desk,
quiet but so polite, enrolled
in my remedial English at the rezz,
learning about why she writes dependent clauses,
subordinate, required by inexorable laws
of standard English
to be connected to the main.

And she serves her sentence
well in most respects -
her impressions of autumn leaves
fall from her pen in bright oranges and reds and browns.
But I can't seem to break her of writing subordinate clauses,
those unfinished thoughts she wants to make stand independent, alone.

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Survey on the Mentoring Institute

Mentoring Institute Staff (with special thanks to Josephine Lau, assessment office)

Below we reproduce the results of the survey distributed to the faculty in the fall regarding their perceptions of and attitude toward the Mentoring Institute. We greatly appreciated the willingness of so many faculty to respond to the survey, and we were pleased to note the generally positive regard of the faculty toward the institute and its activities. The data, based upon 62 respondents, can be summarized briefly as follows:

Everyone reported that they read *All About Mentoring* at least occasionally; 85 percent reported that they read it "frequently" or more. Seventy-seven percent reported that they have participated in one or more Institute-sponsored activities (averaging 2.4 activities per person). Of these participants, over half reported a positive change in attitude. There was increased appreciation of the concept of mentoring (44 percent) and the view of mentoring as a scholarly activity (33 percent); respondents saw themselves as more committed to self-directed learning (37 percent), student centeredness and individualization (30 percent); and 79 percent said that they acquired new and valuable information through these activities. The Institute also helped them become more aware of the diversity of mentoring practice at the College (67 percent), increasing their awareness of their colleagues' work with students (85 percent) and other scholarly work (54 percent). Half of the respondents indicated that their mentoring practices improved as a result of Institute activities. They have added at least one new feature to their practice or have corrected an old habit (57 percent), and they have become more active in their scholarly activities (53 percent). In general, the greater the participation in Institute activities, the greater the number of positive changes in commitment and practice in mentoring (e.g., increased involvement in helping new mentors acquire the culture of the college: $r=.47$, $p=.001$). A similar trend was observed in the frequency of reading *All About Mentoring* (e.g., increased levels of activity in promoting mentoring outside the College: $r=.42$, $p=.005$).

Overwhelmingly, the large number of written comments were positive. Space does not permit us to reproduce them all in this issue, so we will just end this summary with three such comments:

Although my behavior may not have changed, the MI has encouraged me to examine what I do and reflect on the diversity of practice at Empire State College. I think our diversity is a strength, and I very much appreciate being made more aware of it.

Even if it does not change or impress my mentoring, the MI is a strong statement about maintaining commitment to student-centered learning.

I believe the Institute is an important affirmation of the importance of the role of mentoring not only by the faculty but the administration.

1. Where do you work? N %

Regional Center 29 47.5%

Unit 22 36.1%

FORUM 14 23.0 %
 Center for Distance Learning 9 14.8%
 Graduate Studies 9 14.8%
 Other special program 4 6.6%

2. What is your status? (N %)

Full-time faculty 39 62.9%
 Part-time faculty, half-time or more 14 22.6%
 Part-time faculty, less than half-time 9 14.5%

3. Have you heard of the Mentoring (N %)
 Institute?

Yes 57 93.4 %
 No 4 6.6 %

4. In which of the following Mentoring Institute activities have you participated?

Being mentored with a formal learning contract 4 6.6%
 Overseeing a new mentor learning contract 4 6.6%
 Being "buddied" by an experienced mentor 7 11.5%
 Serving as a buddy for a new mentor 8 13.1%
 Attending a center meeting sponsored by the Mentoring Institute 32 52.5%
 Serving on the Mentoring Institute Board 6 9.8%
 Contributing materials to *All About Mentoring* 19 31.1%
 Contributing materials to *Things That Work* 9 14.8%
 Attending a Mentoring Institute All College workshop 23 37.7%
 Other 1 1.6%
 None 14 23.00%

Average number of Mentoring Institute activities participated 1.9

5. Do you regularly receive your own copy of *All About Mentoring*?

Yes 59 96.7%
 No 2 3.3%

6. Do you read *All About Mentoring*?

Regularly 34 56.7%
 Frequently 17 28.3 %
 Occasionally 9 15.0 %

7. If you read *All About Mentoring*, please rate the publication in the following areas:

| | Mean | Outstanding(3) | Okay(2) | Poor(1) | No Opinion |
|---|------|----------------|----------|---------|------------|
| Providing information about the practice of mentoring | 2.5 | 27 46.6% | 27 46.6% | 1 1.7% | 3 5.2% |
| Exploring issues of interest to the | 2.5 | 30 51.7% | 23 39.7% | 2 3.4% | 3 5.2% |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| mentors at the college | | | | | |
| Making the academic work of mentors more widely known | 2.4 | 21 36.2% | 27 46.6% | 3 5.2% | 7 12.1% |
| Overall rating | 2.4 | 24 42.1% | 20 49.1% | 2 3.5% | 3 5.3% |
| Other | 2.6 | 4 80.0% | 0 .0% | 1 20.0% | 0 .0% |

9. How have the activities sponsored by the Mentoring Institute affected your commitment to mentoring?

| | Increased | Same | Decreased |
|--|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Appreciation of the concept of mentoring | 24 42.1% | 31 54.4% | 2 3.5% |
| View of mentoring as a scholarly activity | 15 26.3% | 41 71.9% | 1 1.8% |
| Understanding of the complexity of mentoring | 20 35.1 | 36 63.2% | 1 1.8% |
| Desire to mentor individual students | 7 12.3% | 50 87.7% | 0 .0% |
| Level of activity in promoting mentoring in the college | 15 26.3% | 41 71.9% | 1 1.8% |
| Level of activity in promoting mentoring outside the college | 13 24.1% | 41 75.9% | 0 .0% |

10. How have the activities sponsored by the Mentoring Institute affected your attitude toward mentoring related concepts?

| | Increased | Same | Decreased |
|---|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Understanding of student centeredness | 13 22.8% | 43 75.4% | 1 1.8% |
| Commitment to student centeredness | 16 28.1% | 41 71.9% | 0 .0% |
| Understanding of individualization | 15 26.3% | 41 71.9% | 1 1.8% |
| Commitment to individualization | 14 24.6% | 43 75.4% | 0 .0% |
| Understanding of self-directed learning | 18 31.6% | 38 66.7% | 1 1.8% |
| Commitment to self- directed learning | 18 31.6% | 39 68.4% | 0 .0% |

11. How have the activities sponsored by the Mentoring Institute affected you in other areas of the College?

| | Increased | Same | Decreased |
|--|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Awareness of the diversity of practice at Empire State | 36 63.2% | 20 35.1% | 1 1.8% |

| College | | | |
|---|----------|-----------|--------|
| Involvement in helping new mentors acquire the "culture" of the College | 14 25.9% | 40 74.1% | 0 .0% |
| Interest in assessment | 6 10.7% | 48b 85.7% | 2 3.6% |
| Knowledge of what colleagues do in their work with students | 43 75.4% | 14 24.6% | 0 .0% |
| Knowledge of colleagues' scholarly work | 29 50.9% | 28 49.1% | 0 .0% |

12. How have the activities of the Mentoring Institute affected your practice at the College? (N %)

I have added to my everyday practice of mentoring at least one

new feature 30 50.8%

nothing new 29 49.2%

With respect to my mentoring practice, I have changed or corrected an

old habit 30 51.7%

changed nothing 28 48.3%

In terms of scholarly activities

I have become more active 15 26.3%

I am more interested in being active 13 22.8%

I am unchanged 20 50.9%

13. Overall, the Mentoring Institute has had the following effect upon my attitudes towards mentoring: (N %)

My attitudes are more positive 33 55.9%

My attitudes are unchanged 26 44.1%

14. Overall, the Mentoring Institute has had the following effect upon my behavior: (N %)

My mentoring has improved 28 47.5%

My mentoring has not changed 31 52.5%

15. Overall, the Mentoring Institute has had the following effect upon my knowledge of mentoring: (N %)

I have acquired new and valuable information 43 76.8%

I have learned nothing new 12 21.4%

I have acquired new but useless information 1 1.8%

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Survey Postscript **Michael Andolina, Northeast Center**

Thanks for sending me the results of the Mentoring Institute's Questionnaire. I'm not at all surprised that you received such great support and positive feedback on the institute's work. However, as Xenia Coulter and I have discussed, I have some concerns about some of the assumptions implicit in the questionnaire. Specifically, I think the questionnaire reads as if there is a certain model of mentoring in mind, one that does not always reflect the actual daily routines, responsibilities and tasks in units. Specifically, I believe your questionnaire suggests a highly individualized, maximally flexible, student-centered model that relies heavily on the interaction of a one-to-one tutorial, a highly successful model that has served us well for 25 years.

However, when I reflect on what I actually do in practicing the "art" of mentoring, especially in a small unit, I realize that there is a significant gap between ideal theory and real practice. Now that the College has asked unit mentors to carry ten percent more FTM, I believe that this gap will widen.

Yet, I do want to state unequivocally that I agree with the assumptions and the model you present. In fact, I wholeheartedly endorse them. This letter is not meant as criticism of the institute or its survey questionnaire, or of the model itself, but it is intended to generate discussion on what we've been examining for years: the "true" mentor role.

Here are some questions that did not appear in your questionnaire that suggest a different model of mentoring.

1. Agree/disagree : The institute helped you in identifying ways to integrate CDL courses with your other resources.
2. Agree/disagree: The institute helped you to identify on-line courses within Empire State College and through other colleges and universities.
3. Agree/disagree: The institute assisted you in developing strategies for "tracking" your students' work completed primarily through CDL.
4. Has the institute been successful in developing strategies for working with a majority of students who are, for the most part, far afield from your areas of expertise?
5. Has the institute provided information on how to cross-register students for classroom instruction or identified exciting courses, teachers and well equipped labs for our students.
6. Has the institute provided strategies for providing useful information on financial aid, costs, fees, and textbook access?
7. Has the institute assisted you in sharing information on how to present information sessions, orientations and local media coverage of unit events?

8. Has the institute supported ways to help track tutor evaluations and CBE paperwork?

9. Has the institute provided advice on how to work more effectively with graduate students?

I'm sure the list could go on and on. We've heard it all before. I'm also convinced that there are more questions that would suggest yet another model than the one I imply. Or, one could argue that the questions I raise ask for advice and counsel on issues outside the scope of the institute's goals and purposes. Some might even argue that the questions raise issues about tasks that are (or should be) beyond the role of a mentor. Nonetheless, the topics are very much a part of everyday life, no matter what we think of their relevance to our academic training or our personal interests and strengths.

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Tales of the Mentor: Stargate **James Robinson, Long Island Center**

It is a quiet twilight sometime in the far distant future. The Starship Midlothian hovers over a squadron of ore tankers of the Extraction and Disposal Fleet near Andromeda. Captain Bill Zawicki sits at his desk in the Learning Center of the great starship, his hands moving quickly over the keyboard in front of him. He is eating the last of a ham sandwich and staring at a blank computer screen.

Bill: Goddam machine. (Pounds the side of the terminal. The screen suddenly comes into focus, showing a gentle, smiling face.) Hah! Finally got the dummy to talk.

Irene: Hello? Did you articulate something?

Bill: (Formally) This is Wing Commander William T. Zawicki of the Starship Midlothian. I want to speak to Mentor Biinso.

Irene: Mentor Biinso is currently busy answering the calls of other Starfleet staff. If you would like to leave a message...

Bill: I have left 50, Irene, and you know it.

Irene: I'm sorry. As you know, the first 30 are not counted. I can't answer for the last 20. Perhaps they were misdirected on the web. In any case, Mentor Biinso has left strict orders that he is not to be disrupted. He is at a Time Coordination Meet-In with Lord Keri, may he live a thousand ages.

Bill: I don't give a hot Venusian poop! If my assignment isn't finished by three o'clock Saturday, I lose my command. All I need is five minutes of Mentor Biinso's precious on-line time.

Irene: But you had five minutes in July, Commander! That is your mentor-time allocation according to the latest availability ratio. If I give you another five minutes you will be over your quota.

Bill: Stuff the availability grid. If I miss this assignment I can't graduate, and my pay goes back to Ore-Fleet Pilot, Grade I.

Irene: (Soothingly) What is the problem, William-Zawicki? Perhaps I can be of some assistance.

Bill: Yeah? I doubt it. The assignment Biinso gave me is as confusing as a left-handed quark in a right-handed accelerator.

Irene: Confusing? I'm sorry, William-Zawicki, that word is not in my lexicon. Could you unpack that metaphor?

Bill: Confusing. It looks like one thing, but it might be another.

Irene: I regret I am unable to process that. According to Lord Keri's Main Directive, Sub-Particle 15, a thing which is not clear is either irrelevant or referrable. Do you wish me to refer the matter?

Bill: No referrals. I have to talk to Mentor Biinso, you twit. He is programmed to handle confusion. That's what a mentor is for - confusion, ambiguity, clutter and detritus...

Irene: (Sighing) I am trying to follow your gibberish, Commander William-Zawicki, but I am afraid my answer must remain the same. Your message must be answered in the order it was posted. Would you desire a day of virtual waiting on Antares Sub-Three?

Bill: Thanks, but no thanks. (Muttering) You're not going to bust me, you hunk of electronic garbage... (Starts punching keys at random)...I'll get Biinso on the line if I have to crawl every inch of the Starfleet web on my hands and knees...

Irene: I must ask you to cease this tantrum, Wing Commander. If you persist in attempting to deactivate my program and make a personal connect with Mentor Biinso, I will have to terminate your code.

Bill: Take your best shot, Irene! (Punches the keyboard furiously)

Irene: (Coldly) I'm sorry, Wing Commander, but you leave me no alternative. Mentor Biinso advised me that you might be difficult. I was given interactive authorization.

Bill: (Still punching) Yeah, for what?

Irene: You can either wait for Mentor Biinso to return your message or you will be transferred to Lady Rhatiga's Domestic Battalion for Paper Retrieval.

Bill: (Uncertain) You're bluffing.

Irene: You would spend a thousand portfolio-days in the Metro Ancient Paper Sanctuary. I should remind you how profligate they were in those days. Time meant nothing to those paper worshippers.

Bill: (Dazed) Holy Starfleet!

Irene: I am sorry, William-Zawicki. My Lord Keri only wishes your happiness. I am programmed to offer you tea or coffee, with Galactic Crumb Cake or Venusian Cream pie. Do you have a priority of preference?

Bill: (Shaken, but resentful) I'll take the pie, dammit.

Irene: A wise choice, Wing Commander. Perhaps you should also meditate on Lord Keri's famous koan, "When the Mom-and-Pop store vanishes, where is virtue?"

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**Authenticity and System in a Competitive Regime:
Reflections on Empire State College and the SUNY Faculty Senate's Distance Learning Report**

Robert N. Seidel, Genesee Valley Center

Editors' Note: A fuller version of this article, presented at the Empire State College Retreat on Distance Learning, September 19-20, 1996, is being prepared for publication by the College.

In this Age of Electricity, little will be dramatic or new in the remarks I'm about to make. In fact, in ordinary and public ways, if not scientifically and philosophically, the subject has been fairly well cultivated.

Extension division educators of the Universities of Wisconsin, Defense Department trainers, and insurance company sales boosters have had their hands in it for years.

Not surprisingly, Americans have proven to be adept at distance learning, in practical if not always college-creditable ways. The evidence is writ large in our social and economic history. It is a fascinating tale involving two phenomena. First is the people's immense native talents and ambitions. Second is the incentive of a "competitive regime," where the critical characteristics are liberty, opportunity, capitalism, and disruptive change.

I was one of 12 members of the Faculty Senate committee whom the Senate's then chair, Jim Chen named to study distance learning and make recommendations to the senate and chancellor. Not all were such iconoclasts as I, yet we became fast friends.

We joined energetically and productively in the effort. From the start, and our attempts to bridge different approaches and styles, we were struck by our assignment's seriousness and unconventionality. And we had to laugh from time to time. We who enjoy plays on words will appreciate that the ambiguous "unconventionality" refers here to:

- (a) differences between the modes of distance learning and those of "conventional" college studies,
- (b) distance learning's challenge to conventional higher educational "values," and
- (c) the threat that distance learning poses to the authority, cohesiveness and control structures of "traditional" colleges.

Committee members were mostly senior faculty from around SUNY. Who of us had been reared on the vision now before us? College, conventionally speaking, was Bryn Mawr, Columbia, and Michigan. Though younger, SUNY's Albany and Genesee are also conventional.

Now we had to think of college as . . . Well, we didn't know exactly what.

Let me frame this differently. Early in the Age of Electricity, the idea of college in modern societies was mainly elitist and exclusive. With the land grant institutions, City College, the teacher training schools that became SUNY, and the GI Bill of Rights, this notion broadened considerably and many Americans benefited.

The conventional elite model, manifested on a campus, somehow survived the attempt to combine in one ivied place a sheltered late adolescence and love of learning with lusting for status and wealth. Love of learning and genuine scholarship had to contend with trade and the quest for lucre. Moreover, it was clear to the elite model's guardians both that trade and money made their enterprise possible, and they could, if too close to the seat of learning, corrupt it.

Looking more closely at the current situation, we can ask: In what ways are distance learning and capitalism alike? There are, I think, four major common factors:

First, entrepreneurialism, with the benefits and harms of competition.

Second, legally sanctioned institutions and procedures, to organize transactions, resources and activities.

Third, a need for oversight or regulation, to protect against abuse and damage from "oligopoly power," "insider trading," excessive self-interest, and the like.

Fourth, means to adjudicate grievances.

These factors were as important for the many who learned informally and well over distances as they were for those who took Wisconsin extension courses. For the informal distance learners, factors two, three and four were informal. The "open" market regime served for sanction, oversight and adjudication.

~ III ~

The scene I conjure up is interesting. Structurally, it is also ancient. A biblical vintage parable captures its essence. A mother hands her child a few coins to purchase salt in the market and warns, "Don't buy from a stranger."

The implications are clear. A clan member will be around to correct errors. The traveler, off to another town, will be beyond reach. The community and its mores cannot hold the traveler, if a cheat, to a fair standard.

Behaviorally, ancient commerce, capitalism and contemporary distance learning have similarities. They conquer space and time. They challenge the authenticity and cohesiveness of communities and institutions. And the competitive regime provides the most practical test of efficacy - success or failure in real situations. About both distance learning and capitalism, the question - as by analogy the parable has it - is this: Are they honest?

Let's not kid ourselves. Modern formal education is seldom an authentic community. Kinship bound to tradition, honor and truth does not deliver contemporary "traditional" higher educational services. Nor does the modern "free" market system, of itself, contain adequate mechanisms to prevent cheating, manipulation and abuse. Modern higher education and market capitalism require systems to maintain authenticity. Competition, though important, does not do it alone.

The Distance Learning Committee knew that similar problems had produced our charge. Within SUNY, some accused others of offering distance courses out of their proper "territory," or without proper sanction, or without due concern for authentic teaching and learning. We also found the main cause of anxiety about distance learning to be . . . not technical novelty in itself - but the threat distance learning poses to established ways of thinking and doing things.

Before and during the early Age of Electricity, many agents of communication - railroad, telegraph, telephone, lending library, Montgomery Ward's catalogues, and mass distribution publications - fostered lots of informal distance learning. These well served farmers, artisans, merchants, professionals, and manufacturers. They also held somewhat in check the harms of competition and oligopoly. These systems, combined with the people's native aptitudes, buttress and help explain Christopher Jencks' findings, that formal educational attainment correlates weakly with Americans' actual

economic and mobility gains.

In Adam Smith's free-market model, there's a true insight. Two merchants sitting in the coffee house constitute a threat to the common good. They may conspire to conceal the bulk of their turnips to keep up the price. If this occurs, a little event may put things right. A child discovers a wagon of turnips in a shed and blows open the merchants' plot. Knowledge trumps power.

Formal education notwithstanding, America's experiment in mobility and hopefulness has often enabled people to learn what they needed to know to make a living, be effective citizens, and enjoy esoteric ideas and pleasures. Democracy's apostles supported these practices as consistent with liberty and their notion of a realizable good community. One wonder of democracy has been how knowledge has in fact enabled ordinary people to trump power.

In a large sense, distance learning also directly challenges the control of higher education by institutions of higher learning. Distance learning is to education what knowledge and competition are to oligopolistic capitalism. In the same measure, therefore, distance learning poses risks like those of capitalist competition.

~ IV ~

The report of the Faculty Senate Committee implicitly recognizes all I've said thus far. Equally important, it was SUNY faculty themselves who dealt with core issues of authenticity. The report and the resolutions the Faculty Senate passed are, indeed, work of which we can be proud. We would like distance learning to conform to the following principles.

- (a) We must keep learning and instruction at the forefront. Our competition should be primarily for quality, knowledge and the joys of learning.
- (b) We must enhance institutional and individual opportunities for creativity and productivity.
- (c) We must challenge higher education to be authentic and true to its purposes regarding student growth and goal attainment.
- (d) We must safeguard against the brutish entrepreneurialism that appears to characterize some distance learning ventures and against other harmful effects of competition.
- (e) We must support faculty.
- (f) And we must provide means by which problems and grievances can be prudently and fairly adjudicated.

The report pretty much speaks for itself. In particular, I ask you to view the report as a general outline of issues and questions that rightly pertain to distance learning. We believe it constitutes a strong check list.

~ V ~

What things should concern us at Empire State College? We are already working hard and intelligently on these matters. Yet, for what it's worth, here are four questions:

- (1) How does distance learning "fit" within our mission, practices and culture?
- (2) What is the authority of faculty and other academic professionals in distance learning decision making, resource allocation, evaluation, and integration of new tasks and demands into work routines?
- (3) Will there be satisfactory, objective evaluation of the impact of distance modes on learning and mentoring?
- (4) Can we so articulate our concerns and policies that reasonable systems - not unreasonable and constraining bureaucratic and technological structures - will develop?

In sum, I expect the distance learning report to contribute to our efforts to maintain authenticity. I expect that we can do this within our own system. I hope too that we can continue to reach out - with distance learning as another of our tools - to learners of all sorts. After all, we of all institutions of higher learning have been most appreciative of people's formal and informal ways of learning and getting on.

We are not alone in this endeavor. We have good colleagues in SUNY and beyond. They share our concerns. SUNY practices are diverse. Some are more conventional than others, and some surely need deconstruction. Yet our SUNY colleagues are our allies.

Together we must insist upon authenticity and good systems. Together we hope to make the best of the competitive regime that surrounds us. Whether SUNY as a system can do a great deal to help us is not clear now, and that will make our work more interesting in the years ahead.

Surely, our work is cut out for us.

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Among the Olive Groves George Bragle, Northeast Center

"Kalimera."

Not standard morning greetings at an Empire State College office - unless you are mentoring for International Programs. The word means "good morning" or "hello" so some things are the same, but others are different. Regardless, the Empire State College mentor learns a lot about mentoring and about the universal eastern Mediterranean appeal of Empire State College.

The Empire State College student in Athens and Cyprus comes in three molds. One, the professional student seems familiar. He/she is in mid-career and sees a future with a company or in a profession that can be grasped if only there is a diploma in that future. There was a youngish couple, both in banking, who knew that their future would be brighter if they were eligible for advancement. The bank they work for is British-owned, has branches wherever in the world the sun sets, and prizes employees who have earned college degrees. These two are youngish, ambitious and willing to take a chance on a college that sounds strange because it is perhaps their only option. Higher education is not a universal phenomenon in their country; it operates for the full-time day student; doesn't reflect quickly changes in marketing and banking. Empire State College tuition is high but the bank will help a bit. They are at Empire State College because someone of their friends told them about it. It has also been recommended by the postsecondary school they went to for specialized business training.

A familiar scenario? However, note the differences. They speak two languages, Greek and English. Talking with them about their secondary education reveals a background that matches Mortimer Adler's *Paidea Proposal* - something I only suggest to New York State born and bred students as a longshot goal: classical art, Greek philosophy. Their postsecondary school taught in English and in addition to business subjects required science and humanities.

A second example, a policeman who plays in the official band of his department wants to teach music when he retires. He was trained in several music conservatories in Cyprus and England and has spent his entire police career since basic training playing in the police band. But he wants to teach music to children. His tune and tone are open for CBE's, and his contracts will teach him to find local applications of Piaget, Erikson, Gardner and Project Zero. We may spare him the anatomy and physiology of the hand for tuba players.

A third example is actually a group description. A young woman who has completed two years of post-secondary education in a business school wants a B.S. degree in marketing. Her reasoning is based upon her position in her family business. She isn't entirely sure what marketing is all about but reasons that the Economics of the EU, International or Middle Eastern aspects of business will be the future of business in Cyprus or Athens. Her four friends will probably all agree to study the same program.

All these students will do degree program planning, all will study some CDL materials, some will work with tutors on individual contracts, some will study in groups. All will have a mentor. For periods of time at the beginning and end of

terms, fortunate Empire State College mentors on loan to International Programs will have the opportunity to mentor a U.S. alternative college program in an Eastern Mediterranean culture that is itself becoming an alternative.

More experienced mentors will recall the pleasure of working with the older experienced professional who needed some topping off experience uniting theory and practice and/or the joy of exploring a topic related to a long standing interest. All stateside mentors can still experience the pleasure of introducing the learner focused experience to students who are as confused as U.S. students on learning that they are an essential part of their own education. It may take them a bit longer, but I believe that they do get the idea. They certainly do get the idea that Empire State College mentors are listening people who are interested in the marketing of their family business.

There is a sense of renewal that comes from working with international students. The language difference begs again for increased listening skills. The differences in business, especially marketing, require a re-reading of Area of Study Guidelines too often an untouched part of long-term memory. It is in the required translation of U.S. Empire State College into Athenian Greek, Greek Cypriot that the core values, as we call them, are made fresh and live again. Mentoring style, academic specialties, delivery modes, interactive modes all need to be rethought and selections made from lists that may not even exist yet. A whole new meaning can be found in asynchronous communication.

International Programs provides the mentor a series of experiences designed for renewal, revitalization, cure for the blahs. In short, a nostrum for the ills.

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A Commentary

Robert Rodgers, Niagara Frontier Center

Here's a brief piece that I hallucinated recently.

Each year I must explain to someone what I do as a mentor. Relatives, no matter how distant, know better by now than to ask, but there is always some neighbor, acquaintance, or stranger who inquires, usually innocently, and deserves a meaningful answer. I also owe it to myself to have some idea of what it is I am doing; so occasionally I hallucinate hearing the question. Some remarks of Marilyn Gwaltney at a recent mentoring workshop have led me to develop an image based on memory of high school physics. She listed a set of forces operating on us and it occurred to me that mentoring requires balancing them so that the outcome is learning by the student. I have slowly developed a metaphor of a parallelogram of forces with a resultant vector.

Here are some of the determining agents and their forces acting on me at each occasion when I talk or write to a student:

Colleagues: collegiality and models

Administrators: authority

Staff: both bureaucracy and facilitation

Legislature: finances

Community: quality of life, reputation, resources, and future students

Family: expectations, diversions and encouragements

Union: solidarity

Profession: prestige and ideals

Discipline: knowledge, theory and technique

Events: the daily news of the world, nation and community

The trip from home to work: hassles and easements

Myself: ideas, interests, concerns, needs and impulses

Students in general: the cumulative effect of their expectations, aspirations and abilities

The particular student: situation, personality, appearance, activities and learning

There may be others, but that list is impressive enough. My central task is to resolve those forces in a manner increasing, however slightly, the probability that the student will at some time in the future learn something - that is, in favor of life-long learning. That is the ineffable bottom line.

Is it any wonder that I dread hearing the question: What does a mentor do? What indeed? Are we like the bumblebee - a patent impossibility?

Must we take on faith alone that our vector has its intended effect? On those few occasions when I hear from or hear of a former student I am reassured, because the evidence suggests that they have continued to learn.

But I also hallucinate a voice that asks why I assume that future learning is, or should be, the target of my vector. Is that indeed what we should expect from ourselves? To that basically cynical question my answer is unhesitatingly "Yes!" How do I know? Very simple. I recently found out that two of my students had been employees of the very nursing home in which my mother resides. It is therefore to my fundamental self interest that they continue to learn. I myself may need them at some future time. The persistent cynic may say, "But suppose that you move elsewhere. What good will it do you to have had students who continue to learn?" Well, suppose that my wife and I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area of California to be near our daughter? It just happens that the quality of life there may be influenced by two of my former Empire State College students, one a poet, the other a painter. There's no hiding place down here!

Having disposed of the term "future", I am left with the doubter who questions that "learning" is the goal of mentoring. Well, every logical system has some unquestioned assumption derived from intuition; so all I need say is that it characterizes our species in our present stage of evolution.

Lastly, the pragmatist asks, "What good does it do you to conceive of your work in this way?" At the very least it reassures me that there is a rational model for mentoring. Some discussions I have heard would lead one to believe that there are only traditional or charismatic conceptions of mentoring. Second, it gives me a wide range of sources to blame when things don't go well. I will settle for that benefit any day. Only when they all seem to have ganged up on me at once do I question the value of the metaphor.

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Technology, Distance Learning, and the Transformation of Academe

Duncan RyanMann, FORUM/East

Introduction

A plethora of recent writing has focused on the implications of new and emerging communications and computer technologies for the future of higher education as it has existed over the past two and a half millennia. Although these authors have diverse and conflicting opinions and concerns regarding the benefits and costs of the unfolding transformations of higher education, they are united in recognizing that computers and communication technologies are creating the opportunity for a dramatic transformation in higher education (Albrecht, 1995 A and 1995 B; DeLoughry, 1995; Murray, 1996 A and 1996 B; Noam, 1995; Snider, 1996; and, Twigg, 1995).

These changes are having important impacts on students, faculty and staff, and the structure of higher education institutions. The fundamental driving force behind these changes is that teaching is being transformed from a one-time local process into a replicable and distributable commodity. Lectures and seminars essentially disappear, unless they are taped by video or audio device, and must be actively recreated by the instructor for each new group of students interested in learning. Videos, on-line courses, and many other new teaching technologies can be reused, repackaged or reoffered with considerably less involvement from the original creator of the learning material. Over the next decade, this change is likely to alter the practices and structures of higher education with the same power and magnitude as Gutenberg's invention of the printing press.

Students are no longer constrained to classrooms and laboratories in residential college communities. Students now have a menu of learning modes, through computers, FAX, telephone, mail, etc., available at times and in places convenient to the individual student. However, additional problems and issues are created for students. New technologies and modes of communication can bring with them additional hurdles in the track to a college degree, such as expenses related to computer hardware and software and the skills necessary for using them.

Faculty and staff face the transition from teaching and administering in a classroom setting to creating the on-line, video, or other "learninglitarian" as the higher education marketplace responds to these transformations. (Increasing disparities in income have developed in many other areas including: professional sports; entertainment; law; and, CEO salaries compared to production worker salaries, to name just a few.) In simple economic terms, as the number of students that an instructor or institution can reach increases, the greater the return that instructor or institution is likely to enjoy.

Others argue that in the future, it may be difficult if not impossible for instructors or institutions to capture the returns from many of these learning materials or any other resources available through the Internet ("Software Revolution," 1995).

New technologies are altering the cost and benefits of delivering educational services to groups of students. In the traditional lecture or seminar mode of instruction, the costs often increase and, arguably, the quality of instruction decreases, as the number of students in a class increases. Many of the new learning technologies allow very large numbers

of students to benefit without diminishing the quality of instruction. Often additional students can be served at little, if any, incremental cost.

There also are likely to be substantial dislocation and change in the structure of colleges and universities and the academic labor market associated with these transitions. As Noam (1995) observes, "Th(e) system of higher education remained remarkably stable for over 2500 years. Now, however, it is in the process of breaking down." The economies of scale discussed above have the potential to alter the entire structure of the higher education market. Instead of the roughly 3,800 colleges and universities that exist today, we might end up with 50 national or international mega-institutions and a few hundred to a thousand smaller specialty or boutique schools.

One widely cited pair of studies found that in 1994, 30 percent of higher education institutions were offering one or more distance learning classes, and this had grown to 41 percent in 1995 (Tucker, 1996).

Issues related to faculty development and quality learning resources

Through my, probably narrow, search and review of materials and publications in this area, I found much more attention paid to surveys on the use and availability of various technologies and descriptions of what these technologies are than to issues relating the effectiveness of these technologies in enhancing the quality of student learning or guidance or suggestions in developing effective learning material utilizing these technologies (Planning Group, 1995; Tucker, 1996; Gilbert, 1995; Shapiro, Roskos, and Cartwright, 1995; Wagner, 1996; Goodman, 1995). A couple of the discussions of technology and effective pedagogy were local Empire State College documents (Wilson, 1996; McKenna, 1996; Murray, 1995; Jaffee, 1996; Eastmond, 1992; Eastmond and Ziegahn, 1992; Empire State College Office of Educational Technology, 1996; Empire State College-CNY Faculty, 1995; SUNY, 1995).

A few basic questions for individual faculty and higher education institutions to ask when considering adopting new technologies have been identified:

- Does the technology make sense educationally? Will it really advance student learning and scholarship?
- Does the technology make sense financially? Is there a realistic cost/benefit analysis?
- Will students and faculty all have access to the new technology and know how to use it?
- Are the rights of the faculty and professional staff protected (McKenna, 1995; AFT, 1995)?

Several writers have identified *active learning and doing*, or what Jaffee terms "interactivity," as centrally important to the design and implementation of learning experiences that successfully incorporate technology into their formats (Jaffee, 1996; Murray, 1995; SUNY Distance Learning Committee, 1995; Empire State College-CNY Faculty, 1995). In practice, this involves a couple of dimensions. Positive experiences and the greatest learning are likely to result when students participate in learning activities that engage their thinking and creativity, rather than attempting to passively transfer information or knowledge.

Establishing a relationship between teacher and student is also an important element of any learning environment. New modes of communication and new technologies provide challenges for teachers in establishing and maintaining relationships with students. Feedback, encouragement and perspective on the material being studied are components of a healthy relationship between student and instructor. With new technologies, teachers may initially have to design activities that relieve student anxieties about the medium.

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Two Case Studies: Examples of Empire State College Practice

Lee Herman, Central New York Center

Xenia Coulter, Central New York Center

Editors' Note: The past and present Mentoring Institute co-chairs, in developing ways of familiarizing new faculty and administrators with the workings of our College, each assigned themselves the task of describing a real student case that, for them, exemplified an important aspect of mentoring. In the previous issue of *All About Mentoring* we published two such cases; below we reproduce two more. Again, we urge our readers to send in illustrative cases of their own.

Lee's Case: Susan

Though not very academic or intellectual, Susan wants a professional career in human services and she is eager to learn (and only so) whatever will help her get there. She is bright, industrious and obviously but quietly proud having successfully sustained herself and her children. She is much less admiring of her clients, though she also works hard to be "nonjudgmental" and to remain mindful of how much harsher their circumstances and histories have by and large been than her own.

During a first learning contract, Susan and I devise a study focused on some of the generalizations she makes and conclusions she draws about her clients. Complemented with a variety of readings about the current welfare debate and its history, the focal points are two empirical studies of the attitudes of her coworkers toward their clients and of the fit between those attitudes and the actual case histories of the clients (e.g., length of time on public assistance). She creates a questionnaire, studies (and sanitizes) case files, interviews coworkers. We converse regularly. The final draft of her report is very good: fluently written, organized, reasonably well informed with historical and sociological perspective, and its conclusions and neo-conservative recommendations credibly and carefully supported by the evidence she has argued.

Though I disagree with her recommendations and will seek in subsequent conversations and studies to stimulate Susan toward a more self-critical perspective, the learning she has achieved is certainly reasonable and represents very significant growth in intellectual sophistication. As part of the next learning contract, Susan takes the CDL course on human biology. Other students have taken this course; they've by and large liked it and done well, though they generally criticize the sheer volume of information-assimilating work required. However, I am very pressed for time while Susan and I plan this learning contract. I urge her into the CDL course, not attending or remembering that she had told me that she had taken biology courses before and had hated them/not done well. Also, I neglect to attend to how imperatively busy her non-academic life is: two young children, an exhausting job, responsibilities to her church and religious community, residue conflicts with her former husband, etc. I want her to study human biology because, while somewhat related to her human services interests, it will be "broadening." She accepts my conviction, but we do not really explore it or her own hesitation together. The decision is not part of a genuine, mutually inquiring conversation.

Now, many weeks into the CDL course, Susan reports to me that she is just barely keeping up and just barely doing passable work. She has some confidence that she will make it, but is anxious, frustrated and above all determined never again to study human biology or any other science: "I'm just no good at it. I just want to get this over with." I feel guilty

and regretful that I have blown a chance to be a properly attentive mentor. I try to salvage something by asking her more about what she dislikes about the course. Aside from the schedule, which does not rationally fit her life and normal pace of learning, it's the learning approach: digesting and representing large amounts of information that is entirely abstracted from her ordinary experience or curiosity. After she gives an example - how the student is expected to learn about the respiratory system - I ask her if the content would be more interesting, understandable and retainable if she had approached it another way: I remind her that during her prior learning contract she had read Kozol's new book, *Amazing Grace*. (She had been fascinated and deeply moved.) I ask if she remembers his descriptions of the asthma epidemic in Mott Haven. And then I ask her if it would have been more interesting if she had approached human biology by trying to understand the asthma (the respiratory and other systemic involvements, the causes and the cures) these people suffer. Susan's eyes light up; she responds enthusiastically. I realize that such an individualized approach might not only have enabled her to learn biology more successfully, but also that it would have been a way for her to "broaden," growing out more genuinely from her individual concerns. It even could have been a way to introduce a perspective more reasonably (to her) critical of the social system in which impoverished people live. (The inhabitants of Mott Haven do not suffer asthma because they neglect their health, but because the NYC welfare services send them there to live and the city also decided to build a medical incinerator in that neighborhood.)

It's too late for Susan to withdraw reasonably from the CDL biology course, but both of us have learned some important things about individualized learning. For her, it may not be the subject which is dull and too difficult, but one's approach to it; for me, it's the importance of trying to remain vigilant and attentive, even when I'm pressed for time, to what attracts students' curiosity, what might build upon their strengths and to genuinely engage them in conversation about these matters, sustaining the how and what of learning as part of a mutual inquiry.

Xenia's Case: Cheryl

Cheryl is originally from England and held a variety of administrative positions there and, once she moved here, also in the United States. At the time she started at Empire State College she was the financial manager for the Special Children's Center in Ithaca. Despite her obvious talents as an administrator, her true passion was the study of wild animals, and she sought to somehow combine her experiential knowledge of management with her desire to learn about animals. The solution was a program in zoo management. Her investigation into the requirements for this program sent her to the Syracuse zoo where she became friends with some of the administrators there, to the Cornell biology department and the ornithology laboratory, and to the library where she searched for formal programs in this area at other universities (she found only one). The degree program that she designed is typical of a certain percentage of my students: very little formal study at any other college (in Cheryl's case, none); many credits from life experience; and a series of uniquely designed studies at Empire State College that address the student's particular interests and/or educational goals.

Here are a few interesting highlights of her work at the College to date:

- a) Her credits from experience are extensive, and they are testimony to the depth and breadth of knowledge we frequently see in our adult students that unfortunately are often invisible to traditional academics.
- b) My most favorite study emerged from a semi-catastrophe. During the course of her studies, Cheryl underwent a divorce (another common happening among our students), and she felt the need to return to her native country and to visit her aging and sick parents in England. That visit has by now stretched into two years. We planned for her to complete one of the environmental studies on her degree program by cross registering at the British Open University (neither of us knowing the first thing about whether or how she could do this). Once she settled down in England, the cross registration proved impossible to arrange. Undaunted, we then (by phone and mail) invented a replacement study that we conceptualized in part as a practicum in environmental activism. Her first assignment was to become involved in a British conservation group (which eventually acquired funds to create a program to save hedgerows). She was then to learn (and write) about finances, policies, recruitment methods, and activities of such volunteer organizations in England, and her final assignment was to then compare these grassroot groups to similar organizations in the United States. I am enamored with this study (and the wonderful papers that ensued) because it represents what Empire State College can do so well (and arguably other colleges cannot): take a student's special (and unexpected) life circumstances and use them to create an opportunity for formal learning that integrates the student's interests, Empire State College's goals, and community needs in a single course of study.

c) Although "distance tutoring" was not in vogue in the early phases of her work at Empire State College, we had no difficulty arranging two studies by mail and telephone with two mentors from other centers: Environmental Economics with Lloyd Lill from Genesee Valley and Zoo Ethics with Wayne Ouderkirk from the Northeast Center. Since those areas are of particular interest to those mentors but are seldom in demand, they were delighted to work with her. Once in England, she also studied statistics with me, which we did largely by FAX. Lee and I gave a paper in Russia in 1994 in which we argued that with "distance learning," a student's campus is the real world, which is almost inevitably a far richer learning environment than the relatively narrow confines of a traditional campus. Cheryl's case seems to illustrate well this argument.

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The Sabbatical **Bob Carey, Metropolitan Center**

In applying for a sabbatical, I said that I wanted to rewrite a MALS course, one of the required courses (Models of Critical Inquiry) that used Darwin in the course of visiting several issues. I also wanted to finish a manuscript dealing with critical reading that has begun to take shape as a result of doing a study group by that name for several years. I also planned to rewrite sections of another course Jim Wunsch and I had done in Forum and we were hoping to offer again. Along with that work I wanted to further develop and begin writing about some issues in historiography that I have been exploring over the years.

The year began in Chicago. I was able to attend the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Program Faculty Development Institute. The purpose of the institute was to study what interdisciplinary study and course design involve. Faculty from 23 MALS programs met on the campus of DePaul University in Lincoln Park, Chicago for the three-week program which consisted of a morning seminar discussing readings and approaches to different subjects. The afternoon sessions were given over to looking at course design question, drafting and critiquing proposed syllabi and course outlines.

The finished products of these efforts would be edited by Charles Strain of DePaul who, along with Diane Sasson of Duke and Howard Kushner of San Diego, developed the grant proposal that created the workshop and led one of the seminar sessions and became Volume V of the Association's *Workbooks of Course Syllabi*; its title is *Models of Interdisciplinary Teaching: Syllabi from the AGLSP Faculty Development Institute*. Members of the seminar also took part in a panel presentation at the AGLSP's annual meeting in Raleigh, North Carolina in October 1995.

The better part of the year, following that, was given over to reading Darwin - most of his principal works and his notebooks. I also began working through a large body of material dealing with the fate of the theory after the firestorm occasioned by *Origin and Descent*. Darwin is, like our Civil War and the French and Russian Revolution, an industry. There is, first, the history of the theory; its eclipse by Mendelian genetics, its revivification in the form of the modern synthesis (often referred to as Neo-Darwinism) as naturalists and genetic biologists worked out (1936-1947) the "evolutionary synthesis," that as Mayr puts it is the "paradigm of today" (Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought*, p. 120). This does not mean that neo-Darwinism, once it took shape, swept all in its path. The theory remains the source of serious debate - not about its usefulness, so much as about its ramifications and how they should be understood. The literature is enormous and contentious as researchers continue to explore the dimensions of the theory.

The literature is, with rare exception, immediately engaging. Though some of the more technical discussions were very slow going, mastering some of the basic terms and mechanism was worth the effort because it afforded a better view of the reach and significance of what Darwin achieved. His notebooks are a fascinating journey in themselves, because the reader can trace the stops and starts of slowly gathering conclusions and thereby appreciate the extraordinary journey this man took, even as he lived in monastic semi-seclusion at Down and had to struggle with poor health for the better part of his adult life.

My interest in Darwin is an instance of my interest in trying to understand what constitutes an historical event and historical change. History, as a form of narration, must, perforce, use frames if it is to be written at all. We, as Americans, are used to thinking in terms of decades - the '50s, the '60s - as though they were, in some sense, self contained, describable entities. They become stories with a beginning, middle and an end; in this way the period and its personalities and issues becomes available to us. It works as narrative even though the price is that of necessary reduction and simplification.

But what if history isn't really going anywhere? We know that things evolve, that they change. Is that the same as saying they have an ultimate purpose, that they are moving to some kind of conclusion? Darwin's theory forces those questions on a reader, just as it forces one to ask: Is what I am describing actually the case in nature? Or is it there because I put it there? Is the person I write about today similar/identical to the person who lived 5,000 BCE? That seems, by most reckoning, an enormous length of time, but it is arguably the case that what we call the modern world - settled, urban, dependent on food crops and animal protein, emerged about then and the human who inhabited that world are "moderns," our cousins. This is a tad arch but it does help focus the question of human behavior and what remains constant over time and cultural variation and what is local and parochial; my impression from the perspective of evolution is that much of the discussion about multiculturalism, for example, is a softer, gentler form of essentialism that played a major part in the 19th century debates about evolution and which continues, in some strength today, to shape our perception of each other.

Rewriting and rethinking the course that Jim Wunsch and I had done for the Forum program took me to a different part of the history/event/change patch. One part of the course invited students to think about heroes as one of the reasons for history changing, what that approach explained and didn't explain, and why it remains very popular in the general culture, if not in the academy. I found myself comparing Alexander and Moses and wondering who, of these two "heroic" types, was the more historically significant. For Alexander we have Arrian, Rufus and Plutarch and his modern interpreters - Peter Green is probably the best. For Moses, we have Scripture and a history of interpretation that is, in some measure, the history of Scripture. I haven't finished the rest of the reading and writing that I need to do, but roughly it lays out this way. We can assess the short and long term significance of what Alexander did. We have sufficient extant evidence to make a historical judgement. We have no reliable evidence about Moses; we don't even know who he was or if he was. But we do have the story - Moses the story beats Alexander the conqueror as a historical force. What that means is what I am sorting out.

I had jury duty.

The critical reading manuscript slowly grows like topsy and will probably need the on-going work of seminar meetings and consultation to get done. It will be pamphlet size piece, probably in the 80 page range. After looking at door-stopping "readers" that seem to be little more than a compilation of materials wrapped in an editorial gossamer, I decided to stay away from putting together a section of samples and stay as close as possible to a "what to do now that you have opened the book" kind of style.

Two last notes:

The reading in Darwin led into the development of a contract looking at the issue of disease and history -how to think about the role of disease as a contributing cause of historical change and human agency as a cause of disease. This is a course which, like the Darwin study, will be rewritten again and again.

The other item - just noted with several pages started in a reading journal - was the result of reading Frank Sulloway's study of Freud. The entry I made reads: Freud and Jung considered as a chapter in the history of religion. More to follow on that.

In the summer, my dentist told me that I needed a root canal. It was time to return.

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The Philosophy Motion - # 265 Tuna and the Moles

Forest K. Davis, Mentor Emeritus

Living in the country, so we have observed, requires a certain firmness of definition. There is nature-space, and then there is human-space. Nature has its own purposes; it pushes all the time. Humans may be parts of nature, they push, too. Sometimes the respective boundaries get mixed up. Natural entities turn up in each others' territories. Neighbors of ours installed a cats' door in their kitchen door; the cats went in and out readily, and the neighbors felt that a problem had been solved. So did the raccoons: they went in and out quite as readily and willingly partook of the cats' food. In short, they learned a new way of foraging. The last we heard, the neighbors had learned to live with cats and raccoons, and fed both whenever indicated.

Solutions as amiable as that occur occasionally, but not always. People do push back on nature. It happens when one trims a bush or tree, or when one weeds a garden in the interest of vegetables or flowers. Call it assisted natural selection. Half a dozen years ago a woodchuck moved into the field and set up shop. A woodchuck out in the field is one thing. The next year a member of the second generation of chucks moved into the backyard and set up shop, about 30 feet from the house-door. We felt pushed. If we had decided to put in a cats' door we might have ended up with chucks in the kitchen. Enough is enough. The chuck was not encouraged to remain.

Of course one could look at it differently. It might have been possible to develop a line of educated chucks which would rival the gifts of raccoons in what might be called assisted living; it would require patience and at least a moderate commitment to the positive values of sociobiology. One might, in short, have made a pet of the venturesome chuck. Yes, indeed; one might; and one might not.

A dozen or so years ago there was another of those catly adventures which one's mind revisits in the small hours. In those days there were three cats, no less; we forget how it came about, but there they all were. They got along reasonably well. It happened then that in the house were creatures which entered not through a cat-door but up through the floor somehow, and as luck would have it, they found the cats' dish. They had extended noses, tough front feet with rows of tiny bear-like claws (for digging tunnels in the earth, we hear, in the interest of catching worms and insects). But catfood was all right with them; they duffed right in and had plenty. We supposed the cats would dispose of them; forget that. Cats, it appears, are finicky about moles; they don't think moles smell good or something. Outdoors they have ways of dealing with them; time after time one finds the moles, dead as the proverbial hammer, so that policing the area requires one to scoop them up for removal to other sites.

Not indoors. One can see it all in one's mind's eye, even now, after a dozen years: all three cats sitting neatly in a row facing their cats' dish into which the two small moles, totally oblivious of the risks, were eagerly poking their faces. Measurable amounts of catfood were disappearing by the minute. In time the cats withdrew to their favorite chairs, leaving to their human hosts the problem of what to do about the moles. The problem did not seem to recur, at least not till this fall. One wonders what sorts of warning signs were hung about the building advising the mole population to stay outside in the lawn or wherever. But there came a day when odd traces began to appear in the then (single) cat's dish. No one ever saw or heard a mole or anything else. It was just that those traces were persistent.

The cat stood it about as long as he wanted to, and then, quite suddenly, he moved out. He was in the habit of going out at night; he liked it out there. We always said to him, - look both ways! - He gave no sign of having heard, but he did invariably sit down on the porch and observe the surrounding area. He certainly appeared self-confident. Indeed, if we made the mistake of not letting him out he would come and tread all around the pillow until we got up and let him out. He would run straight to the door ahead of us and wait there till we did our duty. The impression he gave was that he liked it well enough indoors in the daytime. He would eat first and then settle for the day, often in a new place. If there was anything obviously clean and fresh, he chose that. If there were clothes to be washed in the waiting washer, he was quite capable of bedding down there, curled around the centerpost. Chairs were rotatable; he could take them or he could let them alone. He would sleep all day, often on his back with all four feet in the air. At suppertime he would eat again; but then he simply had to go out. And go out he would, one way or another.

Finally it dawned on us that we just might have a couple of moles again. It was no great problem to find out; it took less than five minutes for the first one, and another 20 for the second. But the cat was gone. He didn't come back. He didn't leave a note or anything; he just didn't come back the next morning. Now we have to be realistic. Cats disappear every fall around here.

Notices and appeals are tacked up in country stores and on bulletin boards. Families miss their cats; they consider them family members, regardless of what the cats think, and they want them back. Other questions arise: Are the cats alive? Are there fisher cats or coyotes around? Do hunters sometimes pop them off if the deer are scarce? Do people with an enterprising turn of mind catch them and deliver them to medical laboratories for vivisection or other test purposes? One hears all these things. One can become paranoid without one's cat.

Tuna has been gone before, even as long as three weeks at a stretch. But not six. What is one to think? Everyone inquires for him. No one knows where he is, so no one knows what to say. Little Emily, perhaps most of all, is puzzled. She is only four. She does not know what fisher cats are, nor likely coyotes, either. Tuna was more or less her cat originally. He was one of the people she came to see, week by week. She inquires for him on every visit. We have to say, we do not know where he is; lately we are not even sure he is coming back. She clearly does not understand about family members who suddenly vanish. At her age family members are what they are, and they do not disappear. It is even less likely that she understands about moles or woodchucks. At four years of age can the universe be that unstable?

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MI News

The Advisory Board met several times this year to discuss various projects, create a set of formal bylaws, and to plan for the future. It became apparent that the interests and goals of the Advisory Board and the cochairs (both past and present) exceed the time and resources available to them. For example, in addition to editing *All About Mentoring* and arranging various developmental activities within the College, the institute wants to regularly publish various Calls for Papers (relevant to adult learning and mentoring), maintain a directory (and copies of) relevant journals, and provide editing assistance for Empire State College faculty and staff wanting to convert paper presentations into submittable reports. The institute also wants to take responsibility for maintaining and updating the *Mentoring Handbook*. The institute is also interested in making the College and the concept of mentoring better known outside the College. We have discussed the possibility of establishing a consulting service, particularly in countries where funding is limited, to show how an academically solid college can be built upon community resources. As part of a consulting initiative or simply as an independent project, we are also very interested in creating a summer institute for outside visitors. We would also like to work even more collaboratively with NCAL.

In order to even begin to satisfactorily respond to this range of work, a new model for the institute is currently being explored. Rather than two faculty co-chairs who work over and above their full-time mentoring responsibilities, we are considering the possibility of having a single chair with some amount of release time to serve as the director of the institute. Other faculty would be encouraged to work collaboratively with this director on various projects. By this arrangement, the institute could more effectively coordinate its activities, thus increasing the feasibility of many of the projects we have envisioned.

The Mentoring Institute Advisory Board will meet at the All College Conference in April to come to closure about the proposed changes in institute structure. We invite input from all of you. Meanwhile, this issue of *All About Mentoring* is ChrisRounds's last before he steps down as co-chair after a much longer involvement with the Institute than he had originally expected. We will miss you, Chris!