ALL ABOUT MENTORING

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Issue 54 • Autumn 2020

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The quotes sprinkled throughout this issue of All About Mentoring *offer us a glimpse of the ideas and perspectives of Arthur Chickering, founding academic vice president of SUNY Empire State College, whose contributions over decades and decades have left such an indelible mark on so many individuals and institutions interested in students' learning and their development. (Please see more information about Chickering's work and impact on page 123.)*

ALL ABOUT
MENTORING

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Special thanks:
Thanks, as always, to our whole SUNY Empire State College community for voices and ideas that make this publication, and so much else, possible.

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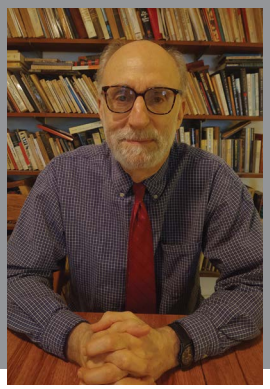


Our World

"Oh, I think I understand
Fear is like a wilderland
Stepping stones or sinking sand"

— Joni Mitchell, "I Think I Understand" (1969)

We are in a crisis. This is what a crisis looks like. This is not only a crisis of "legitimacy" (as the great social theorist Jürgen Habermas described such historical moments); it's a crisis of all major social institutions that not only have lost their reliability and credibility but, particularly now, have made us poignantly aware of their cracks, their basic unfairness, their failure to provide what we feel — and know — they need to provide. Too many people in too many places are being hurt; too many people cannot make it, no matter how they try. Of course, there are degrees of pain and suffering (as I sit at my desk in my home with August rent paid and food on the table and health care in place and a full-time job, I am incredibly aware of my privileges — they are stunning), but, overall, the world is just out-of-kilter, startlingly askew.

Honestly, I cannot get it out of my head that in a four-week period between 11 March and 11 May, 33,500 of my fellow New York City neighbors died of COVID-19 (and that's the official count!) and the numbers continue to climb. This did not have to happen, just like it did not have to happen that people don't have shelter and could be evicted from their homes and can't feed their families and have no work — or are just full of fear. 2020: This is our world.

We can look at the miserable failure of "systems" — economic, political, sociocultural — to function in the best interest of the citizenry (look at our berserkly unequal economic system, or our health care system that too often lacks the care). And, at the same time, we can also think about the thinning out of our "lifeworld" — the quality of our daily lived experiences, the textures of our subjectivity and shared meanings (look at the alienation and depression so many feel, or the worry that parents have about what their kids are taking in, or the belligerence that underlies so much communication). (This system/lifeworld discussion is one taken up by Habermas and by many other philosophers and social theorists.)

Of course, no institutional arena can escape this crisis. Its damage ripples through every part of society. Education is smack dab in the middle of all of this. Parents and kids in preschool through high school scramble to figure out what schools will (and should) look like and whether those who are already vulnerable will have the supports they need to learn. (It looks quite doubtful.) The higher education scene is just as difficult and disturbing, particularly as tuition-dependent institutions and those whose very existence depends on public funding are barely hanging in there. (They are — we are — in survival mode, not helped in the least by distorted budget priorities.)

My sense is that it is possible, and it is absolutely necessary, to work together to change systems. We have to fight to do that — to critically evaluate policies and reimagine institutions of all kinds that are not, and should be, responsive to the vast majority. (And this includes changes at every level of educational systems to make them smarter, fairer, more flexible, more accessible — and to demand that they be properly funded.) But what some imagine can be a technical fix, a system correction, simply *can't* rescue us.

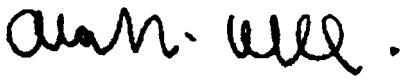
It is thus also absolutely necessary to work together to change values and dispositions. We have to fight to do that, too — to carefully and critically reflect, at every turn, on the ideologies and ethics that we too often just take for granted or forget are never neutral. (And this includes changes in schools at every level to make sure that we're not just reproducing the attitudes and ways of seeing each other that reflect a competitive, mean-spirited anonymity, which is, horribly, the only thing too many people know.) Still, what some

wish can be a community and identity revolution, a lifeworld transformation, *can't* do it all.

I think it's both the system *and* the lifeworld.

How incredible that our college (and, of course, others too) was founded to change both stifling institutional structures *and* hierarchy-obsessed pedagogical attitudes. Systems had to be rethought (Why semesters? Why credits? Why only accept learning that originated in the ivory tower? Why not just invite everyone in?). And our lifeworld had to be revised (Why professors? Why podiums and even the most brilliant lectures? Why tell anyone what they need to know?). Yes, of course, things change in a half-century, but wow: a radical vision and the search for systems to back it up.

Where are we right now? What do we really care about? What do we really understand? Often feeling squashed by the crisis, what concrete steps can we take to question and rebuild this and other institutions, their systems, and their lifeworlds? However incredibly hard and scary and often frustrating and probably against the odds it is, it's all worth it. We just can't sink. We have colleagues and students — it's our world — to try to support.



"The major transformations required to reclaim our institutional soul will not be achieved unless our professional souls are similarly respected, supported, and celebrated. Significant institutional transformations cannot be achieved in the face of organizational cultures that view administrators, faculty members, and student affairs professionals only as instruments of production, deployed to achieve maximum competitive advantage in a competitive, market-driven enterprise. They cannot be achieved if students are viewed only as consumers, generating credit hours and credentials."

— Arthur W. Chickering, January/February 2003
Reclaiming Our Soul: Democracy and Higher Education
Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 35*(1), p. 43*

Connecting Community Scholarship and Service

Rebecca Bonanno, Garden City and Manhattan

Human Services Mentor Rebecca Bonanno is the recipient of the 2019 Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship. At the Fall Academic Conference in October 2019, she delivered the annual Susan H. Turben Faculty Lecture. We thank Rebecca for providing and editing her talk for All About Mentoring.

It is an honor to be speaking today with all of you, my SUNY Empire State College colleagues, as the recipient of the Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship. It was an unexpected honor. As some of you may remember, back in March during the awards dinner, I decided that the announcement of the Turben Award was a good time for me to go to the ladies' room. I figured I would be back in time to congratulate the winner — but it turned out it was me.

When I say that the award was unexpected, please believe that I am not just being modest or suffering from imposter syndrome. I did not expect to be the recipient of an award for scholarship, because I have never thought scholarship was my greatest strength. What I have thought of as my greatest strength has been my work with communities. So I was puzzled at first. Also, I had missed the entire introduction that explained why I was being given the award, so that didn't help.

But after learning what was said about my work and talking to some of my colleagues at the college, it became clearer to me why I was chosen. The work that I have done in the community, which is informed by my expertise, is real scholarship that is recognized and supported by SUNY Empire. It is part of Ernest Boyer's model of scholarship, which has been explored and expanded upon over the last few decades. I have learned that what I have been doing (along with many, many of our ESC colleagues) is called the Scholarship of Engagement, and that is what I would like to talk with you about this afternoon.

As many of you know, Ernest Boyer, the founder of SUNY Empire, authored a report for the Carnegie Foundation in 1990 called "Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate." In it, he proposed that the academy begin to look beyond the traditional definition of scholarship as "knowledge creation" (what we typically think of as basic research). Boyer acknowledged that the development of new knowledge — what he called the scholarship of discovery — was crucial; but he argued that students, institutions, and society as a whole would benefit from a broader view, which had a number of features. They include:

- Interdisciplinary work and interpretation (the scholarship of integration).
- The dissemination, transformation, and extension of knowledge (the scholarship of teaching).
- The application of theoretical knowledge to consequential, real-world problems (the scholarship of application).

Drawing and expanding upon Boyer's work, another Ernest — Ernest Lynton — helped to conceptualize the transfer of knowledge in a more expansive way. Instead of thinking of knowledge as flowing only from teacher to student, or from scholar to society, Lynton described it as an ecosystem in which knowledge moves in many directions, changing and expanding through interpretation and constant feedback

Photo credit: Sara Luckey

Rebecca Bonanno

from all parts of the ecosystem. Here is a quote from Lynton (1994) that I really love: "All scholarly teaching and application constitute learning both for the scholar as well as for the client and student. The learning of the scholar arises out of his or her reflection on the situation-specific aspects of the activity, and on the details of the transformational process by which students, clients, and readers are helped to understand and to utilize knowledge" (p. 10). Scholars must work with — or be "engaged" with others. Lynton told us not to work only with other scholars. We should put thought into who we engage with, and the sharing of knowledge must be reciprocal.

Donald Schön was another great thinker in this area who argued that the hierarchy of theory (up high) and practice (beneath it), with practice seen as being derivative of theory, ought to be realigned. Schön (1995) proposed a "new" scholarship steeped in collaboration, and commitment to community, responsibility, and mutual concern for others.

Sometime in the early to mid-1990s, Boyer's "scholarship of application" expanded to become the concept of the "scholarship of engagement" or "engaged scholarship," which includes the new concepts of how we share knowledge that I have just discussed. Thinking and writing on this topic continue to the present day. The scholarship of engagement is not the technical and objective practice that most of us had been taught to think of as "rigorous" research; instead, it is inherently a value-laden practice. It places social, political, and moral aims alongside academic and scientific aims, as it involves others for the betterment of society.

What does this actually mean in practice? I will discuss my own practice in engaged scholarship in a moment, but to give you a better sense of what I'm talking about, here are a few examples with which you might already be familiar. ESC faculty, professionals, and students are engaged in many of these:

- Community-based research. The Institute for Community and Civic Engagement (n.d.) says this takes place in society and has community members take part in designing research projects and putting them into action. It also overtly respects the contributions made by our partners that lead to a project's success and abides by the principle of "doing no harm" to the communities involved.
- Service learning, which "integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities," according to a report from the National Commission on Service-Learning (Fiske, 2002, p. 6). It typically includes:
    1) Service to others.
    2) Ties to academic content.
    3) Reflection on the service-learning experience.
- Community-engaged creative activity. This can be performances, exhibitions, readings, and other public sharing or creation of art that involves people outside of the academic institution.

I would like to give you a bit of background about myself. I come from a family of educators and service providers. I grew up doing service in my school, my church, my community, and receiving a lot of support for these activities. Later, I was trained as a social worker, I continue to practice, and it is a major part of my professional identity. Social work and education were natural and comfortable professional fits for me. And here at Empire, service with my community has been a natural extension of my teaching and academic interests. And as a social worker, I think I feel compelled to venture beyond the academy and into the community at times, both to participate in social justice work and to stay connected to what is happening outside of "the bubble." I have a small clinical practice specializing in child and adolescent mental health. Having a license to practice clinical social work means that I must participate in continuing education activities, which keeps me involved in formal learning. And practicing in general — the very immediate pressure to help the people that I have committed to helping — is a great motivator to keep me reading, learning, and reflecting. But a private psychotherapy practice can feel like a different kind of bubble — I work with the people who *seek help* and who are able to pay for it, which leaves out a large portion of the population who do not. So over the last several years, I have committed to expanding my engagement with the community as a scholar and a practitioner, to meet the need I have both personally and professionally to stay connected to what is happening beyond the college and beyond my immediate social and professional circles.

"... I feel compelled to venture beyond the academy and into the community at times, both to participate in social justice work and to stay connected to what is happening outside of 'the bubble.'"

To help frame some of my activities, I am going to refer to parts of a typology of publicly engaged scholarship that was developed by Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer in 2010.

Publicly Engaged Research and Creative Activities

The first part of this typology that I will discuss is publicly engaged research and creative activities. Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer (2010) described publicly engaged research and creative activity as being "associated with the discovery of new knowledge, the development of new insights and understanding, and the creation of new artistic or literary performances and expressions — in collaboration with community partners, broadly defined" (p. 18). I am going to focus on the research aspect of this type of engaged scholarship, as I am not at all qualified to discuss creative or artistic endeavors. So, some examples of community-engaged research would be community-based participatory or action research; public policy analysis; and research conducted in collaboration with nonprofit organizations, government agencies, or foundations. Research that is conducted solely to advance an academic field (what we think of as basic research) or that is shared only with academic audiences is not considered publicly engaged research.

I conducted a research project in my community of Huntington, New York, about three years ago, after I became interested in a concept called mental health literacy. Mental health literacy is the knowledge and beliefs that people hold that help them to recognize, prevent, and manage mental health disorders. Included in this knowledge and set of beliefs are (1) the ability to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders, (2) understanding of risk factors and causes, (3) knowledge about self-help strategies related to mental health, (4) knowledge and beliefs about professional help, (5) non-stigmatized attitudes and beliefs about mental health disorders and treatment, and (6) the ability to find information about mental health (Jorm, 2000).

While working with children with mental health disorders in my clinical practice and helping their parents to understand the causes and treatments for these disorders, I noticed that there was a wide range in knowledge among the families. Some parents were familiar with terms and concepts related to psychological disorders and treatments while others were hearing about these for the first time when their children were in need. I've worked with families who hold beliefs about the causes of mental health and behavioral disorders that are not at all grounded in science, yet are popular among groups of well-educated, professional parents, such as the purported but disproven connection between vaccines and autism. I began to wonder how parents gain mental health literacy and from what sources they acquire their information. Former ESC colleague Jordan Wright and I began digging into the literature to look for more about these questions and found that the research on parental mental health literacy was fairly limited.

Jordan and I could have designed a basic research study that examined mental health literacy broadly. But I wanted to gear the research more toward my own community, to find out what was happening in the families nearest to me. I also thought that, with low treatment rates for children and teens suffering from mental health disorders and highly stigmatized attitudes about mental health problems and treatment, this study would be a good opportunity to provide some outreach and education to the community.

I decided to reach out to some folks in my community who might want to collaborate with me on this. On Long Island, and throughout New York state, our communities are parts of townships, each with their own local governments. So I began with a division of my town government, the Huntington Youth Bureau, whose mission is to promote the growth, development, and well-being of youth in the town. The Youth Bureau administrators and staff were enthusiastic about my project and we began a collaboration that helped inform the design of the study and gave me access to community members who would participate in the research. We also discussed how we might disseminate the results of the study and raise awareness about child and adolescent mental health in our town.

I then applied for the Empire State College Foundation's Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship, which provides a faculty member each year with significant release time and generous funding for a yearlong community-related research or artistic project that culminates in a community forum and other forms of dissemination. This is an amazing opportunity for faculty who are interested in the scholarship of engagement and is a clear demonstration of our college's commitment to faculty work of this kind. I was thrilled to be chosen for the fellowship for the 2016–2017 academic year and I began planning both the study and the community forum. The forum was a screening of the film *No Letting Go* (Bucari, Rush, & Silverman, 2015), which followed a real-life family's experiences with a child struggling with mental illness. The screening was followed by a community discussion and a mental health fair, which included representatives from local mental health and youth development organizations. The Youth Bureau staff and I planned the community forum to be held on National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, May 6.

Recruiting participants for the study, which included an online survey and in-depth interviews with a subsample of parents, was a challenge that I could not have managed without the Huntington Youth Bureau. With their gatekeeping and assistance, I conducted outreach and recruitment for the study at health fairs, community meetings, and other events. The Youth Bureau's support and "seal of approval" helped me to reach a more diverse sample of research participants than I might have with just flyers and online recruitment.

Working with the Huntington Youth Bureau staff to develop the study and the community forum helped provide me with richer context — their input gave me a better understanding of the types of issues and barriers that families in our community were experiencing. One conversation that really stands out in my memory was with a small group of caseworkers at one of the Youth Bureau's service-providing centers; a worker told me that she thought it was great to learn about and increase parent's knowledge about child mental health, but she wondered what some parents would *do* with that knowledge if they were not able to access services for their children when they needed them. What about paying for services? What about the uninsured and underinsured? What about the long waiting lists at the local mental health agencies? What about transportation? What about language access?

Of course, as a social worker who had earlier provided services in an agency for low-income families in this community, I was aware of all of these issues. But this conversation reminded me that perhaps I had fallen

into a temporary state of "researcher tunnel vision." In this conversation with caseworkers, I could not maintain any credibility as a social worker by saying, "Well, those issues are outside the scope of this study." Workers in the community, people in the community, aren't always interested in our narrow research questions. They, of course, want to know, what does this really mean for us? What will be the impact?

The truth is that my project did not address most of those questions and I acknowledged that. But the caseworkers and I did have a meaningful conversation about how negative parental (and societal) attitudes about mental health can be a huge barrier to treatment, along with all of the other practical barriers like service scarcity and transportation. We agreed that all of us who work with youth and families are in a position to reduce mental illness stigma by not being afraid to talk about it, by sharing stories of treatment success, by directing young people and their parents to reputable and reliable sources of information about mental health, by correcting misinformation when we hear it.

But when I reflect on this one meeting where my research goals were challenged — and I have many times — I realize how this project would have been different had it truly been participatory research. Certainly, it was community-engaged, as it involved collaboration with and dissemination to the community. But had I begun with research questions derived from conversations with and outreach in the community, my questions would probably have been very different. This tells me that there are still so many opportunities to expand on what I began during my Imperatore Fellowship. It's a little overwhelming, actually. But I continue to promote the causes of increasing parental mental health literacy and reducing mental illness stigma through my presentations throughout the community. Further, this community-engaged research has informed the instruction that I do in the community, in that reflective and cyclical way that is a signature of the scholarship of engagement.

Publicly Engaged Instruction

The next part of the typology I'd like to discuss is publicly engaged instruction, which is "organized around sharing knowledge with various audiences through either formal or informal arrangements." Basically, this means giving talks outside of academic settings to share expertise. This is something that I love to do and, as a mental health provider with a specialty in child and adolescent mental health, there are a lot of opportunities for these types of presentations. I have presented at a Long Island-based girls empowerment conference on topics including communication and social skills; in a high school's freshman seminar about mental health in adolescence; and most recently I have been tailoring workshops on self-care to specific groups of people such as teen girls, college students, and social justice activists.

These presentations and workshops bring scholarly information to a wider audience that might not ordinarily have access to it. Bringing knowledge out of the classroom and into the rest of the world is certainly a service. What also makes this activity valuable as scholarship, in my estimation, is that I am not simply providing information found in other sources. Instead, in collaboration with the community organizations that invite me to speak, I must try to understand the educational and informational needs of the particular audience and synthesize knowledge that will be meaningful, relevant, and most importantly useful to that audience.

The talks and workshops that I conduct are usually interactive so I'm able to learn from the audience members — often parents and young people — about what they are experiencing, which provides me with ideas to pursue in my teaching, research, and other service activities. I am providing a service but there is also reciprocity in that I am gaining knowledge, learning about various perspectives, hearing from community members who, in some cases, challenge the information that I am sharing — which forces me to question and rethink my own understandings. My evolving understandings are then cycled back into my teaching, research, and future work with communities. This is the reflective element of engaged scholarship.

"I am providing a service but there is also reciprocity in that I am gaining knowledge, learning about various perspectives, hearing from community members who, in some cases, challenge the information that I am sharing — which forces me to question and rethink my own understandings."

I'd like to digress a bit to share one especially memorable experience with you and it's on the personal side, so bear with me. In 2014, I went back to my high school to speak to a group of students. As a high school student myself, I had been involved in a peer support group, where we learned basic helping skills like active listening, to provide support for other students who were struggling. The school social worker who ran this program developed a weekend-long retreat for students, to

help build unity and community, draw on individual and group strengths, and develop a sense of shared responsibility for others. This program is called Awareness Weekend and it is still up and running now, 30 years later. It was and still is a great experience for both the kids and the adults who participate. One of my former high school classmates took the job of school social worker and now runs Awareness Weekends twice a year. That social worker and friend, Dr. Katie Kelly, reached out to me in 2014 and told me that she remembered an Awareness Weekend when we were in high school at which I had spoken to our peers about my personal struggles with mental health issues. She said that it had made a big impact on her at the time and she wondered if I would come to Awareness Weekend and speak on a panel with other alumni about those same struggles and experiences. I said yes but I was a nervous wreck! So there I was, a social worker, a college professor, standing in front of 150 high school students talking, not about the incidence and prevalence rates of mental health disorders among adolescents, but about my own personal experiences. Of course, I could have always used my professional expertise as a buffer if the talk started to get rocky, but that is not what the students wanted to or needed from me at the time. I was wary about how I — as an almost 40-year-old person at the time — would be received by the students. I must tell you — you all are a great audience — but that audience of 14- to 18-year-olds were the warmest, most accepting, and receptive audience that I have ever addressed. After the other panelists and I finished, there was a line of young people waiting to thank us and hug us. There's a lot of hugging at Awareness Weekend and the kids are really into it.

OK, so, there's obviously a lot of engagement in that anecdote and possibly some service. But you may be wondering, where is the scholarship? Well, I'll tell you. Not long after I experienced this wonderful reconnection to Awareness Weekend, my social worker-friend Katie and I decided that the world needed to know about Awareness Weekend. It had been around for decades and other school districts had adopted the model but no one had ever written or published anything about it. Dr. Kelly and I (with the blessing of the program's originator) wrote a practice-based article called "Awareness Weekend: A Retreat-Based Positive Youth Development Program" that was published in the social work journal *Children & Schools* in 2016.

This is not to say that peer-reviewed publication is the only element that constitutes scholarship in this example. As I hope I've been getting across in this talk, publication is not the most important result of community-engaged scholarship. But, in this case, I was able to draw on my engagement with a community, to work with a professional outside of academia, to use my knowledge and skills to highlight something positive that has been happening in a community, and to put it out there for others to know about. And it all felt great for me personally and professionally, which is a bonus.

Publicly Engaged Service

The final example of my own engaged scholarship falls under the category of Publicly Engaged Service. According to Doberneck, Glass, and Schweitzer (2010), this is "associated with the use of university expertise to address specific issues … identified by individuals, organizations, or communities" (p. 24). This type of work is not typically driven by research questions, though research can be a part of it.

My work in publicly engaged service has primarily been with a Long Island-based organization called the Women's Diversity Network. The network's purpose is to connect and mobilize women of different backgrounds to create positive changes through a more unified sisterhood. The group came together in 2017, with the goal of creating an event that would bring together Long Island women of diverse backgrounds to both share common experiences and celebrate differences — a Women's Diversity Summit, we called it.

Some of you may not know much about Long Island; you may have associations with the wealthy lifestyle of the Hamptons or maybe you have heard President Trump talk about the gang MS13 that has a large presence on Long Island. Both of these perceptions of Long Island are accurate; there is a deep divide between communities separated by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Despite growth in the Latinx, African, and Caribbean populations, plenty of white Long Islanders rarely interact with people who look different than they do or speak languages other than English. Discriminatory housing policies have created many mostly white and mostly black communities with separate public schools (funded by geographic tax bases), often bordering one another. There are indigenous communities, some on reservations such as the Poospatuck in Mastic, New York, and the Shinnecock Nation in Southampton, but most Long Islanders know little about the surviving cultures and communities of those whose ancestors lived there before anyone else.

Because of these deep divisions and the cultural and political climate we live in, a Long Islander named Shanequa Levin, a professional advocate then with the organization Every Child Matters, began organizing to bring together women from different racial, ethnic, religious, and other cultural backgrounds to plan this nonpolitical gathering, the Women's Diversity Summit.

I became involved as a volunteer early in the planning stages. I chaired the programming committee, which put me in charge of leading a group that selected the presentations and workshops that would be offered at the summit. As the size and scope of

the event became clearer to all of us and we realized the amount of work that needed to be done, roles began to blur and soon I was also involved in fundraising, outreach, marketing, and many other activities that needed doing in order to make the summit a success. And it was a success — more than 300 people from across Long Island attended. In addition to the educational workshops that we offered, we served food from different cultures and brought together performers of South Asian and Native American dance, African American spoken word, and many other diverse creative endeavors. The feedback about the summit was amazing.

My fellow volunteers and I did not realize it at the time, but the work had only just begun after the first summit. After our initial success, Shanequa and those of us working closely with her decided to form a nonprofit organization, the Women's Diversity Network, with the goals of continuing to bring together and educate women of diverse backgrounds and advocating for social justice causes that were important to women on Long Island. We did this while planning for a second Women's Diversity Summit, providing panel discussions and film screenings on a variety of topics, and carrying out a focused "Get Out the Vote" campaign prior to the 2018 elections. We worked hard those first two years and we continue to work hard.

Underlying all of the tasks and activities, behind the many discussions, texts, and emails, however, is the real project that we are immersed in. My sister members of the Women's Diversity Network and I are committed to creating community where it did not exist before. It began with women of different backgrounds meeting to plan an event and has grown into a community in which we learn about one another's experiences and reflect on our own. This has not been an easy or smooth venture and we are nowhere near an endpoint, a place at which we can say, "We're here and this is our community." Instead, the process of coming together has happened in fits and starts, with many bumps and some bruises, hellos as well as goodbyes. As women of all ages, of different religions and races, sexual orientations and gender identities, educational and family backgrounds, and most significantly, different personalities … many, many strong personalities … we do not fit together smoothly. We have rough edges and we often brush up against one another uncomfortably.

With this in mind, it sometimes amazes me that we have been able to agree upon goals and create a clear advocacy agenda — specifically, we have decided to advocate for changes in policies and practices related to gender violence, discrimination and systemic racism, and maternal and infant health. Notwithstanding the commitment of time and energy that our members made, we also had to commit to the even harder endeavors of working through our disagreements, putting aside ego, valuing all voices equally, and recognizing and checking our privilege. We do not do these things perfectly, but the Women's Diversity Network members have agreed to be in ongoing reflection, both individually and as a group, to advance our mission.

Of course, you do not need to have a Ph.D. or be a social worker to do these things. I am one member among many and we each bring our own strengths and insights to the group, along with our weaknesses and blind spots. But I believe I have contributed my expertise to the development of the Women's Diversity Network in a way that includes the elements of the scholarship of engagement. In discussions and meetings, I have shared knowledge about oppressed and underserved populations. I have helped facilitate difficult conversations using my understanding of group dynamics and power. I joined with my colleagues in thinking critically about our advocacy issues so that we can make smart and thoughtful policy recommendations to those in positions of power. And I have experienced the reciprocity that characterizes engaged scholarship, as I have gained knowledge and deeper understanding from my fellow network members and from others in the community.

Throughout my work with the Women's Diversity Network, a concept from my social work training has often come to mind, and that is the *conscious use of self* in professional helping. Conscious use of self describes the skill of intentionally using one's own abilities to communicate and interact with others in ways that facilitate change. The relationship between the social worker and the "client" (whether that is a person sitting in a psychotherapy office or a member of the community working in an organization) is paramount in the helping process. The conscious use of self means that the worker is continuously reflecting and trying to gain the self-awareness needed to create respectful and authentic relationships with others. Once these relationships are established, the social worker herself becomes the medium through which knowledge, attitudes, and skills are transmitted to others. And from there, change happens.

In community work, the conscious use of self becomes complicated, as I am not present in a professional social work capacity per se, and yet I am acting as a social worker when I work with community members to address social problems. I am a volunteer just like all of the other volunteers, each with our own needs and motivations for joining the group. I both formed friendships and at times clashed with other members, and yet I frequently felt my social work training guiding me, telling me to walk this volunteer/professional line in a way that was congruent with my values and the group's goals, even when it was difficult. The challenge of this work has been a huge source of professional and personal growth for me. I wrote about some of my experiences with the Women's Diversity Network and

was pleased to have it published in the online publication *Qualitative Inquiry in Social Work* (Bonanno, 2019.)

Personal Reflections

Now that you have learned about my experiences in these different areas of engaged scholarship, I would like to share a bit about what I have learned.

Engaged Scholarship is Important to Society

When we engage with the community in the ways that I have described, we are making a variety of contributions.

- We are making knowledge more accessible, beyond the scholarly journals that are out of most people's reach.
- We are taking a stand for knowledge itself. Knowledge may constitute fact (a word that gets a lot of attention these days) or subjective experience, which is especially important if we are to shine light on the narratives of oppressed and disenfranchised people in society. Whether we are natural scientists, philosophers, artists, whatever — engaged scholars are communicating to the world that the development and dissemination of knowledge matters — to everyone.
- We are solving problems. Engaged scholars are addressing real-world issues in ways that matter to people and societies.

· We are bridging the gap between the "ivory tower" and the rest of the world. As we interact with people outside of the academy, we are demystifying higher education, research, and knowledge itself. I don't know for a fact that the work of academics in the community provides community members with a different impression of higher education; but I know that I have had the opportunity to talk to many, many people about ESC, adult learning, and prior learning assessment as I have engaged with the community. And the more participatory the scholarship, the more the hierarchy between scholars and all others breaks down to empower everyone to contribute to knowledge, understanding, and the alleviation of problems.

Engaged Scholarship is Hard Work

All scholarly work is taxing and requires time, attention, and commitment. But the scholarship of engagement adds another level of "work" to the work. Engaging with communities requires a social presence that can be exhausting. We are entering communities and spaces, some of which may be unfamiliar to us, each with their own cultures, norms, and expectations. We are sharing our expertise but must do so with sensitivity and awareness of our privilege and any cultural mistrust that may have been in existence long before we arrived. We must listen and learn when it might feel easier and more natural to talk and explain. And there are conflicts — in my experience, many, many conflicts — that must be explored, understood, and worked through to achieve common goals.

Engaged scholars have to be up for these challenges. And when the pressures of academic responsibilities and community engagement start to overwhelm, we may need to take a step back. I have very intentionally reduced my community work this academic year, as it was taking a toll, and, as I have expressed, mental health and self-care are also important to me. For me, this decision resulted from reflection on how I could best contribute right now.

Engaged Scholarship is Professionally and Personally Meaningful

Being an engaged scholar has enabled me to intertwine various aspects of my life toward achieving goals and living my values. I am able to fulfill my academic responsibilities of teaching and mentoring, service, and scholarship while simultaneously advocating for causes that I believe in, making personal and professional connections with others, and developing as an academic, as a social worker, and as a person. I don't know if others experience engaged scholarship is this same way (it's certainly not part of any official definition of the scholarship of engagement) but I feel as if I am doing it all the time — when I debate policy issues with members of my network, I am engaging as a scholar; when I listen to a podcast or read the news and then share my interpretations with students and members of the community and elicit theirs, I am engaging as a scholar; when I participate in public forums on topics relevant to my community, I am engaging as a scholar. I'm guessing that some of you can relate to this experience; and if not, perhaps it's because we have not, as a community ourselves, had enough discussions about the ways in which scholarship infuses our work and our lives. I would be interested to know what you all think of this idea. For me, this sense of interconnectedness of the personal, professional, and academic is rewarding.

Ernest Boyer and those who followed him in "reconsidering scholarship" over the past three decades have widened our view of what it means to contribute to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. Yet, the progressive scholarship of engagement is still not fully embraced in colleges and universities around the world, especially when it comes to faculty member's achievement of promotion and tenure. We are fortunate to work at an institution in which Boyer's thinking is in our DNA. SUNY Empire embraces and encourages engaged scholarship in many ways and I am so appreciative of that. Thank you to the college for acknowledging my work through this award. Thank you to my colleagues and mentors who have been so supportive of my work; special thanks to my Associate Dean Dr. Desalyn De-Souza. And finally thanks to you all for listening to me today.

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"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."

— Arthur W. Chickering and Stephen C. Ehrmann, October 1996
"Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever"
American Association for Higher Education Bulletin, 49*(2), pp. 3–6*

Running a College on the Side: Reflections on My Engagement With Coursera

Valeri Chukhlomin, Saratoga Springs

In recent years, massive open online courses (MOOCs) have become one of the most important innovations in global higher education. Another important trend is the rise of online content aggregators, such as Coursera, edX, and FutureLearn. Coursera, the leading aggregator, by May 2020, had surpassed 56 million subscribed learners globally offering 4,500 online courses, 300 specializations, and 20 entire degrees. Since 2015, through membership in Open SUNY (online courses and entire degree programs offered through the SUNY system), SUNY Empire State College has obtained a unique opportunity to join Coursera and reach out to the world's largest community of online learners. One of the college's pioneers on Coursera, Val Chukhlomin, has led the development of seven Coursera MOOCs. In just four years, his MOOCs have enrolled more than 120,000 learners from more than 200 countries. In this essay, Chukhlomin shares his observations and insights into the Coursera world and discusses some of the pertinent problems. Please note that quite recently, Open SUNY merged with SUNY Online. The two entities are now called SUNY Online.

An Invisible College

Thinking retrospectively, I must confess that a few years ago when I entered the world of MOOCs, I could not have imagined that I would soon be totally obsessed and enslaved by them. Since 2014, Coursera has adopted all seven courses that I proposed for development. Through SUNY Innovative Instruction Technology Grants (IITG) and Coursera loans, I was able to raise more than $180,000 to pay for the course development. Then, I was privileged to lead the efforts of three college teams, the most tireless and devoted professionals on this planet, to create and launch the courses. Since then, more than 120,000 learners from around the globe enrolled in them. In April 2020, one of the courses, How to Get Skilled, was selected as part of the massive Coursera COVID-19 response to be delivered for free for the global audience. This effort is currently bringing to the course 3,000 new learners per week! Overall, it is a great honor to represent SUNY and the college to many thousands of learners, alongside prominent colleagues from Yale, Princeton, Columbia, UCLA, and other leading universities. At the same time, there is a very significant personal cost for me to be on Coursera, as I am the only one who voluntarily and with no release time is carrying the burden of sustaining the effort. So, the theme of this article is to make a case for Coursera MOOCs and to describe how I have managed to run a college on the side. Also, there is a call for possible collaborators in the near future.

Is There Something Shakespearean About MOOCs?

My MOOC-making journey started back in 2013, which was one year after Coursera was created. By that time, the college's Center for Distance Learning (CDL) had already been playing around with so-called "connectivist" or cMOOCs. That year George Siemens, a leading researcher and the renowned cMOOC pioneer, conducted a keynote presentation at the annual CDL Conference in Saratoga Springs. The famous Canadian shared his brilliance with us and, if I recall correctly, was a little surprised to learn that some CDL folks were also doing cMOOCs — and quite successfully (Yeager, Hurley-Dasgupta, & Bliss, 2013). When my colleagues discussed their cMOOC

Valeri Chukhlomin

experience at the same conference, it occurred to me that there was possibly a hidden meaning behind the phonetic similarity between the Russian word «Мука» (pronounced M-oo-kh-ah) and the English, made-up word "MOOC," the acronym for a massive open online course. In Russian, which is my mother tongue, «Мука» means suffering, self-inflicted torture, or even getting pleasure from the pain. For example, Boris Pasternak used «Мука» to translate "the dangers" in his beautiful translation of Shakespearean: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them" (Shakespeare, 1899, 3.3.269).

Can it be that MOOC-making is supposed to be that way? I cannot stop thinking about it, as currently, MOOC-making is happening in the parallel universe that is not connected to either the college's strategy or current business, and, therefore, remains mostly invisible for the college community. Once launched, on-demand MOOCs live pretty much on their own. Like unmanned spacecraft traveling the

interstellar roads, the MOOCs slowly deteriorate. They still enroll remote learners and collect data, although there is no one on the receiving end. The real Shakespearean question is whether we as a college need Coursera MOOCs or is it time to put the plug on them? Here are some arguments to keep the MOOCs alive.

Why MOOCs?

There has been nothing more important in the online learning marketplace in the last decade than the advent of MOOCs. For a nontraditional college receiving 70% of its revenues from online courses, ignoring MOOCs is not an option. What we are facing is a paradigm shift. Online learning as we know it has evolved as a technology-enhanced version of old-age correspondence courses. As such, it was largely ignored by the world's leading universities. The situation had started to dramatically change in 2012 when Andrew Ng, a distinguished computer scientist from Stanford University, launched his first, massively open online course on artificial intelligence (Pérez-Peña, 2012). That course enrolled 130,000 learners. Since then, the idea of massively open online courses, in which the best professors from the top schools deliver their lectures to learners from all over the world, has become widely popular and resulted in a huge wave of MOOCs. What happened after that is that the majority of Ivy League schools and top research universities finally discovered online learning. Then, they started changing the way online learning is designed, delivered, and promoted. It is only a matter of time until Coursera and edX will find an efficient way to massively promote their MOOC-based credentials to take over the online learning market, especially for working professionals. What is going to happen after that? I do not have a crystal ball but, after all, there is only one Facebook and one Amazon in a previously crowded place. As a coordinator of "traditional" online courses for adult learners, I am absolutely fascinated by seeing how quickly MOOCs are evolving. While it is probably too early to tell how disruptive MOOCs are going to be for higher education at large, it is too risky for any institution, particularly one like SUNY Empire that heavily relies on tuition dollars from online programs, to pay little attention to MOOCs. MOOCs are the future, and among other things, they are well adapted to the coronavirus world.

Why Do We Need to Pay Attention to Coursera?

Coursera is a Silicon Valley company, still very much in a start-up phase, which is trying to make MOOCs profitable. Initially, Coursera was formed as a consortium of 10 research universities and positioned itself as a top-quality, online learning platform. Gradually, Coursera has expanded by embracing new corporate and academic partners, including a limited number of international and U.S. state universities, such as those within Open SUNY. Currently, with close to 200 partners, Coursera has created the world's largest pool of subscribed learners (currently, more than 56 million, with plans for expansion up to 300 million learners). Coursera products include stand-alone courses, specializations, and degree programs. Starting with free MOOCs, Coursera has moved to offering fee-based certificates of their own. Most recently, Coursera has started offering for-credit courses, graduate certificates, and accredited degrees vetted by their partner institutions.

Here is an example of the disruptive power of Coursera. In 2016, the University of Illinois pioneered an AACSB-accredited [Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International] MBA on Coursera with more than 20,000 enrolled learners. In 2018, there were more than 800 graduates of that program. They paid close to $20,000 in comparison with $80,000 paid by campus-based students. In 2019, the university closed its on-campus MBA program and fully moved it to Coursera. The resultant online program is fully accredited by AACSB and is less expensive than almost any online MBA in state universities including SUNY Empire. As of 2020, two dozen new master-level programs have been added to the Coursera portfolio.

One may think that there is no direct competition between our college and Coursera. Well, not exactly so. In the fall of 2020, Coursera is launching its first undergraduate degree completion program for adult learners where students will be able to bring up to 90 credits (out of 120). In 2018, when Coursera was discussing its intent with state universities including Open SUNY, we did not use our chance, but the University of North Texas did. Now, they are launching this program at a massive scale. This was a really close call.

What Do They Do Differently?

MOOCs have completely changed our perspective on scale. For a Coursera MOOC, it is not rare to enroll learners by hundreds of thousands, and some courses have attracted millions of learners. With scale, Coursera MOOCs have enabled a massive use of learning analytics to inform course design. On Coursera, learning analysts keep track of learning behaviors of millions of learners and translate it into recommendations regarding course design. Coursera courses use a lot of short, engaging videos and keep track of user preferences. Coursera pioneered the use of peer reviews and is making huge progress on the way to automate it. When done, this will be a game changer in online education. Most recently, Coursera has created computer labs that can be added to any course. Coursera courses are expensive in production, but scaling does help a lot in covering the costs. Coursera programs are stackable where short courses are combined into certificates and then to degrees. Learners on Coursera can preview courses before they enroll. What is most remarkable is that Coursera has moved to position

itself as a skills management company. They allow learners to use their platform to evaluate their readiness for particular careers, and identify their existing skills and skill-building needs; then, they help learners to develop individual pathways to get skilled. This functionality is now used by more than 1,000 businesses and many governments worldwide to upskill their workforce. In addition to Coursera for Business, Coursera has launched new initiatives such as Coursera for Campus, where any university can adopt Coursera courses to quickly build their own online program. Basically, any university can now use 4,500 Coursera courses to build a foundation for their own online program and use their own campus, Zoom, Skype, or whatever teaching technology to connect instructors with students without the need to build their own courses from scratch.

What is a Coursera MOOC?

In a nutshell, a Coursera MOOC is an online course template divided into weeks. Typically, there are four to five weeks (modules) per course, with six to 10 video lectures, quizzes, readings, forums, and exercises. Coursera has developed a set of best practices based on learning analytics. For example, Coursera recommends that each learning week needs to consist of 40 to 60 minutes of viewing time and all lectures must be delivered in six-minute episodes. All recommendations are supported by very extensive data sets that include millions of observations. Overall, Coursera pedagogy is reflective of quantitative courses used in many research-intensive universities. Technically, the platform does allow me to create courses that follow the SUNY Empire philosophy of inquiry and guided independent study; what I have found is that for most Coursera learners, the SUNY Empire way of teaching and learning is not familiar. Coursera videos are short (five to six minutes) and concrete, with embedded (so-called "in-video") questions and polls. Like consumer polling on Amazon or Facebook, Coursera learners publicly evaluate "products" by rating courses and stand-alone learning objects and sharing their opinions. When doing so, they compare the course they are taking with other courses on the platform. From the educator's point of view, this is a very high level of transparency, and the competitive pressure is high as your "product" quality and "delivery" are openly benchmarked against the highest standards in the industry.

Round One: My First Engagement With Coursera: The iMOOC (2014–2016)

Since joining the college in 2006, I have been working closely with Professor Bidhan Chandra on the theme of virtual acculturation. Virtual acculturation is what happens when international online learners get accustomed to and learn how to succeed in a small, all-American, online class. Earlier, I had studied this phenomenon in Russia (Chukhlomin, 2010), and it appeared that my colleague, Bidhan, had done the same in the U.S. Around 2011, Associate Professor Anant Deshpande joined our research team. After co-authoring a journal article in which we described our findings (Chukhlomin, Deshpande, & Chandra, 2013), our team moved to develop a bridging online course aimed at helping international students and foreign-born professionals freely navigate U.S. virtual environments and online courses. Initially, we wanted to develop a MOOC on the Canvas Network. Thanks to advice from Tom Mackey, at the time dean of CDL, the three of us applied for and received a $57,000 IITG grant and switched the course development to Coursera. To work on the project, we invited two mentors from the college's International Education program (Lecturer Lori Calix and Visiting Associate Professor Jeannine Mercer), two non-business faculty (Associate Professors Michele Forte and Dana Gliserman Kopans), two instructional designers (Tonka Jokelova and Jane Greiner), a videographer (John Hughes), and an assessment professional (Amy Giaculli). We called the project "iMOOC" where "i" stands for international or intercultural.

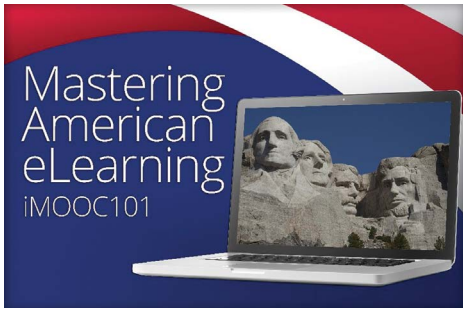

Image provided by the author.

iMOOC101: Mastering American eLearning course logo on Coursera.

Back in 2015, Coursera courses were taught live, very much like online courses at SUNY Empire. We envisioned our course as a competency-based, cross-cultural training, aimed at foreign-born or remotely located students and professionals who were interested in overcoming cross-cultural barriers in virtual work and learning environments in the U.S. The course was built as a series of explanatory lectures and exercises helping students better understand and eventually overcome the barriers preventing them from successfully integrating into the all-American classroom or workplace. The conceptual competency map for the course is presented in Chukhlomin (2016).

To participate in the course, we invited students from SUNY Empire locations in Europe and Central America. Actually, we took advantage of our experience in conducting online classes for students in Lebanon and filmed a series of interviews with them during summer residencies in Cyprus. We also interviewed a number of foreign-born SUNY Empire faculty and asked them to explain how they managed to identify and overcome cross-cultural barriers. The interviews were edited and included in the course as case studies. Also, we reached out to the U.S. Department of State, and their staff helped us connect with more than 400 U.S. education

centers and posts abroad. Most remarkably, a nationwide network of 30 centers in Indonesia actively participated in the course when it was first delivered in March–May 2015. The overall enrollment in the course was close to 5,000 students from 139 countries (Deshpande & Chukhlomin, 2017).

To produce the course, we prepared video lectures, self-assessments, quizzes, and case studies. A novel element in the course was presented by cross-cultural animations. Animations are case studies that are illustrated with the use of software (we used GoAnimate, now known as Vyond). What we discovered is that going public and reaching a worldwide audience with cross-cultural training is a risky business, as it is extremely difficult to illustrate cultural misunderstandings neutrally.

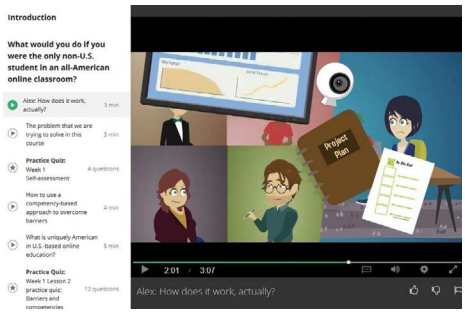

Image provided by the author.

Alex (an international online student) in an all-American virtual work (or online learning) environment (an animated case study developed for iMOOC101 and iMOOC102 and used on Coursera).

Yet another thing that we learned in the first Coursera course is that MOOCs are not exactly online courses as we tend to think about them. A Coursera MOOC is a new educational tool, very much like a televised, interactive textbook where learners come in huge crowds — and not necessarily to watch all lectures and do all exercises. What we observed is that Coursera learners, particularly in free MOOCs, behave differently than students in our college's for-credit online courses. Coursera learners come in huge crowds to sample a course, get an idea or two, and then quickly move to another course. That is why the usual metrics like retention rates are not very useful in the MOOC world. According to MOOC researchers, an average completion rate in free MOOCs is 3–5% (Jordan, 2014). At the same time, the self-reported level of satisfaction of both completers and non-completers is practically on the same (and very high) level of 70–80% (according to Coursera's internal annual reports). The paradox is explained if we begin thinking about MOOCs as a different beast. I usually use an analogy with a party where there is no need for a participant to talk with every guest and taste every dish to consider the party a success. One may be highly satisfied with a party even if all communications and all the activities the person has had at the party were reduced to just a couple of conversations — as long as those conversations were important or planned. But the advantage of MOOCs is that you can always return to get more — as long as the party never stops.

Soon after we piloted iMOOC101, Coursera announced a transition of live MOOCs to the on-demand mode. Thanks to another $20,000 IITG grant that I was able to obtain in 2015, our team converted iMOOC101 into iMOOC102. Since then, the updated course has been continuously running in an on-demand mode, and by May 2020, it had enrolled close to 3,000 new learners. Interestingly, 20% of new learners are educators from Asia, many with Ph.D.s. Using IITG funds, we attempted to engage more participants and collaborators several times. For example, Bidhan and I delivered presentations at the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) Annual Conference in Orlando (2015), the NAFSA: Association of International Educators Annual Conference in Denver (2016), and the regional NAFSA Conference at Skidmore College (2016). Anant presented at the annual AACE (Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education) Conference in Honolulu (2016). Once I even traveled to Hong Kong to deliver a MOOC-making masterclass that was conducted for local universities at the U.S. Consulate (2015). In addition, I presented our iMOOC experience in three conferences in Australia, two SUNY CIT (Conference on Instruction & Technology) conferences and during the Open SUNY Distance Learning Week.

The goal of these activities was not to just share our experience; we also tried to find a way to sustain the course and to make it part of an ongoing learning process. To do so, we presented the course to international education advisors at the annual SUNY Global meeting in Albany (2016), traveled to several SUNY campuses, and presented at SUNY COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) conferences. Unfortunately, the effort to find partners for sustaining the course has so far not been successful. But — similar to the Voyager — the course is still alive and is continuing its mission.

In 2017, Anant Deshpande and I summarized the results of the iMOOC research in a prestigious, peer-reviewed journal, *The American Journal of Distance Learning,* published by Taylor & Francis (Deshpande & Chukhlomin, 2017). The article focused on exploring how various factors such as content, navigation, consistency with design, self-assessment, interactivity, and accessibility impact student motivation to learn in a MOOC environment.

Photo provided by the author.

The iMOOC101 production team (l-r): Tonka Jokelova, John Hughes, Jeannine Mercer, Anant Deshpande, Lori Calix, Val Chukhlomin, Bidhan Chandra, and Amy Giaculli (Saratoga Springs, November 2014).

Here is what some of the learners have said about the course (excerpts from an IRB-approved survey):

- "I learned a lot about American culture through the video

lectures as well as the reading and interviews."

- "It has opened my eyes to the important contributions e-learning is providing to narrow that gap between what I know and the many things I'm learning through the iMOOC."
- "I took delight in the varied instructors and their cultural and ethnic diversity."
- "The link to professional studies and application to the work environment beyond the diploma was needed, and excellently done."
- "I better understand the low context culture of and the general academic systems of the U.S."

Round Two: The Career Brand Management Specialization (2016)

What I personally learned from the iMOOC experience is that Coursera MOOC-making is a team sport that requires a highly coordinated effort — very much like a movie production. After that, I undertook a small learning journey by taking a movie production class to find out more about the work of an executive producer. I realized that producing Coursera MOOCs was similar to filming an independent movie where each of the participants wears several hats, and for each of the hats there is actually a well-defined job description! I was eager to try it one more time, and soon a new exciting opportunity presented itself.

At the end of 2015, Coursera came up with a new idea to combine stand-alone, short courses into MOOC specializations. A specialization is a series of four to seven courses that cover a certain content area. Usually, this is an equivalent of a large university course or even several courses. To support the development of specializations, Coursera conducted a highly competitive request for proposals (RFP) in several content areas, including personal growth, and offered support and financial incentives (loans) to partially cover the costs of course development. From my perspective, having personal growth as a subject area was particularly important because this was one of the few niche areas where a comprehensive college like SUNY Empire could at least theoretically compete with Ivy League universities. Competing in other areas, for example, computer science or artificial intelligence, was hardly possible. But personal development is exactly what we teach in the college and do it well! Coincidentally, in 2014, I had completed a textbook and with a small group of CDL faculty, piloted a new online course in career self-management and self-marketing (Beckem, Benno, & Chukhlomin, 2015). From the moment of its launch, the course was well accepted and highly regarded by the college students, and I thought that because of its proven usefulness, success, and innovation, this course could have been an excellent candidate for the RFP. With support and encouragement from Ronnie Mather, at the time interim dean of CDL, I responded to the RFP and — miracles happen! — the proposal was accepted, with an addition of a $40,000 loan and course development support including intensive Coursera training in Mountain View, California.

Attending a Coursera specialization training camp was one of the most interesting undertakings in my entire life in the U.S. Though I had visited Silicon Valley before, I had never been inside a fast-growing start-up company. It started with a parking lot shared with Firefox and LinkedIn. I immediately recalled a joke that I heard from a Russian-born Jewish engineer in New York City: "We live so close to America but never see it." While there are many Americas, the innovative America is definitely in Silicon Valley! What I found inside the Coursera building was young boys and girls of all colors sitting in their cubicles, riding bikes, chatting in free ice cream rooms, and getting in groups with few, much older looking, egg-headed men and women in Elton John glasses. The training itself was a military-style, three-day, early morning to late night exercise. I think that the camp was intended to help us digest the idea that the task we were given was impossible to achieve but we still were expected to do it. This is exactly what I told Ronnie upon my return home.

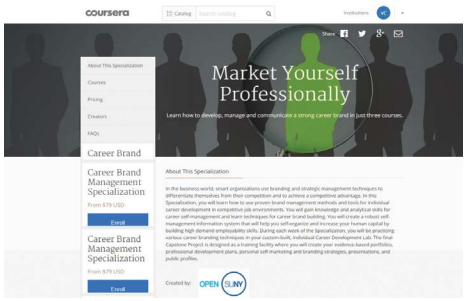

Image provided by the author.

Career Brand Management Specialization on Coursera (homepage).

Now, why the task was impossible to achieve. To get things ready, we had only two months (December and January). Starting in February 2016, we were expected to launch one new course each month and to finish the development in May. Altogether, we needed to produce, with studio quality, 150 to 200 new video lectures. Also, prepare 60 to 80 exercises, 50 quizzes, and lots of reading materials. On top of that, we were required to comply with Coursera requirements (edited closed-captions, in-video quizzes in all lectures, and peer-reviewed assignments) and to keep an eye on the courses we were launching at the same time as we were developing new ones. This was four times more work than the iMOOC, six months for four courses vs. nine months for the original iMOOC, and 50% of the budget with the difference that this time we were supposed to return the money from the royalties obtained from Coursera learners. Was it possible to do it? Absolutely not! This is what I said to Ronnie. I also said that I had assembled an absolutely, unimaginably fantastic team and we'd do it anyway. Even now, four years later, I sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and cannot believe that we did it.

The team included Associate Professors Michele Forte, Dana Gliserman Kopans, and John Beckem. In two courses, we were joined by Associate Professor Kymn Rutigliano. The technical team included instructional designer Tonka Jokelova, videographer John Hughes, and assessment specialist Amy Giaculli. None of us had release time; the work was conducted day and night, in two parallel video studios working simultaneously. I can only compare it to the Japanese practice of "Ultra C for a handful of rice" in the 1970s where Olympic athletes were striving to achieve super excellence in gymnastics far beyond the standard, with practically no monetary compensation. It did work for the Japanese in competitive gymnastics, and it worked for us. But I honestly do not know whether it can be repeated — even with decent pay! Later, I described the experience in my presentation at the Coursera annual conference in Denver (2017). I called it "Guerilla MOOCmaking" (Chukhlomin, 2017) and got an ovation in a full room. Kudos for the team!

The Career Brand Management specialization is a series of four courses that were fully launched in May 2016. Since then, it has enrolled 82,000 learners worldwide. Organizations like the United Nations agencies have adopted it for corporate training. The specialization is aimed at working professionals looking to enhance or change their careers. In the specialization, students develop a strategic vision for their future work self, work on skill-building and self-promotion, and develop techniques for ongoing self-coaching. Of those enrolled, 40% of students have a master's degree, and 38% have a bachelor's degree. Ninety-four percent of the participants report that taking the specialization was useful for their career development. In all courses we have detailed, IRB-approved surveys were used to keep track of the student progress. In 2019, with the help of Associate Professors Victoria Vernon and Ajay Das, I posted a detailed report about the results of the specialization (Chukhlomin, Vernon, & Das, 2019).

"In the specialization, students develop a strategic vision for their future work self, work on skill-building and self-promotion, and develop techniques for ongoing self-coaching."

Here is what students say about the specialization (Coursera, n.d.):

- "This course had a profound impact on my personal and professional development. It was instrumental in helping me make important career choices and increasing my confidence in moving forward."
- "If you're looking to revitalize or advance your career, this course will help you become a self-directed learner and seek out opportunities to enhance your portfolio."
- "I really appreciate highly the efforts of my respected dynamic and competent Instructors Dr. Valeri Chukhlomin, Dr. Michele Forte, Dr. Kymn Harvin Rutigliano, Dr. John M. Beckem II, Dr. Tonka Jokelova and Amy Giaculli and enjoyed the course material and video presentations of this course. Mind-blowing conceptual approach was adopted especially in the areas of basic conceptual knowledge of Strategic Career Self-Management in depth. Overall it was a superb experience of learning."
- "I really enjoyed the Strategic Career Self-Management course. I have an interest in strategic management and thinking and am interested in how the instructors connected these with career development. It's a different approach than using traditional goal-setting and career planning. I like the idea of viewing ourselves as an organization and thinking strategically for further development. Thanks for creating and sharing this course."
- "This course is fantastic in helping job seekers learn to view themselves and the jobs they are interested in, from the perspective of the hiring authority. Also, will provide skills to be successful on your career path."

Round Three: How to Get Skilled (2018)

After overextending myself and exhausting the production team in 2015–2016, I really needed a break to focus on my ongoing college work and personal life. When working on the specialization, I developed a habit of getting up around 4 a.m. and working into the night, seven days a week. My wife was not very happy with that. At the same time, I got a feeling that both Coursera and Open SUNY were very satisfied with the results and they might be interested in getting a new MOOC proposal from me. In early 2017, Coursera launched a new initiative proposing the development of short, practical, hands-on MOOCs called "project-based courses." I liked the idea and came up with a proposal to create an application for skills management. My idea was that by using the application, career builders could organize and monitor their skill-building work and develop tangible outcomes, such as data-driven and evidence-based selection criteria statements. To work on the idea, I obtained a new, $45,000 IITG grant. In the rest of 2017, I worked on the application and the underpinning competency model. I also needed to come up with a very realistic case study. I am very grateful to my daughter, Marina, and her husband, Steven, a graduate of SUNY Empire, who joined me in this effort. By 2018, I was ready to create a new, project-based MOOC.

The production team included Dana Gliserman Kopans, Amy Giaculli, and John Hughes. In all of my MOOCs, Dana

did a wonderful job by translating and editing my poor English into well-written and easy-to-understand prose. John is a rare kind of all-in-one professional who proves to be indispensable in producing the highest-quality videos, mixing sounds, and video editing. Amy was not only the movie star in our homemade serials; she also did the work of an assistant producer, which is basically doing all sorts of things. Instructional Designer Alena Rodick was the new member of the team. With the arrival of Alena, we moved from creating rather static, talking-head-over-PPT style video lectures to a more cinematographic production combining homemade video lectures with imported, professionally-made clips, animation, and music. Alena was also highly instrumental in developing the application. Marina and Steven were not officially on the team, but we would not have been able to produce this MOOC without their help. Marina created a storyline for the main case study and populated it with real-life materials; Steven created two companion websites to host the application. Time and again, we were relying on assistance by the SUNY Empire people and we always received it! My wife, Irina, who is an adjunct with the college and a Ph.D. and formerly department chair back in Russia, once again tolerated, fed, and supported me during yet another MOOC year. In addition, for this new course, I wrote a companion text.

The course launched in late 2018 and had attracted 16,000 learners. I expected that the number of learners would soon significantly increase, as in March 2020, Coursera selected the course for their COVID-19 response; indeed, from April–August 2020, the course's enrollment doubled (more than 32,000). This is what Coursera learners have said about the new MOOC:

- "With this course, I have learned how to improve on my skills and accomplish desired goals."
- "The course shows skills that I am not ready to work in, also helps explain what to do to increase my skills."
- "The course helped me to see clearly where I have to improve to get an enhancement in my career."
- "The JAFAR [Job Analysis, Full mastery, Assessment, and skillset Review — a computer application created by Chukhlomin (2018) for individual skills management] template is a very thoroughly designed spreadsheet that does a good job helping to visualize my skills. It's also helpful to mix and match new skills to see how they would affect my qualifications for different jobs."

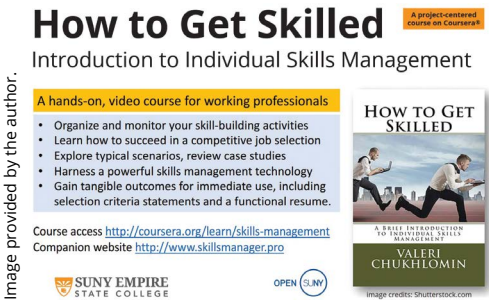

Image provided by the author.

How to Get Skilled on Coursera (2018).

Can We Attract 1,000,000 Fee-Paying Learners?

In my experience, Coursera is a big boy's game. A course from Stanford University usually attracts 100 to 200 times more learners than any SUNY course. Oftentimes, this is because the subject-matter expertise at Stanford is higher, for example, in artificial intelligence. But there are courses like Stanford Cooking that are also 100 times more popular than comparable courses from other universities. This brings us to the point of the real value of the SUNY brand. On Coursera, we do not present our courses as SUNY Empire State College. On Coursera, all SUNY campuses are part of SUNY Online, which, theoretically, has a stronger brand than SUNY Empire. Still, learners' preferences are strongly associated with brands. If so, we must be satisfied with simply being on Coursera in good company. At the same time, Coursera is here to grow; I think that SUNY Online should have proposed to do the bachelor's degree completion program here, in New York state. Another opportunity is to think about participating in the Coursera for Business program. To do so, in 2019, I proposed to IITG to fund a new project aimed at converting the specialization into a corporate training tool. For this purpose, I have developed a new piece of software and called it Career Fitness SMART Lab. The proposal received very high scores in the competition but eventually was not supported. Now, I am thinking about how to get $150,000 to $250,000 in grant money to do the job. I am sure that we can get 1,000,000 fee-paying learners on Coursera. There are also tons of unpublished data in the surveys and megatons of clickstream data for further research. Any ideas or collaborators are welcome!

Photo provided by the author.

Coursera production presentation at All College Conference, 2019 (l-r): Amy Giaculli, Alena Rodick, Val Chukhlomin, and John Hughes.

This Work Never Stops: A Postscript

The importance of MOOCs cannot be overemphasized in the coronavirus world. In May 2020, I relaunched the iMOOC under the new title: Mastering Remote Work and Online Learning in the U.S. in the Post-COVID Era. With Bidhan Chandra and Amy Giaculli, we presented the new course during the virtual NAFSA conference in June–July 2020. The course can be very instrumental in helping international students and working professionals navigate American virtual environments.

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Now and Then: ESC — and Life After

Carole Ford, Mentor Emerita, New Paltz

Yes, there is life, albeit very changed, after SUNY Empire State College.

Actually, my life as a SUNY Empire mentor began as a tutor back in 1976. In fact, I will never forget visiting my first student who was incarcerated at Wallkill Correctional Facility and was enrolled in SUNY Empire through an initiative called Extended Programs. I distinctly remember approaching a huge wooden door which, unsurprisingly, refused to open until I rang a bell and introduced myself through a speaker. I later, much less naively, managed prison-based programs at the Otisville federal prison, and the state prisons in Woodbourne and Napanoch.

About 10 years after I'd joined the faculty, I became the mentor-coordinator of the New Paltz Unit, subsequently the Highland Unit, of the Hudson Valley Center. If I'd designed a job for myself, it couldn't have been a better fit.

Beginnings

My professional life began as a secondary school social studies teacher in Bushwick, a Brooklyn neighborhood. It was a new school, progressive and forward-thinking, where I was able to try out a number of alternative and experimental programs. (And it's where I met my husband, Steve.) Unfortunately, our school district, adjacent to Ocean Hill-Brownsville, was caught up in the bitter dispute over community control. The long teachers' strike of 1968 led to extreme polarization among our interracial faculty, who had been quite cohesive before. Our school, in fact, the entire New York City school system, never was the same afterward. Several years later, we left the city; we'd gotten teaching jobs in England.

When we returned to the states, we settled in New Paltz where I earned my master's degree as well as an advanced certificate in educational administration and supervision at the SUNY college in town. I'd also taken some courses in guidance counseling but finally decided to pursue my doctorate in curriculum and teaching at Columbia's Teachers College. You can see why I say SUNY Empire was a perfect fit; my responsibilities combined teaching, advisement, and even some administrative work.

Life at SUNY Empire State College

In SUNY Empire's early days, we had a lot of discretion in what we taught and were able to help students design unique, innovative programs. We always had internal requirements for breadth and depth of study, as well as for a coherent concentration. But there were no distributive requirements, no grades, and, in fact, no credits; we counted months of study. That, however, didn't prove to be practical. It was difficult to match our concept with credits when students wanted to transfer to other colleges or apply to graduate schools. Grades were less problematic since at the end of an evaluation, as some of you will remember, we could write something like, "If I were to give a grade for the student's work in this contract it would be an A. …"

Around 1990, SUNY Empire was asked to develop an onsite program at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) in Hyde Park so that their faculty, including some of the finest chefs in the country, would be able to earn their bachelor's degrees. To my great delight, supervising the program became part of my responsibilities. When the first of our CIA students earned his degree, we agreed that we should celebrate. The

Photo provided by the author.

Carole Ford

next Sunday, they all gathered at my house — for a potluck dinner. It was, you can imagine, quite a culinary event.

The program was ongoing for more than 10 years, by which time it was phased out as the CIA hired faculty who already had their degrees. Around that time, in 1998, I took on my last assignment before I retired. I was asked to direct the unit in Athens, Greece, for SUNY Empire's International Programs. My husband taught math and ESL at New York College where our program was located. As we got over our culture shock and came to know it, we fell in love with Athens, and with Greece. We never got over the thrill of seeing the Parthenon from the window of the bus that took us to work in the morning. When we returned to Athens for the spring semester in 2001, it felt like a homecoming. We've returned many times since then. Only a few years ago, we spent Greek Easter in the Peloponnese at the vacation home of friends we'd met in Athens some 20 years earlier.

A New Career

I continued working for Empire on a part-time basis for several years after I retired. I led some study groups and continued to supervise our program at the CIA as it was winding down. When the Highland Unit was incorporated into the new unit at Newburgh, I turned my attention to offering courses for seniors who were enrolled in the Lifelong Learning Institute, a program supported by SUNY New Paltz. But, quite unexpectedly, with the publication of my first book, *The Girls,*[1] my retirement coincided with the start of a second career as a writer (as Carole Bell Ford [Bell is my family name]).

While working on my doctoral thesis, I'd become interested in the education of women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. That led me to the, then relatively new, field of women's studies, later gender studies, which remained one of my primary areas of scholarship. *The Girls,* an oral history, was an examination of the life chances of Jewish women growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, when it was still an immigrant ghetto. It was also personal; it's where I grew up. A few years, later an excerpt, "Nice Jewish Girls," was included in *Jews of Brooklyn,*[2] published for the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

In 2005, my book, *The Women of CourtWatch,*[3] the account of a successful grassroots women's movement to unseat entrenched judges in what had become a corrupted family court system (in Houston, Texas) was selected by the national organization Justice for Children as an outstanding work. My book, *After the Girls Club,*[4] was published in 2010; it tells the story of orphaned, teenage Holocaust survivors who made new lives for themselves in America. My essay "Letters from Riverside," based upon letters written by a young, mid-19th century feminist, was included in the 2013 award-winning anthology of works by women writers of the Hudson Valley, *A Slant of Light.*[5]

My latest book, *On and Off the Beaten Path,*[6] about the best road trips my husband Steve and I have taken in the past 20 years in the U.S. and Canada, is a radical departure from my previous work. It's my first travel book, although some of my travel journals as well as my articles, "Postcards from Greece," have been published in local papers and magazines. A number of my essays on overseas travels appeared in the e-magazine, *New Paltz Nation,* and, most recently, my essay on Campobello Island appears in *Lightwood,*[7] an online art and literature magazine (lightwoodpress.com). *On and Off* is the natural extension of my principal nonacademic interests: travel and cookery, particularly in ethnic cuisines (the book includes an appendix with a small number of recipes I've adapted).

Our travels have not only taken us all over the U.S. and much of Canada. Since our first trip to England in 1970, we've traveled extensively in China and throughout Europe. And, aside from travel, other interests keep me busy. I've recently become more actively involved with the League of Women Voters, serving on the board of the Mid-Hudson Region of this venerable organization whose origins go back to the suffragist movement.

We were planning a trip to Newfoundland when everything came to a screeching halt with the coronavirus. Being home so much of the time enabled me to get *On and Off* ready for publication, but otherwise, like everyone else here in the Northeast, I've pretty much been on lockdown.

Whenever it happens, I'm very much looking forward to getting back to life after. …

Notes

1. *The Girls: Jewish Women of Brownsville, Brooklyn, 1940–1995,* SUNY Press, 2000.
2. "Nice Jewish Girls: Growing Up in Brownsville, 1930s-1950s," in I. Abramovitch, & S. Galvin (Eds.), *Jews of Brooklyn* (pp. 129–136), Brandeis University Press, 2002.
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6. *On and Off the Beaten Path: The Best Road Trips in Twenty Years of Travel in the U.S. and Canada,* Lightwood Press, 2020.
7. Available at https://lightwoodpress.com/2020/02/25/carole-bell-ford-travel-on-and-off-the-beaten-track-lubec-to-campobello/.

China Stories

Deborah Smith, Saratoga Springs

What follows are three essays, one for each of the three cities that Deborah Smith visited in China as a Zhi-Xing China Fellow, sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). This work also formed the basis for her participation as a 2019–2020 Scholar Across the College.

Beijing
Doing Sixty and Seventy … and Eighty

It's Sunday in Beijing on the Dragon Boat Festival weekend. Despite light showers, visitors from across China and the globe flowed through the Meridian Gate to see the Forbidden City, the largest palace in the world.

Along with my colleague, Joy, I marveled at the sheer scale of the place. I'm sure you could have taken the population of my hometown of Troy, New York, put everyone inside the Forbidden City and have room left over for the towns across the river, too. If the *hutong* were China's cozy single-story residences for imperial artists (and later, ordinary families) the Forbidden City was an imperial surround for those rare few who ruled China. One could live their entire life within these walls. It's said the emperor got around the place in sedan chairs. His people lifted and hauled him.

Today, we mere mortals walked.

Inside the grounds was an exhibition on the royal jewels of India. Sparkling precious stones, gold, and gems were lit up to show off their stellar qualities. I'll look at nice jewelry anytime. Priceless items, artfully polished and illuminated, can take my breath away. Sometimes these beautiful pieces are ones I'd pick for myself … if I were the empress.

Now and then, I sat down to watch the people. Often, there was an elder woman nearby. These older women found me incredibly interesting. Was it the silver streak in my hair? The Western face? If our eyes met, I'd nod and say hello in Chinese. This often began a rapid Chinese monologue. If our escort, Li, wasn't around to translate, I quickly got lost in the rapid-fire pace of the language.

The major issue with my Chinese phrasebook was its organization. It wasn't grouped by categories familiar to me like Getting Around, Menu Decoder, Arriving at Your Hotel, and that all-important page, Chatting. It didn't even have a complete list of colors if you were shopping. My YouTube language videos were not allowed in China. The result was a crater-sized hole in my ability to understand what I heard or how to pronounce Chinese words. I had only crib notes from my friend, Jianhao, and the few language pages in the back of my guidebook.

These older women were talking, gesticulating, and pointing, clearly *at me.* I looked around quickly for someone younger who might speak Chinese and English. A young man with a child sat nearby.

"Hi. Can you tell me what these ladies are asking me?"

"I'm telling them Westerners don't answer such things," he said.

"But *what* are they asking me?"

"They want to know how old you are."

This was familiar. In Shanghai, near Xintiandi, we met two elder women who happily told us they were in their 80s and 90s. It seemed to be a point of pride with them. By those standards, I'm just a kid.

Photo provided by the author.

Deborah Smith (left) with woman in Beijing.

After several tries to communicate in Chinese, I turned to the young man: "Tell them I'm 63. It's OK, you can tell them please."

Once he announced my age, the two women lit up with excitement.

"I'm 70!" one declared. She pointed at the other woman, "And she's 80!" They both smiled broadly.

"Yep, 63 here."

"You don't look that old."

On this, we all agreed. Neither of my parents looked their age either. After I passed 40 and didn't fall apart on the spot, stating my age never bothered me. Many women never appear their age until they are quite frail. (Somehow frailty can define an age range like nothing else.) But that afternoon at the Summer Palace, drifting over the lake on a dragon boat, the question I always ask myself popped up once again: *What do 80 and 90 look like anyway?*

Because in China, one's age is a badge of honor.

These elders are women who survived all that came before them: space flight, the Cultural Revolution, microwave dinners, Chairman Mao, 3D printing, and 12 different kinds of Oreos in the supermarkets. They made it through; they are proud to reach the great Age of Wisdom.

I surely admired them and their enthusiasm. Let's hope when we get there, we all feel the same.

On my last day in China, I got lost in the *hutongs* near the Lama Temple. Wandering aimlessly, I ran across a couple of elders, this time a man and a woman. They were visiting with one another, as people in the close-knit neighborhoods of the *hutong* do. When I showed up, they began asking me questions in Chinese.

Rifling through my phrasebook, I had no idea what they meant. They laughed watching me. Looking up, I said I was American. Their eyes twinkled as they got giddier. When I tried to introduce myself in my rough Chinese, they asked me whatever-it-was yet again. Now they giggled out loud. Pointing left and right, I asked how to get to the main street. They laughed harder. I walked off, slowly waving, as they waved back.

If nothing else, I was amusing. I've done worse things for a laugh, trust me.

Around the next corner, I stumbled onto a young artist with his bicycle, who mercifully spoke English and accompanied me to the main road. Looking back, I am *certain* what those two elders back at the *hutong* were thinking: "Wacky American. She doesn't even know her age."

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Shanghai
The Marriage Market

As I left for China, my friend, Teresa, asked for a rock from the Great Wall. I replied that the wall might not be made of stone, but if it is, I'm sure they don't want every tourist taking a piece back home either. Her comeback was short and typical.

"OK just bring me a man."

Hang onto that thought. …

Once I arrived in Shanghai, I visited People's Park and the exhibit at the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai. As all modern art exhibits do, it challenges me with what is trying to be said and it's always interesting. Later, back out in the park, I listened to some folks playing music while I marveled at how many giant-size lotus leaves actually grow in a small pond.

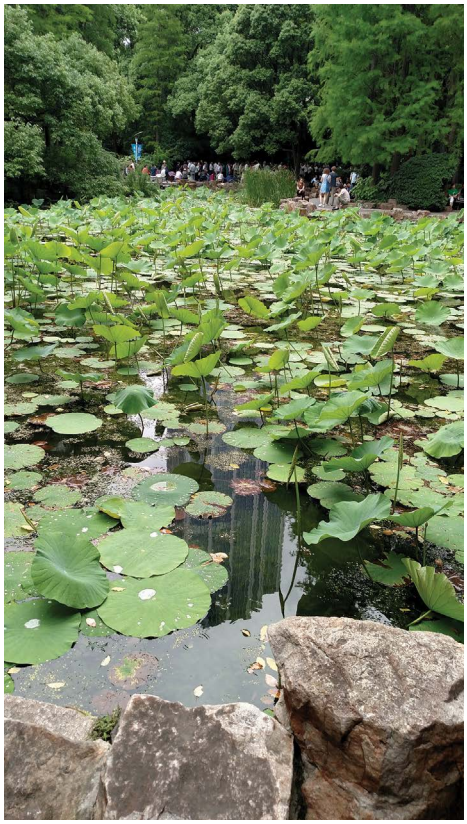

Photo provided by the author.

Lotus pond in People's Park, Shanghai.

Chinese folks use their green spaces. Whether for walking, dancing, singing, or just enjoying the weather, there are always people out in the city parks. On this beautiful day, People's Park was no exception. The sky was azure blue, the trees surrounding me emerald green … and why, I wondered, were there hundreds of umbrellas on the sidewalk up ahead?

It might be a craft show or a farmers market since it was Saturday. This is what happens on American Saturdays in my hometown. Why not have a look?

No earrings or crafts were on offer and no vegetables for sale either. Each umbrella — and sometimes the people walking near them — had a sign in Chinese clipped to it, accompanied by a phone number. The people chatted amicably with anyone who stopped to inquire about their sign. They *always* smiled at me. I assumed this wasn't a sad occasion, like a memorial service for someone deceased. As I neared the park exit, I buttonholed a Western couple to assail with my ignorance. Teresa would want to know, after all.

"What's going on? Why all the umbrellas?"

"It's a marriage market," they replied. "People looking for a spouse, or their parents, come here on the weekends. They set up an umbrella and clip on a card to advertise the eligible person. It's kind of like an old-fashioned Tinder."

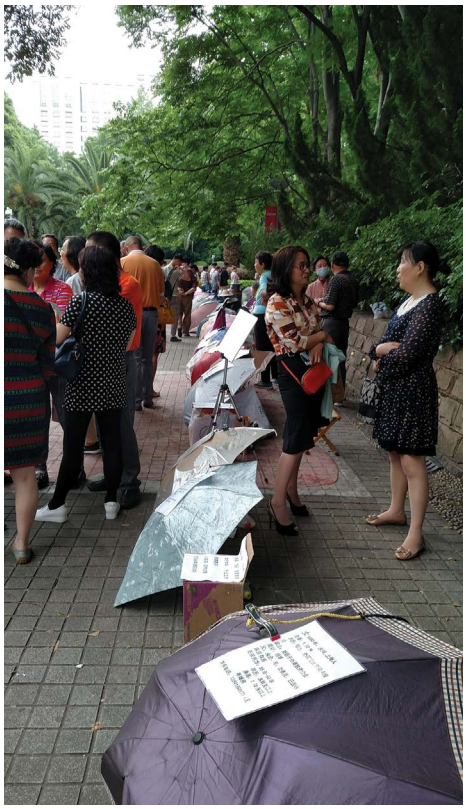

Photo provided by the author.

Marriage market, Shanghai.

This certainly wasn't in *my* guidebook. I looked back at the footpath, lined on both sides with umbrellas. It was 3 p.m. in Shanghai. I am sure if I called Teresa now at 3 a.m. American time, her trip to China would be booked about 10 minutes ago.

China's former one-child policy, instituted to control overpopulation, had its downsides. These only children — nearly two generation's worth and mostly men — are now grown and finding it difficult to meet and marry. It's pretty much a "vertical family." When you are a single child, there's no brothers or sisters to introduce you to their friends, who might have another brother or sister around your age to get to know. There's no group of kids to hang out with and learn from, like I did as a child with my seven cousins. Mom and dad dote on you, but otherwise, there are no instant buddies.

Hence the marriage market, where I found myself today. Marriage markets are as much about taking a chance as online dating, except here you could meet the real person — or your potential in-laws — beneath the trees in People's Park. Just look for the smiles.

These events aren't unique to Shanghai, either. They occur all over China every weekend as single people try to meet one another. Seems to me Teresa could do well to book her next vacation trip to China. Tour the country and include as many weekends as possible.

But this could be an imperfect solution for Teresa, too. She comes from a large Lebanese family. *Hummus* or *labneh* or *shawarma* are not Chinese food, as wonderful as they do taste. But a willingness to compromise on the dumplings, noodles, and breakfast soup now and then? Isn't that the compromise we ask of two cultures who marry and become a family anyway? And successfully married couples actually *do* mingle their cultures, however imperfectly.

But don't ask me. Look, folks, I'm not the one to be smiling at; I'm almost 40 years into a marriage with the same man, so I really shouldn't have an opinion on this at all. What do I — a dinosaur from the last century — really know?

Instead, ask Teresa: "Hey, what about those marriage markets?" after she returns from her trip to China. Right now, she's on her way to the airport.

It's solid proof that hope really does spring eternal.

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Xi'an
Day and Night, Night and Day

In China, exploring is easy if you simply walk around the block. I did this routinely in the mornings in Xi'an. A block in China is much larger than one in America or Europe. It reveals everyday Xi'an at its best, alive with the activities of the day.

In very official cars, government leaders pulled into their offices, while campus security guards guided folks on foot or in autos to the correct places in their journey. Gardeners and grounds people tidied up a landscape already so clean it nearly shined. Small children wearing light pink school shirts walked with their parents to the elementary school on the other side of the block, backpacks at the ready. Mothers carried their tiny tots on a morning stroll.

Some adults and older kids detoured through the store a few doors away from the elementary school. I went in to investigate one morning. The shop was loaded with cute stuff: pencils, sharpeners, carrying cases, binders, art supplies. All decorated with fun cartoon characters in pastels and primary colors. It was easy to see the Chinese penchant for "cute" playing out right before my eyes.

One morning on my stroll I entered a Taiwanese bakery. Among the goods for sale were prepackaged pastries (for lunches and picnics), lovely cakes and sweets resembling flowers and animals. Cleverly sculpted, on one cake the strawberries seemed to burst from the center and then cascade down the sides. Oh, yum. Best of all, they had *coffee.*

With sign language and my rudimentary Chinese, I ordered and paid. Settling into a window table, sipping my iced coffee, I watched Xi'an go by on this warm June morning.

People hurried by, carrying papers and cases important to their jobs. A woman stopped on the sidewalk to search in her handbag. Others rushed onward to somewhere they needed to be. I marveled at the pedestrian nature of it all — whether Eastern or Western, sometimes we aren't that different from one another.

My days were packed, too, including a visit to the University of Chinese Medicine, a walk in the park below the walls of Old Xi'an, and a Chinese classical dance performance. Tomorrow held a visit to the Terracotta Warriors and the evening fountain show at the All Day Mall. See? Busy.

A student at my college created a pixelated portrait of several of the Terracotta Warriors. It hangs in our building, taunting me, as though I should know all the warriors by name. *(Yes, you should, we're here every day. ...)*

Yet, the sheer scale of the Terracotta Pits — funerary sculptures buried with China's first Emperor Qin Shi Huang — is remarkable in real life. Equally so is meeting one of the farmers who found this wonder of the world. While trying to dig a well, instead of reaching water, he dug up the first warrior. Imagine uncovering that in *your* backyard.

The next evening, a small group of us roamed the Grand Boulevard of the Great Tang All Day Mall. Strolling the brightly lit streets, one can see how Xi'an spends a Wednesday night. Small children and their parents delighted in neon lights hanging in the trees, or chased soap bubbles their parents blew for them. Large plastic cartoon

characters stood in the boulevard; narrow water pools burbled and provided a straightaway where you could see the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda in the distance. Music groups played on the ends of the boulevard. Neon signs on lampposts declared "2018: Happy Every Day" as people enjoyed their evening and the illusion of slightly cooler air.

We crossed into a park where a long line of people snaked along in time to cymbal players with a regular but occasionally changing beat. It was fascinating.

Almost everyone was an adult, from younger people to the very old, women and men alike. The dancers were dressed casually (lots of T-shirts) and carried large fans made of hot pink or lime green fabric, or parasols that glittered with ribbons and sparkles. Sometimes two or three folks broke off together and did a pirouette. Swirling their fans, participants stepped to the beat; pumping parasols as the line wound up and down and around itself, changing directions every few minutes to the sound of the cymbals. No one seemed winded. Tonight, everyone was happy to dance with exuberance. It seemed like they could almost take flight.

Eventually, we headed to the fountains for the evening show. The crowd was five people deep, but thanks to modern technology, many recorded the action on their smartphones or iPads. Little screens everywhere inadvertently broadcast the falling water to the crowd behind. My colleague, Sandy, and I positioned ourselves near someone with an iPad. The screen's bigger.

The fountain spray and the colored lights changed in time to the music. Minute after minute ticked by. Like Moses at the Red Sea, I knew people's arms would tire. Soon, they lowered their phones, looked for their families, and left the line. Bit by bit, Sandy and I edged slowly forward. As a fine end to our day in Xi'an, we now found ourselves at the front — watching the real shimmering brilliance of falling water and beautiful music. Because … as a Chinese philosopher undoubtedly noted, here in the Land of Harmony, "Patience is a virtue."

Finding Space to Breathe in a Volatile World

Himanee Gupta-Carlson, Saratoga Springs

"Breathing" defined the past year that I spent on sabbatical, as metaphor and reality. Breathing deeply creates a state of calm. It lubricates muscle joints, tissues, and nerves. Breathing easily is a sign of good health, the capability to live.

Symptoms of the novel coronavirus include shortness of breath. In COVID-19 sufferers, difficulties with breathing indicate a worsening state. Respirators plunged into bodies serve almost like life support, and for those who survive this deathly disease, such devices leave lasting scars.

George Floyd's dying words "I can't breathe" came as a white police officer held his neck down on the pavement with a knee for the alleged crime of being a Black man using a counterfeit bill to buy cigarettes. Floyd's phrase now represents brute force among police and has legitimized finally the truth that Black lives must matter if we are to ever attain anti-racism justice. Yet, in public spaces, those who choose to breathe while wearing face masks that have been shown to slow coronavirus spread and those who choose to breathe freely without them at the expense of others' safety expose deep societal divides.

In yoga, breath is life, a source of strength, clarity, and calm. I turned to yoga often during my sabbatical, a period of time in which I found myself learning how to be an activist-scholar who could think, write, and act in service to others amid chaotic times.

I love my work as a teacher and mentor for SUNY Empire State College. Yet, beneath these roles are a few things I love even more: writing, which has been my vocation for nearly four decades; farming, which has centered my life since I moved to upstate New York in 2010; and yoga and other physical activities that stretch and strengthen my body and ensure my breath is strong.

For many writers, myself among them, writing is breathing. I write and I breathe. In yoga class, I breathe full ujjayi breaths where the inhale begins at the belly, expands through the rib cage and travels up through the chest and throat, and then exhales in reverse order with a slight "tss" sound at the back of the throat. Through ujjayi breaths, I let go of physical tension that often results from insecurities and uncertainties about my sense of self-worth. I recognize the racialization of my body in the predominantly white world I live in and how it affects the grip in my jaw, constrictions in my shoulders and hips. I use the positions of virabhadrasana — warrior — to release those grips, and in doing so gain the physical strength and emotional stability to stay calm. When I write, I clear the clutter of external critique and start to breathe deep into my inner subconscious that helps me formulate the language to communicate lucidly with my conscious self and the wider world. The feisty utterance of the sound "ha" in the yogic breath of joy signifies the release of fear and a willingness to take on the world.

Public Scholarship

My sabbatical allowed me a chance to do yoga on an almost daily basis, as I engaged simultaneously in writing and farming. It also helped me clarify what I think a scholar is. It is someone who shows gratitude for knowledge gained from mentors to serve others: people first, institutions like one's employer and the academy at large after.

Early on, I submitted proposals — all of which were accepted — for papers and/or presentations to several academic conferences that undergird this odd thing I call "my discipline": American studies, religion, autoethnography, and Asian American studies. The proposals dealt with different strands of my work: liberation through farming with a hip-hop-based storytelling sensibility for a panel at the American Studies Association; spirituality through hip-hop and working the land for food for the American Academy of Religion; narrativity and self for the International Conference on Doing Autoethnography; and food and self-embodiment for Asian American Studies. Good fortune in scheduling allowed all but one of these conferences to take place face-to-face before the coronavirus spread turned into a global pandemic. Attending these conferences without the worries of meeting student and mentee needs gave me the chance to meet scholars from November 2019 to early January 2020 in such lovely locations as Honolulu, San Diego, and St. Petersburg (Florida).

Photo credit: Jim Gupta-Carlson

Himanee Gupta-Carlson and her cat, Pepper, on the farm.

At these conferences, we often spoke of how the academy appeared "sick," and of how so many co-panelists could

not attend the gatherings due to illness. I swam in the ocean in Honolulu at beaches that were my refuge during graduate school and did yoga atop a paddleboard. I went for long walks and discussed yoga with others in panels at the American Academy of Religion. At the International Conference on Doing Autoethnography, I engaged with others in a hip-hop dance workout based on the curative powers of Beyonce's *Lemonade* album, which delivers a powerful message of female self-empowerment to her husband Jay-Z in the wake of his infidelity. With colleagues, I shared meals and talked about public scholarship and of moving our work outside peer-reviewed journals toward more publicly accessible sites. When one speaker at the American Academy of Religion defined the audience for his writings as people like his students, I found myself thinking of my students: middle-aged, multiracial, often working-class, first-generation college students seeking a better life in a world that was increasingly coming to be defined by political violence, economic insecurity, and the destructive forces of climate change. I began to think of people like these students as my audience and began trying to reach them in an expanding array of ways: Facebook and Instagram posts, contributions to public-facing academic blogs, conversations about healthy foods at farmers markets, as well as farming itself.

Hip-Hop and Farming

My husband and I began farming as a means to produce our own food, partly for personal health and pleasure, and sometimes, in periodic waves of economic hardship we have experienced over the years, for sustenance. Over the years that we learned how to grow vegetables and raise animals and use regenerative practices to put nutrients back into the soil, I was writing my first book, *Muncie, India(na): Middletown and Asian America* (2018, University of Illinois Press), and nurturing slowly a second project about community-based hip-hop as a grassroots practice of social change.

I sensed there were connections between the creating of food in soil, the innovating of change in hip-hop, and my presence as a woman of color/daughter of Indian immigrants in a white supremacist world. During my sabbatical, when I was allowed to let lie fallow the fields of my faculty obligations, I started to find the means to put these connections into words. Like the pioneers of hip-hop who cultivated an oppositional consciousness through the creation of music, dance, and the often illegal visual installations known as graffiti, I was troubling the landscape of the status quo by being a farmer. Whiteness and maleness set the contours for how we tend to see farmland, farms, and spaces like farmers markets. Ownership of farms is predominantly male and white, even as much of the labor (when a farmer can afford to hire others) is not. I as co-owner with my white, male husband made our farm at least half not that.

As our farm grew, we began first donating food and then, at the invitation of others, selling it via egg subscriptions and farmers markets. My writing and growing network of community connections made my brown female body increasingly the farm's outward face. As my husband turned soil with hand tools and managed our increasing numbers of animals, I planted, weeded, and harvested. In the summers of 2019 and 2020, three times a week, I hauled a tent, 120 pounds of weights to secure the tent from wind, tables, coolers, and bins of vegetables from our farm to markets in Saratoga and Schenectady counties. I reveled in the energy of connecting with marketgoers; in the marathon hours of harvest, prep, travel, set up, sales, and takedown rituals of the market; and in the sheer physicality of the work. Like the breath of joy, being a farmer was teaching me how to shed uncertainty and take on the world.

We began calling ourselves "graffiti farmers" in the spirit of one of hip-hop's foundational arts. We were creating what graffiti artists call 'pieces (short perhaps for masterpieces), only our canvas was soil, not a train or a wall and our media was nature, not aerosol paint.

Photo credit: Yoga Floats

Himanee Gupta-Carlson in Warrior Two pose during a paddleboard yoga class at Ala Moana Beach Park, Honolulu, HI.

These days, the audacity of our art shows up on our lawn, which we stopped mowing after learning that such practices as mowing stifle ecological growth. Nature blows in flowering weeds, which attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Amid unruly unmoved grasses, we have been harvesting greens, broccoli, tomatoes, potatoes, and other vegetables while raising chickens, ducks, geese, and goats for eggs, poultry, and meat. Our yard stands out for its vibrant unruliness amid others mowed to lifeless stubs.

Vandalism or Life-Giving Breath

Against this backdrop came major shifts. A complaint from a neighbor in April 2019 snowballed into a visit from the town codes enforcement officer and threats to shut down our farm. As we worked with the town to resolve the complaints, the neighbor rallied others on our road against us. We entered into an agreement to buy vacant land up the road, drew up a site plan, and wrote up a Statement of Farming Philosophy that mirrored Statements of Teaching Philosophy that I had written in the past. Customers, other farmers, and friends wrote letters on our behalf. The neighbors took pictures of our nonconforming yard and circulated rumors of children seeing chickens killed with butter knives.

A public hearing that took place on February 4, 2020, the same night that Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi tore up her copy of President Trump's State of the Union address, drew a crowd. While many testified in our favor and others entered written statements of support, the opposing neighbors spoke loudly and forcefully against having a farm in their backyard. They created a specter of fear about smells, rats, and disease. These images subtly linked our farm activities to racist language that nativists used to describe eastern and southern European and Asian immigrants in the early 20th century.

In years past, I have asked students to consider how graffiti is defined. Is it art? Or is it vandalism? Is it a statement of free expression that is protected by the First Amendment? Or is it an illegal act? Documentaries such as Henry Chalfant's acclaimed *Style Wars* suggest the buffing — or ugly, shaded paint put up to whitewash illegal graffiti in public spaces — is more vandalism than the graffiti itself, and that perhaps the graffiti was the art that called attention to the vandalism inherent in urban development that has denied life to the land underneath and has led to the structural inequities of society laid bare in such developments as the housing projects where many of hip-hop's pioneering artists grew up. The land on which we farm is not urban. But it was lifeless when we bought it. Regenerative agricultural practices had breathed life into it. Life that was joyous and, like hip-hop, a bit rebellious. Our neighbors — predominantly white, predominantly conservative — responded by trying to squelch its life-giving breath.

"How can you live with so much hate around you?"

A farmer who also happened to be a yogi asked me this question after the public hearing. In her testimony, she called the neighbors hateful, bigoted, and selfish.

The zoning board had voted to continue the hearing the following month. Afterward, I went to the farmer to thank her for her support.

"Why don't you move?" she asked.

Inwardly, I thought, "We cannot move. You cannot move a farm, and 10 years of work of building topsoil. Plus, we can't afford to move."

Outwardly, I spoke of the spirituality of putting my hands into soil, and how when I was out in the fields working or walking through the wild weeds of our backyard, everything else was forgotten. I talked about the struggles we had gone through as we built the farm, of the baby goats that would soon be born, and what we had gained in the process.

"We can work this out," I remember telling her. "We have to."

"Or," she continued, "you could sell your place and move where you'll be welcomed."

Build, Destroy, Build

I often invoke an 'ism from my hip-hop mentor Robert Jackson (also known as Blue Black of the Washington D.C.-based emcee duo The Unspoken Heard) to describe hip-hop philosophy in practice as "build, destroy, build." Blue Black attributes the term to the Five Percenters, a Muslim-influenced movement based in Harlem in the 1960s. Build, destroy, build refers to a continuum by which one gains wisdom — when what you've built is destroyed, you build again. Sometimes, destruction is the result of external forces, and sometimes when it is time to leave behind what no longer serves, destruction is carried out by the self.

Through the month of February, my husband and I worked with a land use attorney and an engineering consultant to make a case for why one should want a farm in the background. I researched present land uses in the three-mile radius where we lived and documented the number of farms. We gathered data on living arrangements and foraging needs for goats, ducks, geese, and chickens, and documented how our proposed site plan exceeded those needs. More of our farmer friends and an increasing number of yogis started preparing letters on our behalf, while others started to hint subtly that it might be more beneficial long term to move.

We had planned to bring our new materials to a town hearing in March. But our purchase agreement on the land we hoped to buy was expiring. The sellers received a new offer and refused

to extend ours. As the coronavirus was spreading through New York, I realized we had lost.

I found myself taking more deep breaths to ease the heaviness in my stomach. We had been farming for eight years but despite the town's self-description as a right-to-farm community, we no longer had a right to farm.

The farm had begun as a backyard garden and had grown into the heart and soul of my research and of our lives. I had marveled at the growth of okra, cried over failed crops, woken up to roosters crowing, and held baby goats in my arms. I had walked through golden, purple, and red flowering weeds to harvest pumpkins, corn, and beans. I delivered eggs weekly to friends as part of our CSA (community-supported agriculture) and created new relationships with customers who visited our stall at the farmers markets where we sold produce. I wondered what life would be like if we no longer could farm.

Then the pandemic hit. In one fast week, a cheese-making workshop I had planned to attend in Vermont was canceled, as was the Association for Asian American Studies Conference. I canceled plans to drive to Indiana to visit my parents. My office, the yoga studio, and all the coffee shops where I would hole up to write closed.

The speed by which we were shutting down the economy — and our social lives — was stunning, frightening, and at the same time, reassuring. This suddenly constricted space created room to breathe differently. Many yoga poses consist of gentle twists or compressions that restrict breath momentarily to allow tight spaces in the body to loosen up. In the constricted space that the pandemic created, I found room to breathe differently. While I had believed I could not move, I remembered that I had been moving for most of my life. Before I came to Saratoga, I had had 40 different addresses. The last nine years at one address had been an anomaly. Recalling anthropologist James Clifford's conflation of the words "roots" and "routes," a new route to establishing roots started to make sense.

We created a profile on the Hudson Valley Farmland Finder site, and within two weeks, found a new space — an empty farm with a barn, historic house, and 48.5 acres, at a price within reach of what we could afford. We bought the farm. By the end of 2020, we will have moved.

Reinventing Scholarship

COVID-19 pushed social life online. I began attending yoga classes that were live-streamed via Facebook and threw myself into spring planting. A one-day, preconference writing workshop that the Association for Asian American Studies Feminisms Caucus had planned went online and became not just a conference gathering but an ongoing weekly meeting.

At the same time, colleagues in my Asian American and religious studies circles who had never taught online suddenly found themselves panicking as their institutions moved all instruction out of classrooms and into what, for them, felt like a cold asynchronous world. Having lived in that world for 10 years, I started creating posts on Facebook about how to warm it up. I described icebreaker questions, scaffolded discussion forums, and creative writing assignments I had devised.

In Asian American studies, scholars have an informal practice of recognizing the greatness of colleagues by introducing them with an accolade such as "The astute and amazing [Name of Person]." I grinned as Facebook posts that shared my tips started describing me in such ways as "The creative and online-experienced Himanee Gupta-Carlson." The kudos helped me see that I had something to offer those who were struggling to grasp something new.

My farm life also changed. I was home at the farm more than I had ever been before so I began pouring my energy into spring plantings and into ensuring that farmers market customers could still get food from us in a safe manner. I continued to sell at the farmers market itself but also made home deliveries an option. With friends, I worked out systems where they would leave money in envelopes and I would make deliveries. I would drive up, don a face mask, squirt sanitizer on my hands, deliver the eggs, pick up the cash, send a text message that the delivery had been done, and depart.

I listened to public radio reports as I drove that relayed information about the worsening health of COVID-19 suffers and the lack of leadership from the U.S. president. I listened to reports about food shortages that were resulting from shutdowns in the corporate supply chain, and of farmers having to dump their products because they could not reach wholesalers in time. This news surprised me because our farm was thriving as a result of the relationships we had established with those who knew us. It highlighted the vitality of farm work. As a faculty member — and especially a faculty member on sabbatical — I was nonessential to the day-to-day life in a pandemic. But as a farmer, I was essential in helping to alleviate food shortages. The pandemic also shut down many government meetings, giving us time to continue farming at our present home while making moves toward our new locale.

Earlier in my sabbatical, I traveled and attended many academic conferences. A running theme, as noted earlier, was the unhealthy state of the academy and the toll that this state of sickness was having on the physical and mental state of the professoriate. For many friends, emotional health further weakened amid demands of learning to teach online while also home schooling children and being unable to rely on restaurants for meals. I felt the toll, too, in my writing.

Since 1998, I have maintained a daily practice of writing three pages a day, usually longhand but sometimes via such websites as https://750words.com. The words are not supposed to be meaningful or significant, and it is perhaps telling that in my first few months at SUNY Empire State College, I heard a speaker call this well-established practice of morning pages "a waste of time." The idea is to use the process as an opportunity to dump out whatever is happening internally onto the paper (or the screen) before getting to the day's projects. By breathing out words in such a fashion, for me, the dust clears and clarity comes.

During the pandemic, the daily practice withered and nearly died. Like the plants that I brought home from my office that I tried to keep alive, I tried periodically to revive the practice, and periodically I did have success in doing so. But the external conditions that unfolded in the world around me made writing and the emotional decluttering that enables writing hard to sustain. That's not to say that I did not write at all. But I found myself realizing that as the world changed, I could not hide out from those changes. I had to immerse myself in those changes on a deeply visceral level in an effort to make sense of what was happening — to me, to others immediately around me, in the country, and around the world. That created circumstances that often felt constricted, as if I could not breathe.

I think my desire to immerse myself in such a way has something to do with my race and ethnicity, my gender, my age, and how I use these attributes to define myself as a scholar. Ever since the mid-1990s when I left my first career as a newspaper staff writer to enter a more uncertain one of fighting racism via teaching and social justice-centered research and writing, I have wanted to write in a manner so that anyone who picked up my publications would be able to say, "Wow, that was great. It was thoughtful, incisive. I learned something from it." My plan during my sabbatical was to put that mission to the test through writings that would bring together hip-hop as a community-based practice dedicated to social change with my ventures in farming as my own mission of building community and working for change.

Not leaving home except to do basic errands and farm work might have created conditions for some to self-isolate and find life in words. That was how my dissertation adviser had described his method of overcoming such issues as loneliness and writer's block. He would go to his books and enter into dialogue with those thinkers. I have come to see that as much as I admire this practice, it is not mine. My community does not reside in books. It lives and breathes in the world.

New Life

In April, I got a phone call from an Indian émigré who works as an information technology consultant and lives in Colonie, New York. He had attended a book discussion I had led in late February at an Indian restaurant in Schenectady and had recalled me mentioning that I had once been a journalist. He was trying to invigorate a social media outlet for Asian Americans, the *Asian American Herald*, in the Capital Region by creating a weekly talk show. Would I be willing to help?

I began conducting weekly interviews with local elected officials, religious leaders, teachers, artists, and activists in the area. The interviews took place via Zoom initially and were livestreamed via Facebook. I found out quickly that this weekly show — a half-hour in length — was a great means of connecting with persons of Asian ancestry in the area where I lived, and of creating information about their lives and experiences. It also has been reshaping my sense of how I might do scholarship. Instead of proving one's expertise through long hours of reading, interpretation, and analysis, why not talk to those on the ground? Gather the stories and share them via social media, and record them for later use by me as well as others. It has turned out to be quite enjoyable.

As my *Asian American Herald* work developed, I also started receiving emails from friends and colleagues in my various scholarly circles, with suggestions to write for academic blogs and other public media outlets. Those projects often involved collaborating with others, which in turn created fodder for the talk show. As an example, I was asked if I'd like to write a short piece with three others about the Netflix series *Never Have I Ever*. I am not an avid film or teleserial viewer and was probably the only person on the planet who had not heard of this series. But I agreed, signed on for a Netflix account, watched the series and loved it, and wrote up my piece. I then invited the collaborators to join me as guests on the *Asian American Herald* talk show. We now are planning future projects together.

This kind of work has taken my writing out of my notebooks and peer-reviewed journals and into spaces like the Political Theology Network, Zocalo Public Square, the South Asian American Digital Archive's magazine *Tides,* and the religions history blog called "The Anxious Bench." It also is leading now to a project for an Oregon-based immigrant project titled "1965" and articles for a grassroots news outlet called Weave News. It is reviving my writing and changing my view of the world.

Before my sabbatical, I had a plan to write daily and to present papers-in-progress at conferences across several disciplines. As I have learned through farming, however, elements beyond one's control have a way of turning all plans to dust. When that occurs, you're left with three choices: Seclude yourself from the world at large and write, no matter what; give up entirely; or learn to adapt.

A Fulbright Semester: Building a Social Work Dream Together

Susan McConnaughy, Hartsdale

I found that teaching a course with social work students and collaborating closely with faculty in the social work department were the most meaningful experiences in my semester as a Fulbright Scholar in Vietnam at Da Lat University (DLU) in fall 2019. I also found that struggling to learn how to speak Vietnamese was salutary even though my ability to hold my own in conversations in Vietnamese remained very limited indeed.

My teaching began by offering a new course in the DLU social work curriculum, Foundations of Social Work Practice, to 43 second-year social work undergraduates. This core course covers the conceptual frameworks and values that underline social work practice, and so it was a wonderful opportunity for me to engage in discussions that brought to light our cultural differences. The students were enthusiastic in comparing the similarities and differences in the contexts of our practice (U.S. and VN [Vietnam]) and in the values we brought to our practice. I was able to draw from my decades of practice experience in the U.S. and yet find it so useful to this new generation of professionals in Vietnam. To be valued and "fully used": this is what every older person wants as a capstone to a life's work! At the same time, the chance to question the centrality of my U.S. experience in the context of practice in Vietnam was a refreshing tonic! Every day, I left the classroom recharged by growing my outlook and my commitment to our shared profession.

In the classroom, I drew heavily from the teaching methods I had honed at SUNY Empire State College: formative evaluation, active applied learning, self-reflective learning, and the strengths-based approach. For example, we did formative evaluation at four points during this semester. Students filled out 3 x 5 index cards anonymously answering the questions: What is the most important thing you learned today? What important questions do you still have? My DLU colleagues translated the students' feedback to me, and then we discussed it. In every instance, we and the dean of social work were thrilled with the sophisticated and thoughtful questions students posed.

Applied learning activities were also met with generous responses from both students and faculty. It was thrilling to see so many students buzzing with discussion in their pairs and groups. A typical DLU classroom is a quiet place. Students later reported that they had gotten more confident sharing their own ideas, sharing their own stories, and discussing them with a group. Faculty in their other courses told me these students had become much more confident than previous groups of students. Faculty shared with me that they began to understand better what their students were thinking and how much they were truly capable of.

I was so fortunate that Nguyen Huu Tan, the dean of the social work department at DLU, chose to support me fully by giving me the services of an experienced faculty member, Nguyen Thi Minh Hien, to translate my slides and interpret for me in the classroom. When Mrs. Hien translated my slides, she would ask for clarification of concepts when needed. I then had a chance to explain them to her more clearly, and sometimes introduce her to new ideas. In the classroom, she then not only interpreted what I was saying, but she also explained the concepts in her own way. We then became true coteachers of the course. Mrs. Hien was also able to "read the room" at times in ways that were supremely useful to our teaching. When we debriefed after each class, she would give me her sense of what students understood and what they needed more help with. We could then reset our course.

Photo provided by the author.

Ms. Nguyen Thi Minh Hien (right, standing), lecturer of the social work department, Da Lat University, and Dr. Susan McConnaughy (left, standing) working with undergraduate students to apply the strengths perspective to their practice of social work.

Teaching this core course quickly made me part of a working university. DLU students and faculty were creating professional social work training in the specific context of Vietnam, where the profession had lain fallow during the early decades of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam from 1979 to 2010. Students at DLU were gaining skills they saw as valuable to themselves and to their local communities. Their passion gave buoyancy to us all!

The second part of my charge as a Fulbright Scholar at DLU was to provide training seminars and consultations to nine resident social work faculty. At the beginning of the semester, I sat down with Dean Tan and the social work faculty to brainstorm topics they wanted to cover in our weekly 90-minute faculty seminars. In all, we met six times: two sessions on the strengths perspective (an alternative to a pathology-focused approach), and four sessions on how to publish in international journals. Faculty were forthcoming in our meetings about the obstacles they faced in publishing in international journals, so we were able to problem-solve issues such as finding the right journal to publish in; accessing English-language literature for the literature review; referencing and citing sources in APA, etc.

I also sat down with individual faculty members, sometimes with Dean Tan interpreting, to discuss their syllabi in core social work courses, and later to discuss their research topics for dissertations or articles. Several faculty engaged me further in the process of defining their research questions, finding relevant English-language literature, and offering developmental editing on their articles or presentations. In this way, I was able to have deeper discussions on a variety of topics in VN social work, such as social work interventions with gender-based violence; formal and informal services for the elderly in Dalat City; improving access for women workers in the informal economy to needed services in Dalat City; family therapy for families in the rural areas; and a comparative historical study on the rise of authoritarian states. It was a mutually satisfying exchange of skills and knowledge in every case.

Mr. Tan, Mrs. Hien, Mrs. Phuong and I produced detailed slides/lectures for a number of topics in social work during our semester together. These slides have been translated into Vietnamese, vetted by our team, and used at least once with Vietnamese faculty and students. Mr. Tan would like to offer these slides to social work faculty he knows in other VN universities because there is a dearth of social work material in Vietnamese. (These slides would be improved if more local case examples replaced many of my U.S. examples.) He hopes this will be the beginning of an active email list that can support more robust networking among these institutions.

Mr. Tan also has the vision that certain sets of the slides, or a booklet version of them, could be published on Academia.edu, where many Vietnamese scholars turn for unpublished material in Vietnamese. He would also like to create a website to host a broad array of social work materials and out-of-print Vietnamese publications on related topics.

DLU faculty continue to engage me in the process of developmental editing of their articles or presentations. I have also offered to arrange English translation and submission of their articles to English-language international journals. We have two fully completed articles in the queue at this time. The first is an article by Mr. Tan, Mrs. Hien, Mrs. Phuong and I in which we share our (often contrary!) reflections on our work together.

Lastly, another very meaningful part of my time in Dalat was my experience struggling to learn the Vietnamese language. It was a challenge for me to defy the odds (or a tired stereotype about the older brain) and learn a new language at the age of 69. Vietnamese is an intriguing and beautiful language with its melodious flat tones, its new sounds that my throat had to learn to make, and its softer and more fluid use of the mouth. I love the logic of the language and its imaginative compound nouns! Attempting to learn this language was a distinct pleasure *and* a workout! Maybe most important of all, learning the sounds of the Vietnamese language forced me to listen — to listen closely to my colleagues' spoken and unspoken communications.

I believe my struggles learning Vietnamese "leveled the field" in my relationships with my Vietnamese colleagues and students, who in recent years have been pressured by the central government to immediately acquire facility in English. English can be a difficult language to learn because it, too, requires the production of new sounds, new forms of emphasis rather than tones, bewildering pronunciation rules, etc., etc. My colleagues and I were able to laugh at ourselves as we took more risks in our new languages.

I think that for all of us at DLU's social work department, our semester together provided us with an experience of being part of an international professional community with an important mission: to extend the reach of social work values so dear to us and to extend the understanding and acceptance of our knowledge and skills. Social work means more to many of us than a profession: it is a vocation. We had this in common from the beginning, and by the end of the semester, we had so many shared experiences of enrichment together, as well.

"Vietnamese is an intriguing and beautiful language with its melodious flat tones, its new sounds that my throat had to learn to make, and its softer and more fluid use of the mouth."

My IMTL Project to the Rescue: Virtual Study Group Ahead of the Emergency

Diane Perilli, Manhattan

I had no idea that March 2, 2020, would be my last day in my Manhattan office. Because of the lengthy and costly commute to New York City, I was already teaching my independent studies and mentoring a fair amount from home. Therefore, with the resources I had in place, I was comfortable with the thought of working at home full time. However, the emergent need to move my weekly Monday night, two-hour study group to distance learning became my focus. Little did I know that the Institute on Mentoring, Teaching and Learning (IMTL) project I had worked on with Lead Educational Technologist Carolina Kim de Salamanca (currently interim assistant director of educational technologies) at the IMTL residency in June 2017 would come to my aid. My goal for that project was to enrich my collegewide independent study in Introductory Accounting I with the use of technology. Through this collaboration, I began holding synchronous group meetings with my independent study students, which we now call Virtual Study Groups. As a result, needing to quickly move my study group from 325 Hudson Street to a virtual format was manageable. Having the experience and a system in place, it was a smooth transition.

One of the key aspects of our IMTL collaboration was creating opportunities to enhance the students' experiences and embedding a strategic technical support plan that would cater to the flexible nature of independent studies. Specifically, my goals were to deliver instruction and clarify the foundational course material in real time, providing an opportunity for students to connect with me and each other. An additional goal was to limit repetitive instruction: I wanted to reach the independent study students as a group, thus reducing the need to explain foundational concepts to each individual student. This was accomplished through scheduled group meetings via Skype for Business, the technology that was supported by SUNY Empire State College at that time. The virtual meetings followed the same format as my face-to-face study group meetings. In our synchronous online group meetings, I would discuss and explain the topics and then we would solve problems together while I shared my screen. We would "go around the room" taking turns as we worked through the problems. I have been holding these synchronous online group meetings for the past six fall and spring terms. This model allowed me to effectively enrich the students' independent studies, strengthen their learning, expand their course engagement, and increase student connectedness to me, each other, and to the college. Moreover, my hope was that the students who had this experience with the synchronous group meetings had a smoother and less stressful transition to learning in a virtual environment when the pandemic hit.

Preparedness for Virtual Study Group Meetings From Home

In communicating with my study group students about the switch from face-to-face to virtual in the midst of the spring term, I was already prepared with an email that I had used for my independent study students. The email contained detailed information about the virtual format and included the link to Microsoft Office 365 for students who didn't have Skype for Business. I also attached a job aid: an informational sheet Carolina developed that explained how to use Skype for Business, and additional resources on how to get more help, if needed.

Diane Perilli

I regularly use the smart TV in the study group room in our Manhattan office to display PowerPoint slides and accounting problems. Therefore, all of my course materials are maintained in digital formats. I've learned to save all of my work on OneDrive cloud storage and a portable flash drive. Having the experience of teaching groups of students virtually and having my course materials digitally and accessible through OneDrive, I didn't skip a beat.

Leveraging Synchronous and Asynchronous Technology

One of the benefits of the flexibility and technical support provided by SUNY Empire is that not only do I teach an asynchronous group with synchronous components, as discussed, but I also teach a synchronous group with asynchronous components. Because, as earlier mentioned, the study group room I use at 325 Hudson Street has

a smart TV, I record my study group meetings via Kaltura CaptureSpace Desktop Recorder for students to view later. This requires me to have all material in a digital format, including materials that we use in real time so that they can be displayed on the TV screen and hence, be included in the recordings. (Work done on the whiteboard in the room is not be shown in the recording.)

Synchronous time together, whether face-to-face or virtual, creates a space for the students to be a little social with each other and with me, adding a layer of familiarity and comfort that is helpful in teaching accounting. Using this form, I am able to model the engagement that I'd like to see: dynamic learning and organic conversations. With the competing priorities of adult students, there is no question that asynchronous components are invaluable. Asynchronous tools offer independence and flexibility; students can work at their own convenience and review material when needed and, importantly, as often as needed.

The Power of a Learning Management System

I use our current learning management system (Moodle) for my face-to-face study groups to help organize the students, the course, and myself! For every meeting, I post the concepts that were discussed, which problems we completed together, and the homework assignment. I also post resources, such as recordings of our study group meetings, worksheets, and the problems' solutions. This use of Moodle to supplement the study group allows for coordination between the students and me, and reduces misinformation. Also, sending out announcements through Moodle allows for streamlined communication to the students via an email that is automatically generated through the Moodle "announcement" feature.

"The Bottom Line"

The experience I gained by implementing my IMTL project to enrich my independent studies, together with organizing my course materials in digital form and using the Moodle platform for disseminating information, provided a smooth transition under this otherwise stressful crisis. Nonetheless, the change in group dynamics from in-person to virtual is noteworthy. Many of my spring 2020 students had been in my fall study group; therefore, they were familiar with each other when the new term began. We already had a comfortable and friendly face-to-face environment. Once we moved to virtual, however, the exchange among the students shifted. Even though I used the same format to which they were accustomed as well as the same materials, the students were quiet and seemed a bit apprehensive. That is, while it was an easy transition for me, it wasn't so easy for the students. This experience contrasts with the synchronous virtual group meetings I was holding all along with my independent study students. These students only knew the virtual group dynamic; they had established connections with me and with each other in that mode. Now, as I prepare to teach my future virtual study groups using MS Teams, I am optimistic that the students, now having had this experience, will adapt to the aspects of a remote environment from the start and that the learning community of those studying accounting will prosper.

Art and Activism at SUNY Empire State College

Menoukha Robin Case, Mentor Emerita, Saratoga Springs

Fall 2020 Sustainability Virtual Residency

According to Dr. Rhianna Rogers (n.d.), "Virtual Residencies (VRs) at SUNY Empire State College began as a partnership between [the college's] International Education [program] and the Buffalo Project.[1] The goal of VRs were to connect undergraduate, graduate, and international education courses via a three-week collaborative, cross-disciplinary online module" (What are International Education Virtual Residencies section, para. 1).

A VR designed by Dr. Linda Jones and Dr. Mark Abendroth for fall 2020 is underway as of this writing with the topic of Learning for a Sustainable Future. It began with "… two weeks of constructing a problem with social, political, and economic elements. The third week will highlight cases in which groups of people ranging from local communities to international organizations have made important progress toward solutions. A highlight of this exchange will be an international panel of speakers discussing the topic of sustainability in a synchronous session, which will be recorded and reused as an Open Educational Resource … [and help meet] the goal of ESC's Sustainability Committee to include students in its academic and community projects. … Our theoretical scope … [is] intentionally broad, drawing from the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and the interdisciplinary concepts of environmental anti-racism, ecofeminism, and sustainability in political economy. Our hope is that … [this] will serve as an example of effective interdisciplinary instruction as educators across the world strive to foster informed action for sustainable development" (Rogers, Abendroth, & Jones, 2020). Additional VRs are planned for spring 2021, including Anti-Racism, and Year of Faith, Spirituality and World Religions.

Context

Sustainability wholly involves us, body, heart, mind, and spirit. We can consider sustainability as a lens that reveals how every aspect of life — how we think, feel, and act — affects our long-term relationships with each other. "Each other" includes all that is physically part of this Earth: air, water, soil, plants, animals (including humans) — all that we as beings create, destroy, create — and those intangibles that existed before and/or persist beyond our lives and creations: ideas, beliefs, Spirit — as co-created threads that weave past, present, future into the seamed and patchworked, or, perhaps, the seamless unity of Life.

We humans approach sustainability via sciences, social sciences, economics, health, politics, and many other ways of parsing human endeavor. Multiple approaches best reflect Natural Laws such as bio-diversity: We need diverse perspectives, concepts, beliefs, and ideas, often found in cultural diversity. For example, IK (Indigenous Knowledge) has slowly been coming to the forefront of popular consciousness; it has always been at the forefront of ecological protection, such as the Standing Rock Water Protectors.[2] Diverse approaches to relating our perspectives are also key to sustainability.

That's where Arts come in. Arts are stories — visual, verbal, and so on — designed to reach across differences to touch our hearts, minds, and spirits. They have always worked because of our innate bio-wiring:

Photo provided by the author.

Menoukha Robin Case

> According to recent science, the desire for fairness is biological. Primatologist Frans de Waal studied how some animals empathize with one another, cooperate to achieve goals, and value reciprocity and fairness. They even protest when witnessing inequity that doesn't affect them directly, as did Capuchin monkeys who refused their favorite food, grapes, when their partners were given bland cucumbers. Evolution was once thought to be driven by competition (survival of the fittest), but scientists now understand cooperation is the key drive. Humans, like other animals, respond to caring. Our compassion-based biology floods the body with chemicals that offer a sense of well-being. It seems reasonable, then, that humans are driven more by reciprocity (fairness), empathy (compassion), and cooperation (sharing) than violence, threats, and conflict. (Case & Craig, 2019, pp. 3–4)

We also have innate bio-wiring to deal with fear, the well-known fight/flight/freeze mechanism. It is meant for

emergencies, not a way of life. Whereas originally Arts worked to heal and harmonize communities, they have been hijacked in the service of fear, [such as crafting advertisements]. When fear becomes a cultural norm, it leads to self-destructive, unquenchable greed: Anishinaabe stories tell of Wiindigo, a cannibal who's never satisfied: the more s/he eats, the more s/he wants. S/he's so hungry that s/he chews her/his own lips, and her/his face drips with blood. Advertisements are based on the notion that whatever we are or have is not good enough: We need to buy this or that product. People can become so consumed with fear that they bleed themselves dry with credit card debt. Some leaders bleed us dry, and some industries bleed the Earth dry. There's a direct link-up between misuse of art, consumerism, and challenges to sustainability such as poverty, pollution, and climate change.

Artists in many mediums, including the written art of the storyteller, are reclaiming art to address sustainability issues. Speculative fiction in particular offers "what if" scenarios that unfold our current conditions and decisions into possible futures.

Some stellar prescient novels that have already partly "come true": N.K. Jemisin's The Broken Earth Trilogy; Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead;* Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale;* Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower;* Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon;* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time.* These authors are among a host of writers who unfurled the what-is into the what's-gonna-be-if-we-don't-change-it-up. All took an artifact of what-is and extended it to what-if; Butler (1991) especially was a self-proclaimed news junkie.

To spark imaginations, we begin with an excerpt from a futuristic story I've written for the residency of how today's problems might unfold if left unattended. The following selections from/notes for my novel in progress descend from that genre.

2081: Sar and Stone Baby

It was a time of coastal and mid-continental floods, of waters released from over a century of melting ice: Tsunamis roared as Mother Ocean rose, her vomiting revolt layering a barrage of trash back on the shores where it came from. Rivers and streams stretched long hands to touch their sisters' fingertips for comfort. They trickled when it was all they could do and then they too roared, flooding banks as they were able in the rush of their joint journey.

It was a time of primordial diseases, released from that melted ice.

It was a time of inland droughts and shriveled crops, of free-flaming forest fires and stinking smoke from city fires, of disappointing too-brief rains that slid dry dust down scorched-bare mountain backs, of tender winds that swirled the rain and dust together into sheets of mud that buried settlements in their roiling brown paths.

But it is also the year Stone Baby came home to Sar. They stood shoulder to shoulder in the mud on the edge of a stand of teenage trees.

2079: Sar

"Sar run jus fas" they'd told her and she had, tire-clad feet skimming potholes until she reached a spindly choke of growth that had sprung up after The Cutting of the Last Old Ones in 2064. 2064, the year she'd been born, had never been silent, always the whine, roar, crashes in guttural syncopation of trees downed, sawed, limbed, split, hauled over broken ground. People told how oily smoke had drenched their bodies all that year.

During The Cutting, Jusbar and Nadejet stole away through seedlings scattered among stumps. Hopeful and heartened by the sight of tiny green hands bright in gray air, they conceived a child against the noise. Rolling over carefully, they had stayed on bare ground so the tree babies could continue to grow along with the daughter they'd dreamed. Once she was conceived, they tenderly caressed the new shoots with sated fingertips: "The trees are still here!" They only spoke this way when they were alone. In town, "still here" would be coded as "sar." This is how they agreed to name their child.

By 2079, the trees, like Sar, were gangly, thin fingers and toes entangled, glad for company yet straining for space. Just like her people in the hovel-towns. Only she broke free, run jus fas. The deeper they entwine their roots, the further she runs, till she is at the heart of their deep communion.

Now Sar lets her arms hang loose, dangles her fingers, splays her toes. Her pupils widen until all she sees is space, lean and dark like her, there between her namesakes, space she can flow through with elongated attenuation. By giving up her shape she's bound to sustain her survivor lineage: Jusbar: Just Barely; Nadejet: Not Dead Yet; Sar: Still Here.

Peering from where they'd tracked her, the pale men could only see young trees in the dusk, narrow 15-year-olds pushing sparse-leafed branches upward against the mutual web of their own darkening canopy. They heard an Owl, then another, then the whole damn parliament conferring over what they knew could only be that runaway's presence. "They got her." They scowled at the trees, turned on their heels toward Lecric Town, concluded "Jusbar and Nadejet will pay."

2017–2081: The Raptures

The Raptures was an American group that had recruited a cadre of financiers from among the One-Percenters. They believed themselves to be holy. It was a sunbaked and cheerful belief like the dry side of a raft floating on water-logged rotting timbers of doubt. Incapable of perceiving paradox or irony, they had,

since inception, denied the very doubt that floated their boat while expressing it through intensive surveillance of any subversives who challenged their blessedness. Scanning inside and out, they happened upon Stone Baby[3] in 2032. Ultimately, their fanciful construction of Stone Baby was what bolstered their sense of sanctity.

By 2032, they had remade America as New Governance, Inc. (NGI). Again, they were incapable of perceiving the irony they spewed. Astoundingly, ignoring that one author was Canadian, another Black, and all women, NGI was modeled on banned books that had warned against its very existence. They called their revision of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* "America's Handbook," and organized a hierarchy according to its pages. Slaves were fitted with electric shock collars, an idea sourced from Butler's *Parable of the Talents.* Since they modeled poverty on history, there was never a shortage of slaves: Industry-slave, sex-slave, house-slave, farm-slave, or road-slave was the fate of those like Jusbar and Nadejet whose generations had been systematically robbed of prosperity since 1619. As in "Parable," as the Raptures called it, NGI's goal was an elitist escape from an Earth already ruined by centuries of people emotionally and politically deployed in a war against Her.

They had the Greed Disease that Anishinaabeg called Wiindigo; had had it so long and bone-deep that they thought it was healthy. They believed Stone Baby's discovery meant the time to get off Earth was nigh. They believed the Lord was the One who had helped them help themselves to the belongings of true and nonbelievers alike; to NGI "criminals"; to the vitality of slaves. Their starship was ready and their roster was in place. Along with One-Percenters, a few Wealthy-White-Wannabes were welcomed aboard. They did not welcome people whose skin was any shade of Brown, slaves of any color, or those of any other religion. They clung to their rapturous sweet-spot, called Christofascism[4] by news articles back in the day. Most people should be left behind, they agreed, to die with the planet that had spawned them. Yes, they were celebrating Greed, and the sicker they got, the more they rejoiced.

Since each and every person who made it onto the Father Ship wanted to believe he was crème de la crème, they instituted a new version of the hierarchy they were addicted to, devising a class system all would-be travelers had to accept. Since everyone was white, the initial divisions were according to gender and age. Everyone with a penis was considered a boy or man; everyone with a vagina was considered a girl or woman. Intersex infants were killed at birth. Infants were tenderly coddled by their mothers for three years. Between ages three and 15, all attended school together, learning rules of good citizenship (mainly consisting of a complicated web of behaviors that maintained hierarchy), as well as basic information and skills. During this period, One-Percenters with identified talents had tutors. Between 15 and 20 all of them in the group, including the One-Percenters, were housed in a section of the starship known as the Workhouse. Modeled on "America's Handbook," it consisted of dimly lit quarters furnished with bunks and communal bathrooms. There, these youngsters joined older Workhouse residents whose presence spurred them to excel and rejoin domicile quarters.

There was Education from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., and Apprenticeship from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. One-Percenters were assigned according to their talents, while Wannabe boys assisted their fathers at their jobs. They could work before and after hours to acquire more amenities for their families, and most did. Families with more than one boy often sent their sons to relatives who only had daughters. All daughters including One-Percenters assisted their mothers, training for marriage.

Education after twenty was a privilege reserved for the top tier of graduates who became the next generation of One-Percenters. These were mostly already One-Percenter boys since Wannabe boys had lacked tutors and were too busy to study much. The same was true of all girls — they'd been kept busy according to class, either with diapers, pots, and pans, or hosting, décor, and household management. Theoretically, anyone could become a One-Percenter, and, with the right alliances and sharp managerial skills, a One-Percent-Head. But not The Head; that role was passed directly from one man to the next.

At age 20, most men moved into service roles in municipal systems such as water, sewage, or policing. Those who had scored just short of the top were trained for support positions in governance or populace surveillance. A handful of top-tier boys and the occasional exceptional girl were sequestered to study physics, engineering, psychology.

Laws specific to females included:

1. All women are to be married to a man of their age or an elder who has lost his wife. Elders have preference in choosing wives among those to turn 20 in any given year. A joint marriage ceremony is to be held on the first day of the year for all women who are to turn 20 that year. Those privileged with further study are not exempt.
2. Women who remain barren after five years of marriage and women whose husbands predecease them are to be returned to the Workhouse regardless of skills or status.

Top-tiers who survived these requirements became the next generation of One-Percent-Techies who generated inventions and systems and answered directly to the One-Percent-Heads; such were those who surveilled

Stone Baby. Everyone retired at 45, but aside from One-Percenters, few ever saw that age.

Way back in 2017, long before all of that, Joy was born to one of the most elite One-Percenter families. As they scanned her, they were shocked to discover a twin in a semi-calcified shell folded deep in her tiny baby womb.[5] When they discovered Stone Baby Jesus, as they named the fetus, they shouted Hallelujah. Since Joy's infant womb contained an infant and she had not conceived through sexual congress, she was pronounced Virgin Mother of the Second Coming. Through well-managed surveillance, Stone Baby made proclamations from its Uterine Throne, where it ruled without exposure to the risk of crucifixion. As Jesus had saved them, so they would save Stone Baby Jesus.

As Joy's puberty progressed, her tenderly growing flesh pressed painfully against the unyielding shell that protected the fetus, who also kicked and punched to protest confinement. Praise the pain, Joy: You are blessed to carry Stone Baby. Each kick is a revelation. Literally: Revelation 14: All women are to be married to a man of their age or an elder who has lost his wife; Revelation 15: Elders have preference in choosing their wives among those to turn 20 in any given year. And so on.

Joy denounced them: Your so-called revelations are wacked! Quit spying on an infant that has no opinions and can never answer back! She tried to remove the surveillance devices. They repaired them. She tried again. They restrained her. She cursed and spat at them from her prone position, buckled down, and laced tight with probes.

In 2037, when Joy was 20, the Raptures fulfilled the prophecy of the "Parable," leaving Earth behind. They took Joy along despite her troublesome tongue. They couldn't bear to part with Stone Baby. They loved tracking its tiny heartbeat, deciphering its neurological activity, were awed by its chemical flux, and gushed over its electronic registrations. Exegesis of these processes spun out as did proclamations about nature/nurture, God/Devil, and everything in between. Stone Baby never failed to pronounce politically astute Revelations. For example, starting in 2077, The Raptures niftily Columbused Earth. Stone Baby, they said, had led them there and proclaimed it as their very own God-given home. The science books described it as an uninhabited planet with all the resources they would need once its toxins dispersed. Stone Baby had told them to wait for it to become habitable.

2037–2084: Lecric Town

The Raptures had left in 2037 because NGI had finally declared Earth officially ruined. There might've been pockets of clean air in places nobody wanted to live; if there was clean water that hadn't been siphoned into Rapture hoards, no machine could get near it. But all over Earth, there were remote places where a person could survive, and Lecric Town, founded near the headwaters of the Mississippi in 2039, was one of them. Fog that hung heavy west of what had once been the Great Lakes filtered the air, and there were minuscule clean springs and sloughs.

By 2044, Lecric Town's broke-down buildings full of bickering people had coalesced into factions that were entrenched by 2052.

There were the Progressives, a group that ran infirmaries, maintained windmills, planted community gardens; and their opponents, the New Raptures, who believed they had been accidentally left behind and were intent on following the Raptures to the stars.

Both sides fought for what they truly believed they needed: electricity. Both were running out of metals, wires, grease, of all the mined and manufactured substances that they understood as crucial to that need. But even when they fought for and hoarded barrels of used oil and spools of patched-together wire, they had no idea how to use them. Since 2021, all information had been stored in The Cloud, as they called it, but no one knew how to reach it. Both groups believed The Cloud was still up there, though they differed about its substance and potential methods for access. Progressives wanted to rebuild computers; New Raptures wanted to build a starship. Seeking bygone knowledge and new ideas, both journeyed to defunct universities where skirmishes over the slim archives of archaic rotting books left library aisles bloody.

There were other groups, too, unnamed and arcane. Sometimes they slipped a new book into the library. Although slaves were forbidden books, Nadejet had secretly taught Sar to read. Her enslaver had brought home one of those new books, a slim publication called *Heart of the Ancestors,* thinking he'd find lost knowledge; after a few paragraphs, he threw it in the trash. After Nadejet read it, she thoughtfully tucked it into Sar's "runny-sack," a useful term provided by one of her grandmother's favorite authors.[6] She was sure that Sar would meet the people described in the book.

2082: Story Time

On winter nights, Sar and Stone Baby took turns telling stories. Sar read parts of *Heart of the Ancestors* out loud.

Cabin: 2021–2052

… Seven of us human beings live in a small cabin on a pond where Robin used to squat. Kids, bugs, grandkids, dogs, nieces, cats, nephews, mice, and cousins come and go between the cabin and neighboring lodges.

We'd moved here in 2021 when the laws of physics had melted down like Robin said they would. In some ways, we were able to work the fluidity: We learned to bend light so the cabin with all of us in it went invisible. Eventually, no one from

Bartleby entered the woods anymore; those who had made it back to town told the others how they'd starved with full bellies, shivered in the heat, lost their own selves in broad daylight … confusions we'd learned how to spin, shaking our heads at the necessity. We did try sharing first, salving their soreness, and feeding them — Why do you think their bellies were full? But they just couldn't make the change. Whatever they saw, they wanted to own, not out of need but from fear.

In some ways, we stayed stuck in old habits, too. We got tired, stubborn, or even just plain liked some dying ways — food, for instance. We like to eat, and for a season or two, we still thought of food as something you grow, dig, pick, or catch, then cook up and put in your bowl. And then, too, when we first got here, the land didn't remember Robin, never knew the rest of us. Before we learned to listen, to talk, to respectfully cooperate with the plants and animals here, we'd almost starved: nearly decimated the butternuts by harvesting in their off-year; gotten thin and weak on needle soup from a sole pine too early in sorrow to give; gotten nauseated on polluted water. We went back to town looking for an easier way, where some of us were ravaged helpless with anger, with rapes, beatings, with murders escaped but witnessed.

At first, people had wandered far and wide for food. It was hard; areas that'd been clear-cut had grown back so tight and thick with short, thin trees that even though most of the animals are much smaller now, too, they'd mostly moved down what used to be the road to more spacious forests that used to be landscaping around houses that had caved in on their own weighty grandeur. Waabanikwe showed those who survived how to put down *asemaa* and thin the saplings to build lodges near the creeks that flow into this pond. Animals came back to live among these neighbors — *waawaashkeshiwag* with their flag tails and antlers, *mishi-bizhiwag* with their unearthly mating screams, burly strong-smelling *makwag* — all of them.

The dense, spindly backwoods around the pond are too tight even for those small deer and bears, but we're finally home, brought the place to peace after long hard years. *Gijigaaneshiinzhag* sun on the bridge, sing chicka-dee-dee-dee. *Waaboozoog* flash their cottontails as they scramble through the underbrush. We're upstream from *amikwag,* beavers Robin told me had once left in despair: Their cattails are growing strong, their lodge is alive with *amikoonsag.* As family, we eat a share of those cattails, too. *Mikinaakwag,* snapper turtles, insist that since they'd never abused the law, they have no reason to change, and they keep growing in the old way. They're enormous now, ancient. They remind us that beneath all the changes, history lives: The Aazhoomog Crossroads Anishinaabeg lived here before the great migration to the Great Lakes, and the land itself is a crossroads where old and new met eons ago, shale and iron deposits to one hand; granite, sand, and deep-buried African *migiis* shells to the other.

Robin's always liked the marshy pond and underbrush, and Waabanikwe says it reminds her of the sloughs back home. We eat more fish and rabbit than deer. Robin tells us time to time about one day back in the 20th when *makwa* had broken down the cabin door, tore up the cupboard, and got honey all over her hungry black snout. We have an agreement with the bears, and Ernesto brings one home from time to time. The women tan the hide and render the fat the way Sandy taught Waabanikwe back in Minnesota. They make medicine with it and it heals us. Is it a great life, or what?

Underbrush: 2023–2028

I don't know. Because back in Bartleby, or what's left of it, well, that's another story: broken-down buildings full of bickering people who call each other squatter; they're all still trying to take ownership, can't seem to get the hang of sharing. They're still trying to "make things work" according to a set of laws that seemed to apply for the slimmest skim off the skin of our recent history. Some of the people who live there are my cousins. When I left, they were in factions, split against each other, and from what I hear, nothing's changed.

Wilfredo's a Progressive — he's one of my father's cousins and they call him Juice Director — is in charge of keeping the windmills going because everyone truly believes they need electricity, and men like Fredo who love their people will go to any lengths to provide it. It's a tall order because they're running out of mined and manufactured substances of every kind: wires, metals, but most especially, grease to keep the wheels spinning.

On the other side, there's my aunt's second cousin, Tom: Some people call him *Gran Jefe,* Big Boss Man, which is funny because before it all came down, he couldn't hold a job. Basically, he can't stand anyone telling him what to do. Well, I never liked it either way — being told, or telling — but I do like working with people, so I've learned to listen. Tom, on the other hand, does not have "with" in his vocabulary: he likes working people, period. He's a bully, one of those old-school men who can only feel good about himself by feeling better than somebody else, which means getting them to do things for him.

Both sides are into mastery, each in its own way: Fredo's side is trying to "master" nature into a tame paradise, while each person on Tom's side works to "master" all the other people because they believe that's natural: survival of the fittest, nature red in tooth and claw. So, you have the Fredos hovering around their idealization of nature, the Toms living out their vicious idea of nature, and they endlessly clash. Regardless, they both do want grease for the machinery. After we left for the second time, the factions got together

and tried to steal or beat our bear fat out of us. I already told you what happened to them.

It's a living hell, either way you slice it.

Why steal our fat? Why not hunt bears? Hah — they've never seen any bears, and some don't even believe in them anymore; they think they're mythical creatures. But it's simple: They've never called the bears by name. They've never asked, and the bears never gave permission. Things no longer answer or even appear unless they're respected. As to the healing fat we're graced with: Robin did ask, and she got her answer.

The sun was setting and we could smell the soup Jodie and Ernesto were cooking.

That's the way it was, or the way it will happen, or the way Robin told it to me. Or maybe I died in that fire and I'm dreaming this. Maybe Dennis is alive, Robin never died of old age, and she's sitting with him and they're dreaming me. Maybe that old pine and all her children are dreaming you hearing me tell you all this, and it is all yet to come. Maybe we all dream together. If you're hearing this, part of what happens is up to you.

"That's the way it was, or the way it will happen, or the way Robin told it to me. Or maybe I died in that fire and I'm dreaming this."

When Sar finished, she looked at each person in turn, silently asking them to consider the book's final challenge. Then she explained that the book she'd just read had made it to Lakes University library from the East. It was written long ago but everything had played out just like it said. Both sides of Lecric Town were heavily infected with the continually mutating Greed Disease, and their clash could have been endless. But by 2064, when Sar was born to Jusbar and Nadejet, New Raptures had enslaved or driven everyone else from Lecric Town. Sar was born into slavery, and those Progressives who had escaped were hampered by the need to keep their towns veiled, "like "Robin's cabin," she added.

This dynamic was replicated elsewhere on the continent, in each locale according to mutation. Some, with more fuel and technology than Lecric Town, were close to completing starships, and some Progressive towns had booted up computers, hooking them to crumbling dams and otherwise working to reinstitute the workings of the Age of Greed, as we call it, that slim skin on the body of history that lasted a seemingly interminable 7,000 years or so.

I say "we" because there was a third group on Earth: The People. After a half-century of struggle, in the spring of 2084, masses of us, following stories from another banned book by Leslie Marmon Silko called *Almanac of the Dead,* demolished the last hydroelectric dams, imploded nascent electronic communications, incapacitated machinery, terminated every intrusion and surveillance that had plagued our Mother Earth. One woman had even been able to "[develop] a protovirus to subvert all emergency switching programs in the computers of regional power-relay stations" (p. 730) so that utter liberation was accomplished in just one day. We welcomed anyone who felt relief at liberation, willingly teaching them the skills and kindness necessary to a Good Life. But not everyone appreciated our generosity, much as they hadn't half a millennium ago. We didn't repeat the unfolding of those times. Any attempt to stem the tide of freedom was crushed by the Army of the Homeless.

2040–2069: Stone Baby

Helplessly orbiting in the Raptures' ship, Joy was married in 2040 and required to become, like every other wife: *a* mother, not *the* Mother. Her lawsuit to liberate Stone Baby began in 2041. Though she hadn't conceived the child, removing it from her womb was still considered abortion which had been outlawed in 2021. Her first suit failed and that sacrosanct law remained unbroken.

But she eventually got her wish. In 2044, Joy was impregnated as required of all females between 20 and 30 per "America's Handbook." Her twin gushed out of her body in the birth throes, destroying Joy's baby in the process. She had one year left to conceive again.

The twin stayed in cryogenic limbo while its case continued to move through the courts. Technology to fully vivify it did exist, and motions for and against swung through the years. Concern was the tangled multidirectional web of surveillance between child and host. Joy had kept a constant inner eye on the enfolded infant, and the child had observed every second of Joy's life even while being surveilled. Such recursion was illegal; it clearly undermines hierarchy. Joy's lawyers argued that the traumatic shift from waters of the womb to air erases prenatal memory; that much more so, then, from water to ice to air. Permission to vivify was granted in 2064 when an uncommon spate of conscience temporarily struck the Judge, her own grandfather, on the occasion of Joy's death.

Upon vivification, Stone Baby was stripped of her sacred status, title, and her name. She was renamed Elation. Accompanying adjudication decreed that all records of the Second Coming, mental and otherwise, be utterly wiped. Well versed in historical erasure, the Raptures found it easy, since all information was internally linked via bio-kenners,[7] a technology they had lifted from yet another banned book published way back in 1976.

Elation unfolded from her calcified confines with the same ease as did that murder of extinct Hawaiian crows whose DNA had been discovered in a mosquito fossilized in Mauna Loa lava when they were finally vivified in 2024.[8] This first successful vivification had been the last on Earth; the Raptures left shortly after they jubilantly blackened the skies.

Elation was fostered by Joy's sibling, Serenity. Since Serenity couldn't have children, she doted on the baby who saved her from the Workhouse. Serenity never required Elation to help with housewife tasks. Elation excelled at studies and became a One-Percent-Head.

There was something strange about her: As a child, she had once asked to walk on Earth. Serenity ignored this because it would mean the lawyers had been wrong; that Joy's experiences were available to her twin. That's the only way she could have come to that desire: no one spoke of Earth yet; Elation had never been there; images of Earth were not widely available. Stopped by the terror in Serenity's eyes, Elation never asked again. She later understood the litigation that had preceded her birth.

As a One-Percent-Head, Elation understands that no one can ever know that she secretly carries 27 years of Joy's memories, 20 of those on Earth. That she wakes daily longing to feel the scent of flower-strewn breezes between bare toes. That she dreams of breeze-sweetened feet and a dear friend whispering in her ear, feels her toes curl at the words and sees shiny mud oozing between them, sloshing to cover her ankles. She wants this desperately, even while knowing every single thing that makes it impossible.

Since contention over surveillance had birthed her, Elation makes its techniques her specialty; that, and interstellar transportation. No one knows her hidden desire. No one knows about Elation's hidden cache of spare parts. They are relegated to daydreams, occupying liminal moments between sleep and work.

It's 2079, and she has five years left before marriage. As a master of surveillance, she's an expert at veiling what's she's building.

2079: Song

Sar glided through the thicket that obliterated the sky, body curving this way and that with the elegance of an otter. She knew she wasn't the first to escape Lecric Town, but not one whisper had ever come back. There was no quilted map, no star to guide her, no direction home; only the song from dreams. It was Nadejet who received the song, prompting her to send her only surviving child into the wilderness:

> Run jus fas, Run jus fas
> Owl gan help if ya run jus fas.
> Hang n dangle, splay n flow
> Dar gan show ya war ta go.

No one knew whether Deer existed anymore. No one knew what Owl looked like, but everyone heard them hooting in the woods. Inspired by the book she'd retrieved from the trash, it had been the entirety of Nadejet's plan: Since there are Owls, there must be Deer, so go to the woods, Sar, n run jus fas.

Once in the woods, Sar followed the Owls' calls until her strength wore out. Tired, she fell down and slept. When she awakened, she ran some more. It was days, maybe weeks before the Owls stopped hooting. She heard a sound like a creaky door and froze in fear that she had somehow circled back toward Lecric Town. Scanning the woods, "N … no doors here," she calmed herself. The sound circled her slowly then moved north, and repeated insistently. "Doors don move," she encouraged herself. With fear allayed, she was left with curiosity. As she followed the intermittent creaks, the trees thinned out. Sky showed above sun-warmed ground. Unlike the thin, gray grass in Lecric Town, here was a lush tangle of long, warm greens with golden seed heads. That's where she saw it, head turned over its furred brown shoulder looking right at her. When it saw that she'd seen, it made the creaky sound again, lowering its head to chew on the juicy grass. A little one just like it bounded over and butted the bigger one's belly. "She nursin, thas she!" It must be.

"Dar," she called gently.

No response.

"Deer," she tried.

No response.

"Waawaashkeshi," a human voice said.

Sar wanted to jump backward but was lulled by the softness of the word. She turned toward the voice. It came from a woman who was older than anyone she'd ever seen.

"Waawaashkeshi," the Old One said. "Call them by the name they told us. Waawaashkeshi."

"Waawaashkeshi," Sar repeated.

The deer lifted her head and blinked and the woman's smile grew wide. Sun dappling through branches shone off her teeth and the soft curves of flesh around her mouth webbed with wrinkles. She pulled something from a bag slung across her chest and hanging at her hip, and reached toward Sar.

"Gibakade ina, n'daanis. Are you hungry, my daughter?"

Sar didn't have to be asked twice. The woman squatted at the base of a tree, watching her eat.

Between bites, Sar asked, "War ya? They mar?" The woman looked puzzled.

"Oh, OK. I speak two languages, and I'll learn a third: waawaashkeshi, dar, deer," Sar smiled. "But you … you don't speak Code?"

"Code?"

"We speak English perfectly, but they don't know. They think they understand us, but they don't. We speak Code. Like my name, Sar, means Still Here. My Mom, Nadejet, Not Dead Yet. This says we're from a line of Survivors. War ya, they think that's where are you; they think we're that stupid, we don't see you right before our eyes. It means where are your people hidden … they mar, are there more of you, and when you answer, you code in how many, your situation, your resources. Within a few words, we both know how we can help each other. You're Brown, I thought you'd know Code for sure. How do you get along without it? Are you … did you … are you the one who sent my mother the Owl and Deer Song?"

"Eyah, n'daanis, been singing since the Raptures left, and some of you hear me. They thought we'd all died. Many did, but in some of us, the Disease died instead. If you knew it was a disease, you had the will to heal. Others didn't, took up the whip, and built Lecric Town. Their dreams … build starships, invade Rapture colonies, have revenge. So is that ina where you come from."

"Yes'm. But there's not only those New Raptures, slavers who want to build starships as you say: there's also Progressives. And my folks, Black Greens."[9]

"Some of you are People by blood. Any who felt this ran when we couldn't stop The Cutting. So to your question: Many of us have been here all along, and some made their way through the trees like you. Help me up now n'daanis."

Sar took the woman's arm. They moved through widening spaces to gardens planted in open meadows between thicker and thicker trees until they came to a village.

2144: Sar and Stone Baby

It's winter, it's story time! They gather in the bright night of that last full moon before days begin to lengthen. Throughout the forest, soup is simmering on fires. People sit circled around them, listening to the crackling exclamations of Old Ones, waiting for storytellers to unfurl history.

Some will witness it for the first time; others, having heard it since they were children at one fire or another, never tire of this rippling stream of stories that, like the days after that moon, continue to lengthen, spinning out longer and longer each year.

They hunger for the story. They enjoy the luxury of this hunger since there's plenty of soup.

The story, like the spoons moving between mouths and bowl, will describe circles that dance together as spirals. It always begins with the dear Elder of each fire.

The Elder of this particular fire is Sar herself. The warmth of her brown face is so wrinkled that they can no longer tell when she's smiling, except that her eyes light up. At her side is Stone Baby, even more wrinkled but pale as the moon. Stone Baby no longer speaks, but she can still open her mouth for the soup a great-grandchild spoons with gentle patience.

As Sar looks upon her friend's moon face, she recalls the day Stone Baby spontaneously appeared at her side when she was tracking moose in the warm mud of a slough on a sunny fall day in 2081. Sar hadn't jumped backward or even blinked an eye. "Stay still and be quiet, sister," she'd whispered. She'd pointed her chin at the moose and her new friend had nodded. They'd been together ever since. And Stone Baby, she fit right in. The brainwashing they'd used on everyone aboard the Father Ship hadn't worked on her because she always recalls her mother/twin's memories of Earth. So when she decided to leave the ship where she had remained an insider/outsider, she'd come to Earth where she is an outsider/insider whose knowledge helps the People protect themselves from the ships. Some blinked above them, looking for all the world like stars, but the People knew, and they knew how to bend the light so they were invisible.

Secure in this knowledge, Stone Baby takes the time to savor each sip of soup. She is the last one to empty her bowl.

"Go on then, n'daanis," Sar says to the storyteller, "The impenetrably mysterious Greed Disease that every teller explains in a different way, each of them true! Humans split into far-flung branches! The surveillance of Stone Baby! Sar's escape! The Crimes, the Criminals, the Balance! 2084! And Restoration of the Original Instructions!"

They always start this way; next will come the pivotal moment for each fire's Elder as the telling begins from their own locale before winding its way back to the thread that connects them all. To hear what they impart, you'll have to sit at a fire yourself.

Notes

[1] The Buffalo Project's mission is "to develop action-based diversity initiatives that focus on utilizing participant observations of culture to inform solution-making efforts in college and community environments" (Rogers, n.d.).

[2] "… Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, U.S. … [is a hub of] the No Dakota Access Pipeline (#NODAPL), an ongoing … coalition of people from the U.S. and across the world … to stop the oil pipeline being constructed across sacred burial grounds and under the Missouri River against the express wishes of the Standing Rock Sioux. … At its peak, [encampment] estimates were as high as 10,000 people … [with] a continuous presence of protectors that lasted well over a year. … The originators clearly stated: we are not protestors, we are water protectors … [in] peaceful prayer,

but DAPL employees and police took a combative approach" (Case & Craig, 2019, p. 193).

[3] See Castillo (2013) for a story about a modern-day "stone baby" or lithopedion (calcified fetus).

[4] See an insider's view of Christofascism in Darkwater (2017).

[5] "Fetus-in-fetu" occurs in one out of every 500,000 births. See Gann (2012) for one story.

[6] N.K. Jemisin (2015), who coined the term "runny-sack" (disaster preparedness kit) in *The Fifth Season.*

[7] Bio-kenners, referred to in Piercy (1976), are personal computers worn on the wrist that link to all databases and information.

[8] See Main (2013) for an example of a fossilized mosquito.

[9] See Neal (2013) and ShareAmerica (2010) for videos on the Black Green movement in the early 21st century.

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Care in the Age of a Pandemic

Colleagues from the School of Nursing and Allied Health

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, first responders — doctors, EMTs, paramedics, nurses, and many others have been vital to responding to medical emergencies everywhere around us. Indeed, here at SUNY Empire State College, we have many students and colleagues who have been intimately connected and devoted to the care for those who have been ill.

So many questions have arisen: Can any caregiver really learn to prepare for this situation? How can our nursing and allied health students even begin to tackle the issues, the questions — the realities — they have had to confront? How can one communicate this incredible array of challenges?

We asked our colleagues in the School of Nursing and Allied Health to reflect on these kinds of questions. Thanks so much to those whose thoughts we include here.

Dianne White

Among the many challenges nurses have faced during the global pandemic is that of moral distress related to caring for dying patients whose loved ones are not allowed to visit. One former dialysis nurse, now working in the intensive care unit, became an integral part of the dying process for a former dialysis patient. Having an established rapport with the patient and family, the nurse created time to be with the patient, singing his favorite hymns, praying, and providing comfort during his final hours. Her presence brought the family great comfort as they were not allowed to visit, to say goodbye, or to be a part of the patient's passing.

As faculty in the School of Nursing and Allied Health, it is important to recognize the impact these circumstances can have on a nurse, and to offer support and guidance to facilitate moral resilience.

Lynn McNall

The role of the registered nurse is complicated and, coupled with the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the RN's responsibilities have grown to unimaginable proportions. They are now coordinating one of the biggest health care challenges that the nursing profession has ever encountered. Nurses have demonstrated how they unconditionally care, both physically and emotionally, for very seriously ill patients and their concerned families. Nurses are standing tirelessly at the side of their patients as they face their fears of dying alone, ensuring their patients are provided an opportunity to say their last goodbyes to their loved ones. An alarming realization occurred as the guidelines for safe patient care changed when it became apparent that there was an inadequate amount of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators available to meet the needs of the rapidly rising number of critically ill patients. As educators, it is our commitment to provide nurses with the tools needed for assessing and managing these challenges. As our students advance their broader nursing knowledge, they build their confidence and develop improved critical thinking skills and enhanced decision-making abilities. The nurses of tomorrow must be prepared to assume leadership positions and have a strong voice when crucial legislative decisions are needed to ensure that our country is poised and prepared for the next health care crisis that overwhelms our health care system.

Photo provided by the author.

Rebecca Hegel in her PPE.

Rebecca Hegel
Preparing in the Midst of a Pandemic ...

For those of you who work in healthcare, you can recall how volatile March, April, and May were for both the hospital and community. There was no way to prepare for the days that laid before us when death tolls were as much as *800-plus in one day in one region.* I am not simply referring to policies or procedures; rather, I am bringing to light the emotional devastation that blindsided each and every one of us.

So what have we learned in a time of mourning and rapid change? How do we stay connected when our very way of interaction has become broken? We are social distancing, wearing masks, and wearing gloves, but how do we best stay connected when so many societal restrictions are in place?

I believe that we embrace the ways that we can stay connected via our electronic devices. We have so many technological advances at our disposal that we can use for communicating with

one another. This is our time to create a new normal. While we may never be prepared for what lies ahead, we are certainly equipped to stay connected and engaged. *But mostly, we have learned the critical value of caring for each other.*

Norine Masella
Mentoring Health Professionals Through a Pandemic

I am a faculty member privileged to work with students who are registered nurses and allied health professionals. Like everyone else, back in March, I began to see dedicated health professionals on the news voicing challenges in obtaining knowledge and resources to care for patients and families, and it struck me that I have never seen this kind of situation before. Even now, as "the numbers" ebb and flow, I find myself seeking information that might help support current students, and also provide future students with the knowledge and skills needed to practice effectively during this pandemic. I try to remember that "the numbers" are people — loved ones, family members, and friends. The skills needed to care for our people include the ability to triage and work with limited resources. Unfortunately, grief management and even grief leadership are needed, since our health professionals are providing end-of-life care to patients and families who are unprepared and facing unexpected death. Additionally, specific self-care skills such as resiliency and advocacy are required. Knowing what services are available through our college student services, employee assistance services, and how to find resources to aid their practice from professional organizations so that they may continue their professional development are all important.

Talking with students, I became aware of the specific situations they were facing. For example, while some were working many extra hours, others were furloughed because patients were not going to more routine office appointments. Some of our students face illness and loss of loved ones and/or colleagues, and all suffer fear and anxiety related to the situation. Our students are working on the front lines while enrolled in courses needed to complete an educational degree. It goes without saying that support and flexibility for our students is a must. Lending an ear during a phone call to discuss options for completing courses, making them aware of support and resources, and encouraging them to advocate for themselves by letting others know what they need are some things I can provide.

I find myself looking to professional organizations to seek resources others have developed that might help, and then directing our students to those that are appropriate. Our students represent a variety of health professions, so organizations such as the American Nurses Association, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the American Association for Respiratory Care, and the American Dental Hygienists' Association have reliable information and quality resources. There are sections of their websites devoted to self-care and well-being, and some of my own students have utilized mental health resources from their professional organizations. These organizations also offer reliable information about novel coronavirus, including new knowledge as it is generated and recommendations based on the available science. Additionally, organizations have developed webinars and offer education, some with continuing education units (CEUs) to assist health professionals who need to maintain continuing education as a licensure requirement.

Even as time passes, and "the numbers" in New York state have improved, we face the challenges of providing knowledge and support for our students. As a mentor, encouraging them on their journey does help ensure their success and promotes a stronger health care system for all of us. We must remember that our current students are our future leaders.

Bridget Nettleton

Ironically, COVID-19 took over our lives in March 2020 while 2020 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the year of the nurse and midwife in honor of Florence Nightingale's 200th birthday. The principles of Nightingale were never more applicable than now including good hygiene, ventilation, and isolation as needed.

I had the wonderful opportunity in summer 2020 to serve as a preceptor (mentor) for an RN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree student completing her capstone experience. She had chosen a preceptor previously, but due to the pandemic, that experience was canceled and she wanted to finish her degree as soon as possible. The student was a mother with two adult daughters and a 2-year-old son. One of her daughters was home from college and this summer was her best opportunity to complete her capstone experience. She successfully completed her capstone and is now a graduate. Yeah!

The student described how her telemetry unit had been converted to a unit to care for COVID-19 patients. She said it was scary, not only for herself but for her family, but said "That's what we do — we are nurses." This unwavering commitment to her patients is a hallmark of nurses everywhere. Yes, 2020 is the year of the nurse and midwife, and nurses once again sprang into action when called. I am proud to be a nurse.

Jacqueline Michaels
Checking In Through My Virtual Door

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, our world was turned upside down. My heart ached for those on the front lines battling this unknown disease. I couldn't even begin to imagine this new world that nurses and first responders

I mentor, advise, and teach were living in. Several students reached out to me and shared their tremendous and unimaginable personal and professional challenges. I wondered, how does a mentor even begin to offer the support and guidance they need through these troubling times? I reflected on the years I spent working as a nurse and educator in the intensive care unit and emergency department. My everyday work-life-world was composed of instability, unpredictability, and uncertainty. Shadows of death and dying loomed in the background. I quickly learned how to listen for underlying meanings of questions and provide answers to questions people were afraid to ask. I found that no one ever really had exact answers to situations we faced regarding patients' clinical conditions, death, and dying. Most times there was not a simple answer for such situations. It was in this world of the intensive care unit and emergency department where I learned how to navigate the unknown and read between the lines of life.

I use these skills when mentoring, advising, and teaching students especially when they face challenges in balancing work-life-family responsibilities. I have always checked in with my students by sending messages and letting them know my virtual door is always open for support or guidance. As the pandemic unfolded, I kept the lines of communication open. I reached out more frequently to check in. I let my students know I understood their challenges and that I would be here if and when they needed to talk. The values of caring, compassion, and keeping in touch are needed ever so much more now during the pandemic. It is easy for one to feel isolated and overwhelmed. I found that "checking in" and "keeping my virtual door open" were two tools in my mentoring toolkit that helped me to keep students engaged in and complete coursework. These tools also helped students know I cared about them and was here to support them on their academic journey especially during these unprecedented times of COVID.

Lisa Schulte
Finding the Strength to Carry On: Reflections on Teaching During the COVID Crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has given all first responders a rare moment in global history. They are being recognized for the heroic work that they do on the front lines of the pandemic. The COVID-19 challenge is indeed a team effort, but nurses have a unique role because of the deeply intimate relationship they form with their patients — establishing trust, sharing, and caring for critically ill patients and their families. Early in our education, we learn as nurses about death and dying. We learn that death is a natural part of the human life cycle. We learn how to care for a dying patient's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs, and that throughout this process, the family is an integral and essential partner in the plan of care. We learn that no one wants to die alone. How then, do nurses working on the front lines reconcile these core values with the reality of how patients diagnosed with COVID are dying? Reports of nurses assisting as many as four to five deaths a day are not unusual. No amount of training could have prepared our nurses for this. The effects of working on the front line have been devastating for nurses. Nurses caring for COVID patients experience higher levels of stress, exhaustion, and psychological burden compared to nurses working on a regular floor (Zerbini, Ebigbo, Reicherts, Kunz, & Messman, 2020). My student's reflective journals support this finding. How then do they find the strength to carry on — at work, at home, and then to pursue their education? How do we, as nurse educators, support our nursing students during this crisis?

As nurses, we know that empathy, active listening, and therapeutic conversation are essential components of holistic care. I have found that offering my nursing students an opportunity to share their experiences, thoughts, and fears in a supportive environment is extremely helpful. By establishing a "student lounge" in Moodle as a safe place for students to support and connect with one another, they are able to receive the same level of emotional support from their colleagues as they give their patients.

Nurses are bound by a code of ethics and standards of the profession. Reinforcing in our students these principles and their personal calling as a nurse have helped renew their deep sense of pride for being a member of this noble profession. Reminding my students that nurses have long enjoyed the reputation of being voted the number one most trusted profession in the United States (Gallup, 2020) helps strengthen their professional dedication and drive to keep going. In my small way, this is how I support my nursing students through this difficult time, helping them to find the strength to carry on — at work, at home, and then to pursue their education.

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How Do You Solve a Problem Like Reentry?

Sue Kastensen, Founder and Director, Fair Shake

Imagine, if you can, being snuggly stuck in a building with 1,600 other people, all of whom share your physical gender; never leaving, eating in the cafeteria that offers no choices, and sleeping in a room that is the size of your current bathroom, which, by the way, you share with one or two "roommates" not of your choosing. Imagine, also, that you have no internet access, no cell phone, and no computer. Your phone calls, on an old-school pay phone, will be conducted in a large room filled with boisterous people. You are restricted to one 15-minute call after which you must wait one hour before you are permitted to make another. Finally, you are only offered short intervals of time in the exercise room and library, and you receive few, if any, very short visits from family or friends. Oh, and you'll share the bathroom with 50 people.

Can you imagine this for even one full day? How about one week? A month? A year? People in U.S. prisons are serving sentences that exceed 1 year … so let's imagine five, 10, 20 or even 30 years.

The crowded picture in your head, however, doesn't come close to the reality of life in prison. I have omitted the suffering, the sadness, and the loss of loved ones; the manipulations, the disrespect, and lack of trust; the fear, the censorship, and the razor-wire fence. And the heavy gates with electronic locks.

Today there is an added threat of a potentially deadly virus running wild within the building. The virus, by the way, can only enter the building with the people who come and go for work, but who do not live there.

Finally, I want you to imagine how anyone who does not have personal experience in this process could possibly guide people to build successful lives in a busy world once the exit door is opened to them. Where does one start to offer information about an ever-changing society when it is difficult to keep up, even for those who are fully engaged?

At least one building, full of the people in the thought exercise, opens its doors to release the inhabitants each day; 7 days per week (Carson, 2020). There are approximately 1.4 million prisoners currently serving time in state and federal prisons (Carson, 2020), and 95% of them will be returning to society (Hughes & Wilson, 2020). They are all excited to experience freedom again, but many are also extremely fearful of failure.

Very few prisons offer resources, support, or information to the incarcerated that will help them make vital connections for housing, medical support, or clothing prior to release. No prisons allow those who have recently come home to share their experience with those who are preparing for the transition.

Incarcerated people, when they can work, make less than 30 cents per hour, on average (Sawyer, 2017). It's nearly impossible to save up for today's cost of living on that wage, and the difficulty is exacerbated when landlords or employers refuse to consider leasing to or hiring formerly incarcerated applicants after running a background check.

With such a steep hill to climb, it should come as no surprise that less than 10 years after release from prison, 83% of those who have been released will find themselves back in prison (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018).

Photo credit: Federal Bureau of Prisons

Sue Kastensen presenting Fair Shake in a federal prison.

But it is a surprise. It's shocking. A 17% success rate for an organization of any kind is ridiculous! How is this even possible? It's embarrassing, unacceptable, maddening, and, for me, motivating.

Minding My Own Business

Prior to 1999, I — like most of my fellow Americans — was not aware of the formidable and terrifying gauntlet of challenges waiting for those who are returning to society from prison.

I was also not aware of the extremely long sentences and collateral consequences imposed by our war on drugs, or that people convicted of committing burglary were much more likely to commit another crime than people convicted of committing murder, or that many people convicted of sex offenses would be listed on a national registry for the rest of their lives.

I had never thought about the psychological hurdles to reengagement: building the courage and confidence to apply for a job, the frustrations of learning to use technology, needing strong boundaries to resist the

lure of using shortcuts to acquire money, finding and building healthy relationships (including reconnecting with children, parents and partners); or the intense tenacity and dedication to stay committed to goals made while incarcerated.

I never thought about any of that because in 1999, I — like most Americans — was focused on myself and my future. I was an enthusiastic 36-year-old business owner, manufacturing products that were in high demand in a rapidly growing market. I needed machines, and the employees to build and run them. Amid the growth and excitement, an employee took me aside one day and quietly asked if I might consider hiring her friend who would be coming home from prison soon.

Entrepreneurs are often courageous to try new and different things, but this question put me in a difficult position. I wanted to protect the loyal team that was cranking out our products every day, and I also wanted to give this person a "second chance." Besides, if I did not say I'd consider this question in my small community of 2,000 people, who do I think should?

I said "yes."

I learned a lot about reentry challenges from Rick, the applicant who became our new employee. He and I continued our conversation while I brainstormed on building a tool that could help people find needed resources. I knew that, at the very least, I could contribute an online reentry resource library! I called it "Fair Shake."

Wanting to connect with professionals who help prisoners prepare for release, in 2002 I joined the Correctional Education Association and started searching for a mentor. I found one, and by 2005, I had sold my business, eager to create a nonprofit that would help people transition from prison to life after prison.

Unique Qualifications

Since before I can remember, I have been a risk-tolerant, extremely curious, self-determined, anti-fragile, and somewhat courageous individual. My approach to life did not bode well with authorities and by 8th grade, I felt I was being developmentally stunted at home and in school. In order to survive my teens, I had to find my own path.

After getting kicked out of my parents' home at 13 — and after five high schools, four foster homes, several stays in group homes, a couple of jail visits and a few years in a Catholic reform school — in 1979, when I was 16 years old, I wanted to drop out of school and become an emancipated adult. I felt I was serving a sentence that had no end and no purpose. Authorities wanted me to stay in school, so I said I would continue with high school if I could attend Walden III, an alternative high school (which still exists today).[1] This was my last opportunity for a formal education and, thankfully, I flourished.

The school engaged in very little top-down pedagogy and primarily worked from a framework of student-centered, constructive, and problem-solving perspectives. Even the students were teaching classes! Some of my most cherished and important lessons were not taught in the classrooms; they were felt within the care of the community, for which I had yearned for so many years. The comradery, respect, interactions, support, and cooperative learning — unheard of in public or private schools in 1979 — gave me a deep understanding of authenticity, freedom, ownership, agency, interdependence, and even the importance of history.

At the start of my junior year, I detested school but at the end of the year, I found myself deeply in love with learning. I know now that we can find this love no matter where, or when, we find ourselves.

Lifewide Learning

Between selling my business and organizing a nonprofit, I worked in fair trade for a few years. During that time, I learned about stakeholders in the food chain: the farmworkers, farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, and consumers (we did not include the waste process at that time). My mind opened; I realized that the onus for reentry success did not solely fall on the person coming home from prison — that person also needed to be accepted for employment, housing, higher education, in places of worship, and more. In short, their success depended on all of us! I realized that I had to offer support to other stakeholders, too. I started thinking about ways to support and encourage family and friends, employers, landlords, corrections, and citizens to participate in this common goal for reintegration.

By creating, and listening, and creating some more, amazing things started to happen.

In 2014, I received a call from a reentry affairs coordinator in a federal prison in Colorado. She contacted me because the resource-selection tool on the Fair Shake website[2] was not working properly. After we talked for some time, she invited me to present Fair Shake at the prison complex. She said I would speak with hundreds of men in institutions that covered three levels of security. This would be my first opportunity to present Fair Shake to the incarcerated!

After I nervously introduced myself and provided an overview of Fair Shake, I asked the group if they would tell me what information and resources they were looking for that would help them find success after release. Once we started talking, I relaxed and they, too, became increasingly comfortable with our conversation. By the end of the presentation, I felt like we had an energizing reentry brainstorming session!

In addition to gaining insight from the responses to my question, I also discovered that most of the people in that room were corresponding with family and friends through a secure email server called CorrLinks and that I could continue to communicate with them through that service by creating a newsletter and sharing best practices.

I also learned an even more important lesson: A lot of incarcerated people go to great lengths to help one another.

In early 2016, I started writing a monthly newsletter and by the end of the year, 250 readers had signed on. (Today there are more than 4,000 subscribers.) It is not a broadcast newsletter, either. It is a place to share and build ideas. The readers know more than I do, so we advise and inform one another.

Once that door was opened, I committed myself to spend as much time as I could to engage in in-person conversations with incarcerated people. For the next three years, I traveled all around the country: north to south and coast to coast, presenting Fair Shake in many types of prisons and all levels of security.

For each trip, I created a route that put me on the road for up to one month. I had to drive to the institutions because it made no sense to fly. Prisons are mostly located far away from airports and amenities and can get locked down without notice. I learned to be very flexible!

When I would arrive at an institution where the myriad of presentation participants — incarcerated people, prison staff, and public servant visitors — had seen the Fair Shake Reentry Packet,[3] or the free Fair Shake software application or even the website (in a staff office; prisoners do not have access to the internet), someone would inevitably ask me how my bubble truck[4] was running and if I had new stories from meeting people along the way (I always did).

Photo provided by the author.

Sue Kastensen with her bubble truck.

My truck, with a camper on the back, made my travels possible. It was vital to have my kitchen, office, and bedroom with me at all times.

My travels are on hold for now, but prison reentry and education staff around the country have been staying in touch. Some check-in to make sure I will still be coming to their institutions when they open their doors again to volunteers, and others contact me to ask when the new software will be released. Robert Cialdini's (1984) "Scarcity Principle" is working in my favor, and suddenly Fair Shake is in high demand!

So, who comes to the presentations, and who signs up for the newsletters?

One can make almost no assumptions at all about who is in prison. As you have likely seen in the news, lawyers, CEOs, entertainers, and elected officials can be found in prisons; along with mothers, fathers, young people, and elders — many of whom have been in prison most of their lives and may have entered prison before they turned 18. The people serving time inside prison are as diverse as the people outside of prison, and many who have been convicted of committing crimes have also been victims themselves.

Criminologists, correctional administrators, elected officials, many academics, and, of course, the media, attempt to impress upon us that there is a specific type of person who commits a crime. They want us to believe that this "type" has "needs" that are unlike our usual human needs and they call them "criminogenic needs." They believe that these needs are like an addiction and that most people who commit a crime must vigilantly "desist" from crime for many years, and possibly the rest of their lives because the needs are so strong. These people are put into groups according to their "risk of recidivism," their propensity to commit a new crime and return to prison.

To ensure that most prisoners from powerful and influential backgrounds will not be included in medium- or high-risk groups, the criminologists have devised a way for the majority of white-collar criminals to be excluded from having these "needs" (e.g., Jeffrey Epstein, Martha Stewart). The high-profile prisoners can often skip the dehumanizing, behaviorism-based programming and lengthy stretches of time in higher security prisons, where "assigning low-risk offenders to intensive programs designed for high-risk offenders" … "can make things worse," according to the National Institute of Justice (2012, p. 109).

Considering the amount of time, effort, money, and research invested, I find it very disappointing that the criminologists have not created instruments that allow them to observe how people change. Many people grow, learn, feel deep remorse, and develop a world view that will lead to a law-abiding life, even without programming.

It is no wonder people are mystified about corrections, reentry, and how they can get involved to improve the corrections system or support the lives of those who have been released. National corrections associations, academics and elected representatives — the self-proclaimed "experts" — discourage others from getting involved in attending to the "broken system," as President Obama referred to it. They want us to trust them and leave the "reform" to them. After all, they will assert, they are informed by "evidence."[5]

These experts have been asking the question "What works?" to reduce recidivism for 50 years. In 1974, Robert Martinson answered their question.

After vising many prisons and looking at the programming available in each one, he concluded that not one program worked for everyone. He found that some people benefited from one type, and others benefited from another, but no perfect program that applies to all had been created; there was no silver bullet. His findings liberated corrections from their duty of rehabilitation, creating a gap for the criminologists, with their medical model of interventions, dosages, and programming, to step in.

After more than 20 years of their studies, "evidence" and best practices, the criminogenic approach has only increased recidivism and failed to address the issues that it accuses the incarcerated population of engaging in in the first place: anti-social thinking and behavior. (See the Criminogenic Need Factors chart [National Parole Resource Center, 2014].)

Antisocial attitudes, beliefs and values	Attitudes, values, beliefs, and rationalizations supportive of crime; cognitive emotional states of anger, resentment, and defiance
Antisocial behavior patterns	Early and continuing involvement in a number and variety of antisocial acts and a variety of settings
Antisocial peers and associates	Close association with criminal others and relative isolation from anticriminal others; immediate social support for crime
Antisocial personality and temperamental factors	Adventurous, pleasure seeking, weak self-control, restlessly aggressive
Family/marital stressors	Two key elements are 1) nurturance and/or caring, and 2) monitoring and/or supervision
Substance abuse	Abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs
Lack of education, employment stability or achievement	Low levels of performance and satisfaction in school and/or work
Lack of pro-social activities in leisure time	Low levels of involvement and satisfaction in anticriminal leisure pursuits

Image credit: National Parole Research Center

Criminogenic Need Factors

Fancy (and expensive!) assessments, algorithms, and programming have been built to disregard the attributes, characteristics, and qualities they say criminals lack, which include building capabilities, perspective change, prosocial studies, engagements (such as mentoring), ownership, self-determination, critical thinking, and commitment to community. We want our nation's citizens — as parents, employees, friends, and community members — to embrace these empowering and liberating qualities; and incarcerated people would like to have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of, and commitment to, them! In fact, many of our incarcerated have become far more prosocial than the people who determine them to be a high-risk for recidivism.

What You Focus on Grows

Since I have been presenting in several institutions annually, the prisons that have reentry councils, or think tanks, or other groups dedicated to problem-solving, often invite me to join their groups for an hour or two of conversation after my presentation. Over the course of a few meetings, we gain a deeper understanding of the unique qualities that each of us brings separately — and together — to the solution of the reentry problem.

It was through one of these opportunities that I was able to create a workshop for a National Conference on Higher Education in Prison with three men; two of whom I had met several times in the same prison and had been released; and one I met in a different prison and was still incarcerated. We wanted to find out if the academic attendees would help us think about how we could switch the reentry goal from being a negative one (reducing recidivism) to a positive one (building a satisfying and successful life) since it is far easier (and much more sensible!) to pursue a positive goal.

It was a crazy idea that was fairly difficult to execute but we pulled it off. We were even able to include recorded presentations by Mike, the incarcerated member, and also the voices of the Fair Shake newsletter subscribers who shared their thoughts in writing.

The conference organizers greatly underestimated the interest in this topic: they gave us a small room for our presentation that we filled to more than 250% of capacity, while we had to watch many interested attendees walk away. Unfortunately, like so many things, the conference has been canceled this year, so we will not able to rekindle and continue the conversation in person. The idea, however, will persist.

The Fair Shake Operating System

Creating a web and technology-based prisoner-reentry nonprofit organization that serves millions of people, on-demand, is a huge undertaking.

Many of my toughest lessons were learned simply by deciding to take this on! I had to learn to manage the daily website development by myself, to communicate with several stakeholders using a variety of tools, and to grasp several software tricks and tools involving Office, Adobe and Windows OS. And I have to keep on learning those tricks and tools, too, because software makers often change them when they update.

It was during one of these updates that I became very frustrated. I felt that no matter how hard I tried to keep up, Microsoft et al., were not interested in having me get my work done, they were mainly interested in making me learn things that served their interests. I felt like I was working for them!

My son calmly offered me an alternative to the commercial "matrix." He asked me to consider learning to use an operating system called Ubuntu, which was constantly and seamlessly updated and improved by developers who ask for input from the users. He said it

was a little harder to get started, but he assured me that once I got the hang of it — like driving with a manual transmission — it would become easy.

I wasn't ready for it when he offered, but I very much liked the idea of the operating system and how it was created. It reminded me of what I was doing with Fair Shake. Fair Shake, too, was a little harder, and people had to "do it themselves," but in the end they would be more informed, and Fair Shake would continue to become more relevant and supportive. I promised to look it up later.

Later came hard. It was when I was being forced to abandon Windows XP, which I loved so much, that I decided I'd had enough; it was time to try Ubuntu. I searched online to download it and the search results provided not only the computer operating system, but more importantly, they provided a link to a vital philosophy for our human operating system!

I was like a kid in a candy store as I explored the information online about Ubuntu! I was so excited to read and hear and learn about this traditional, sub-Saharan African philosophy, founded on the idea of interdependence. Ubuntu can be understood through the Zulu maxim, "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," or "a person is a person through other persons." It means, according to Desmond Tutu (2015), that it is the very essence of being human that we belong in a bundle of life, and that the solitary individual is a contradiction in terms.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I recognized this as Fair Shake's operating system and since then I have been weaving the philosophy into all of the information I share. I also close the newsletter with "Ubuntu" to remind the subscribers that we are in this together.

Education for Democracy

Understanding and effectively running a large democracy is an enormous undertaking and proper preparation should begin at an early age. We must nurture care in our youth and demonstrate ways they can think about themselves as individuals-within-community. Their education must include how to express — and listen to — a wide variety of perspectives in problem-solving debates about how to achieve social goals. It will take all of the formative years of schooling to develop these crucial and necessary thinking, reflection, communication, and feeling skills.

Rather than provide powerful tools for ownership, engagement, and intellectual expansion in a vibrant democracy, however, today's foundational pedagogy, with its attendant testing and comparisons, conditions our children to passively receive and believe information. The unspoken argument (unless you ask, like I always have) is that if we just rely on experts, follow the rules, and pursue employment, we will create the means to achieve happiness, security, and satisfaction in our lives.

We need not look further than the front page of the newspaper on any given day to see the devastating suffering and failure of this approach: increased polarization and authoritarianism across civil society, increased mental illness, suicide, anxiety, depression, addiction and opiate use in individuals; and the enormous loss of meaning and control in our lives.

Our citizens are waiting for a courageous and benevolent leader to do the heavy lifting of leading civil society. We want to believe that reform is happening and that infusing money into bad systems is making them better. We are waiting for the white knight to come and save us, but we can't yet see her on the horizon. The education system we count on to properly prepare our youth to recognize and solve social, regional, and global problems is failing our future leaders by withholding the very tools they must use to develop their capabilities, at our nation's collective peril.

In 2007, just one month after receiving my bachelor's degree (at 44 years of age), I read an article in the *Journal of Correctional Education* that offered a new lens for me to use as I think about "correctional education." In it the author, Cormac Behan (2007), argued: "[T]he current penal orthodoxy must be challenged and alternative discourses explored within and without of correctional settings" (p. 158). I agreed! I read on, and found myself weaving these considerations into my perspective:

> Educators need to create an alternative discourse about how we define our progress. It could shift the focus of the argument from a defensive position to a positive one. This might be achieved by arguing for a different approach to education than what the prison authorities or politicians may want. Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning has a lot to offer prison educators. It encourages individuals to challenge the way they make meaning in the world. This requires transforming frames of reference which begins with critical reflection, i.e., assessing one's assumptions and presuppositions. It begins with encouraging students to engage in critical thinking which, according to Stephen Brookfield, is what one should strive for in an adult education process. …This is the beginning of liberating learning. (Behan, 2007, p. 160)

I had just finished school, but I wanted to head straight back to the library to find out more about transformative learning theory! After all, wouldn't we all benefit from taking the time to think critically, reflect, question our assumptions, biases and beliefs, and discuss our thoughts with others?

After 10 years of self-study, I gathered all my savings and returned to school to pursue a master's degree in education. I needed to learn about education theory, curriculum-building and evaluation, so I could build a place where all people — regardless of their educational attainment or relationship — could freely learn how to learn. We have the right, as citizens and humans, to know how to think deeply, how to find information that is not offered through the "news," to consider other perspectives, build agency, and expand our capacity for complexity, caring, and knowledge. We deserve to have a place to break free from the limitations of other people's educational norms, goals and expectations, and think outside of the social or tribal bubble. A place where learners of any age and any educational attainment level could continue freely on their personal path of acquiring wisdom.

Where I once thought a certificate was the answer, I grew to understand that employers et al. were understandably cynical about the value of certificates that cannot show commitment, moral fortitude, team building or critical thinking. They want to judge the person for themselves, which makes sense. After all, a driver's license does not verify a willingness to use turn signals, only that the driver knows how to use them.

It takes courage to face an employer in an interview following many years of incarceration. It also takes courage to say "no" to a powerfully persuasive family member or close friend. It takes great bravery to do the right thing when our group is doing the wrong thing. We can muster the strength that we need to create good boundaries, expand our capabilities, and reduce our suffering. From there, we can feel strong enough to reach out to help others …. and discover that helping them helps us even more. No certificate shows this level of growth, determination, or commitment.

I was extremely fortunate to have been diverted from dropping out of school to finding a reason to love learning. In the halls of Walden III, at the age of 16, I was able to experience the process and value of transformative learning. I am deeply grateful and, like many believers, I feel a responsibility to offer this opportunity to others.

The Fair Shake Free School

So now, while I am not able to get into the prisons to talk with people face-to-face, but while the interest rises in newsletter subscriptions, creating think tanks, exploring biases, and more, I am pushing the creative side of my mind to its limits (which will, thankfully, expand even more) to figure out how one person can maintain and even build a lifelong learning "community center" that not only offers information, but asks visitors to contribute.

The Fair Shake Free School will more deeply investigate these areas:

- Philosophy — to explore epistemology, purpose, morality, care for humanity, values, etc.
- Psychology — to explore the feeling/thinking problem, our needs and wants, uniqueness, dropping unwanted baggage, motivation, etc.
- Sociology — to explore TV and media and it's impacts, how authority impacts groups, how being in groups impacts individuals, etc.
- Citizenship — building community and capabilities together, education, democracy, global village, etc.
- "Swellness" — where our physical health meets our mental health.

We now live in a world of constant change; where lifelong learning is no longer just a good idea, it is vital for security, satisfaction, meaning-making, and building trust.

Fair Shake will not engage in top-down pedagogy but will, instead, rely on a learning foundation based in heutagogy (self-determined learning), ubuntugogy (teaching and learning undergirded by humanity toward others), and transformative learning theory (critical reflection and potential for perspective change).

Looking through the heutagogical lens (Glassner & Back, 2020), learners will understand that they are the captains of their learning adventure and they will "make the road by walking" (Machado, 1912). They will learn how they can discern the value of the information they entertain, ask relevant questions for proper reflection, and construct knowledge to build their life to its fullest.

By applying the lens of ubuntugogy (Bangura, 2005), learners will be able to think deeply about what is at the core of being a human: relationship! They will be able to remember that we learned how to be human from other humans, and that we can build information in a way that honors, accepts, and encourages others. Ubuntu is such an important philosophy for democracy that, in 1997, the South African Department of Welfare stated that Ubuntu "acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being" (p. 12).

Finally, the transformative learning lens (Mezirow, 1990) will equip learners with ways to foster critical self-reflection, challenge social norms, engage in dialog with greater confidence, and consider other perspectives, including changing our own. These tools will support compassion as well as capacity-building in a world of constant change and emerging truth.

Our Opportunity

Let us think again about those who are stuck in the building:

The monolith of correctional bureaucracy and its supporters — the current managers of the building — have no incentive or desire to improve their performance. In accordance with

our current contract, they can keep us out, but they cannot stop us from reaching in to connect, to listen, and to share time, learning opportunities, and humanity. They can also not stop us from changing our contract with them in the future.

We can change the building; for instance, we can create a campus with choices. We can continue to include limitations and restrictions, while we also include decency, respect, and opportunities. We can remind those inside that we know they are bringing unique and important contributions to our communities.

The management of the building, and the welfare of those being held within it, is OUR business; we have a right and a duty to build possibilities with our fellow citizens. As we now properly recognize ourselves as the owners, and see our neighbors inside as co-creators, we can experiment with new ways of thinking about how to help them prepare to leave the building and find success in our dynamic, technology-based world.

Remember, more than 1,600 of our fellow citizens will walk out of those doors full of hope and determination each day. With our eyes and hearts open, I am certain that we can switch the 83% failure rate to an 83% success rate.

What works to improve reentry success? We do. Together.

Notes

[1] Walden III, Racine, Wisconsin: https://www.rusd.org/district/walden-iii-middle-high-school

[2] Fair Shake website: https://www.fairshake.net/.

[3] Fair Shake Reentry Packet: https://www.fairshake.net/reentry-resources/reentry-packet/.

[4] If you'd like to learn about the philosophy behind the bubbles, please check out the "On Sue's Desk" page of the website and scroll down until you see Bubble Truck Philosophy (https://www.fairshake.net/suesdesk/).

[5] To see the survey that the Federal Bureau of Prisons use to assess the "risk of recidivism," please find the Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA) survey on the Fair Shake website: (https://www.fairshake.net/risk-assessments/.), or on the Research and Practice in Corrections Lab website: https://sites.google.com/a/siu.edu/corrections-and-research_lab/Downloads. See the "Measures of Criminal Attitudes and Associates (MCAA)" questionnaire (please scroll down to find it) and the "Measures of Criminal and Antisocial Desistance (MCAD)" survey — worth a moment while you're there!

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The Essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne and My Recollections of Times Past

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Introduction

The following essay, or I should use the French *essai,* was inspired by the 16th-century humanist, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne. He wrote many essays, some less than a page long, others substantially longer, and one book length, all connecting, often in circuitous ways, to the human condition. After reading Montaigne's "On the Education of Children," which I will treat in detail, I purchased a complete set of his opus edited by Stanford University's Donald Frame. I began reading Montaigne's essays in earnest, and along came Sarah Bakewell who became very much a part of my conversation — another "I" with Montaigne. She is the connective tissue that makes my topsy-turvy journey through the mind of Montaigne possible. As Bakewell (2010) noted in her book, *How to Live, Or, A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer,* over the centuries, Montaigne developed a quite personal relationship with his readers. It's as if one's own life and times are played out in Montaigne's discourses. They are filled with his personal anecdotes, observations by his contemporaries, contradictions, and words of wisdom from ancient sages. His subjects range from profane to profound, from humorous to tragic, providing all sorts of tidbits, oddities, and abnormalities to inform, entertain, mystify, shock, and educate his readers. He even plumbed the depths of human sexuality — a one-person "Masters and Johnson" with himself as the subject, sharing what he had learned, often in graphic terms. He interviewed prostitutes to learn the techniques of the trade, as did those famous aforementioned researchers who fell down the technical rabbit hole of lovemaking, emerging at the other end a married couple, but not for long. Montaigne was a showman, a P.T. Barnum, leading us to the next exhibit, the famous egress, a bottomless existential pit of doubt.

One cannot — at least I cannot — read his essays for a time with any kind of intensity and not surface deeply questioning the very mental architecture of how I view existence. The closest analogy to this experience would be if I were to find myself on an out-of-control merry-go-round, going faster and faster — watching the outside world whipping around me — then jumping off, and trying to walk in a straight line without crashing headlong into strongly held beliefs. Montaigne, in my estimation, is much the measure of great philosophers of his era and other times past — steadfast in questioning assumptions, abandoning his own strongly held beliefs, and being quite delighted with freely doing so. We see in his essays, therefore, the seeds of empiricism — evidence-based statements. He just piled on examples to support his observations but was avowedly willing to disgorge them if proven wrong.

Virtually everything that touches human behavior, no matter how ordinary or extraordinary, is game for Montaigne's inexhaustible curiosity. Montaigne, in sum, had an intellect of amazing dimensions. One could invest a lifetime, as some have, devoting to his study. I am literally just starting, or ending, perhaps both, probably having been bumped into the River of Now in his "stream of consciousness" (Bakewell, 2010, pp. 33–38).

Photo provided by the author.

Richard Bonnabeau reminisces about Christmas.

Immortality Versus Eternity

In paraphrasing Ernie Pyle as he walked among the dead American soldiers at Normandy, only the dead don't know they're dead. We could say the very same about Montaigne. But for me, right now, trapped at this very moment in time, Montaigne is very much alive. Aren't we all just like wanderers searching for meaning amid the melting clocks in Salvador Dali's bone-dry surrealistic landscape, *The Persistence of Memory?* The clocks project an ominous outcome. There are no straight lines, just twists, bends, spirals, turns, backward flips, and nothing solid enough to hold onto. Memory itself is melting.

Montaigne, I believe, desired the immortality of remembrance sustained in the living memory of his readers. He lives within me, for me, and in the minds of countless others, distorted by the course of time and the changing constructs of subsequent generations — but still Montaigne. He believed in the foreverness of his individual achievement, but most likely not in

some spiritual afterlife that he could posit with any sort of blissful eternality. Religion for him, it seems to me, was more about politics and power, not about love.

Perhaps his pragmatic view of religion was best illustrated by Bakewell. She recounted in detail Montaigne's audience in Rome kissing Pope Gregory XIII's bright red right velvet bootie emblazoned with a white cross. The meeting was arranged by the French ambassador to the Papal States. This occurred during Montaigne's journey after the publication of the first edition of his essays in 1580 — his first journey beyond French territory. Montaigne, joined by a member of his large entourage, approached the pope in a choreographed stop-and-go cadence of kneeling and papal benedictions as they got closer and closer to His Holiness. After a brief chat upon their arrival, the kowtow was repeated in reverse, taking care not to expose their backsides while in retreat. During his chat with Montaigne, Pope Gregory expressed his gratitude for the latter's support for the Catholic Church in France. This was the same pope who had commissioned medals and paintings commemorating the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of French Calvinists. It began in Paris (1572) and spread quickly throughout the realm, lasting much more than one day. But it resulted in religious differences that, once negotiable, transformed into unimaginable barbarity by Catholic hordes and those Protestants who were able to defend themselves (Bakewell, 2010, p. 240).

Montaigne remained aloof from religion, secure in his psychological armor, which according to Bakewell (2010), derived from the fusion of three related philosophies: Pyrrhonism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism. They saved him from the stygian descent into unbridled passions that so consumed the lives of ordinarily gentle souls, even some people he knew, who became enraged by the existence of and paranoid about the unpredictability of the "other." There was no religion here for Montaigne, just a philosophical perspective to view dispassionately the apocalyptic madness of his times. No wonder Montaigne seemed to hold animals in higher esteem than his own species: for their intelligence, their inherent goodness, their faultless abeyance to the laws of "Mother Nature" — a term he used frequently and with reverence. He even recounted Plutarch's miraculous drama of *Androcles and the Lion.* Most of us know how it ended — with the Roman emperor's decision to free man and lion. But there is "a rest of the story" that is worth reading, as recounted in "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (Montaigne, 2019, pp. 350–351).

Bakewell (2010), in observing Montaigne's practical strategies to live life, noted that he used skepticism as a guide: "The essays are suffused with it: he filled his pages with words such as 'perhaps,' 'to some extent,' 'I think,' 'it seems to me' and so on — words which Montaigne said himself, 'soften and moderate the rashness of our propositions …'" (p. 128). From the Stoics and Epicureans, he learned about living in the moment. Montaigne composed his essays during troubled times much like ours — pandemics, urban riots, massacres, religious wars, political turmoil. He lived in a society and economy upended by incompetent and insecure autocratic king-of-the-French wannabees — a recipe muddled in theological discord, wrapped tightly in religious pretense as much as conviction. It was a whole *weltanschauung* of impedimenta undermining the stability of what remained of a divided society.

Montaigne was not well known beyond Aquitaine, the southwest region of France, before his first set of essays was published. But then fame followed and even preceded him, so he traveled *incognito* with a large entourage befitting his status. Visiting warm mineral baths was of particular interest to him. He had suffered kidney stone attacks two years before, the same malady that took his father Pierre's life in 1568. Pierre was a robust man capable of remarkable acrobatic feats that Montaigne could only admire but not possibly replicate (Bakewell, 2010, pp. 47–48). In his era, it was probably the most gruesome of deaths — unless one was interrogated and/or executed by secular authorities or the Inquisition. Montaigne's own delicate condition probably hastened his decision to retire a few years later and dedicate his life to scholarship.

In concluding my introduction, I ought not fail to mention that I have read most of Montaigne's essays (often more than once). I covered them with marginalia and reached a conclusion, tentatively, that he was a quasi-nihilist but absent the ethical presumption to justify human suffering of any sort in the cause of social and economic justice. Think of Pol Pot and so many others before him. Some of those mountains of skulls included individuals whose only crime was wearing corrective eyeglasses.

My Inspiring Connection to Montaigne

It begins in Turkey, now the heart of what is left of the Ottoman Empire. I was at a fair one night, which in the United States one might call a farmers market cum crafts with a play area for children. The fairgrounds are located

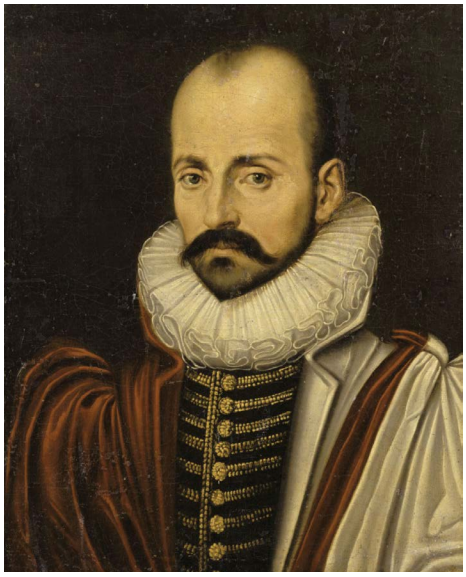

Image credit: Wikimedia Commons

Portrait of Michel de Montaigne circa 1570s (artist unknown).

in the province of *Muğla-Datça* just on the outskirts of where the waters of the Aegean and Mediterranean seas converge — actually converging ever since the end of the last ice age. Vendors displayed handcrafted jewelry, bowls, and utensils carved out ancient olive wood (from trees uprooted to clear space for seaside residences), battery-operated toys illuminated by colorful LED lights, and T-shirts embossed by the almost sacred image of Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. A nearby Turkish tea garden with heady amounts of conversation was the order for the night. There were no free tables, however. So, I strolled among the stalls while I waited for the crowd to thin out. An electronic clock, flashing bright red numbers, edged the time toward midnight. I should probably mention that tea is brought out piping hot. The cups, made of thin glass, have no handles, but flute out toward the top to secure the cups between two fingers, the thumb and the index. Filled to the brim, it is quite a trick not to be scalded taking that first sip. Culturally-based habits are hard to break, which Montaigne would probably second. It is my guess that teacups are so difficult to manage that they have remained unchanged for perhaps as long as a sizeable chunk of Europe was within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, long a safe haven for Jews escaping the Inquisition and others seeking refuge from political and religious persecution. The Armenians, for example, greeted the Ottomans as liberators for freeing them from the oppression of Byzantine Greeks, just as the Greeks had greeted the Ottomans as liberators when they conquered Greece, ending Venetian rule and the dominion by the Church of Rome. Under the Ottomans, these new subjects worshiped as they pleased, chose their own religious leaders, and had their own courts of law and schools; and, like the Jews and other non-Moslems, they paid a poll tax instead of serving in armies of the sultan. The long epoch of good feelings ended in the late 19th century as extreme nationalism from Europe swept over the Ottoman Empire's borders.

To continue — by the way, Montaigne was the master of digression: As Bakewell (2010) observed, "A typical page of his Essays is a sequence of meanders, bends, and divergences. You have to let yourself be carried along, hoping not to capsize each time a change of direction throws you off balance" (p. 35). At the night market, I discovered a merchant's bookstall. Amongst the hundreds of books, I found a freshly printed selection of Montaigne's essays: not a voluminous edition by any stretch, but just enough to whet my appetite as I peeked between the covers. When I came across his essay, "Of the Education of Children" (Montaigne, 2019, pp. 106–131), it was one of those eureka moments, and I bought it! The print was small, and the price was low — the two inextricably linked.

> *"Culturally-based habits are hard to break, which Montaigne would probably second."*

It got me thinking about Gutenberg's invention of moveable type — not so much an invention, but the application of existing technologies, as was paper, invented by the Chinese and perfected with cotton by the Arabs; and let us not forget the winepress. (Montaigne's wealth, by the way, was based on the vineyards and winery of his chateau. You can still purchase a bottle of wine, but this would be post-phylloxera.) Gutenberg's genius, like that of Steve Jobs' in the 21st century, was in modifying and merging existing technologies. We might say that the iPhone had its origins in the Gutenberg printing press — humankind's first effort at mass communication. The printing press spread rapidly across Christian Europe but was banned in the Ottoman Empire until the late 18th century. In fact, there was no equivalent of a moveable-type Quran to rival the Gutenberg Bible and for that matter anything not produced by a hand-held stylus. It was the magic of the printing press to turn a manuscript into the printed word relatively cheaply and quickly that made Montaigne almost an instant success; but not the overnight global success enjoyed by Albert Einstein once a total eclipse of the sun supported the math behind his general theory of relativity — light rays bending in the gravitational field of the sun's corona.

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds"
(Bhagavad-Gita 11:32 as cited by Oppenheimer [PlenilunePictures, 2011])

By the way, Einstein journeyed with his spouse to Japan in 1922 as part of a world tour. He was perhaps the most famous man in the world. The receptions they received were extraordinary. Einstein had great admiration for the Japanese and their culture. But years later, he was convinced by kindred scientists to send a letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt urging the United States to develop an atomic bomb before Nazi Germany. Einstein's letter was his only contribution to the Manhattan Project. The test of the prototype, Trinity, was so otherworldly powerful it was reasoned that informing Japan of the super bomb would suffice to end the war, which Japan would lose with or without employing the bomb. By this time, Japan was bereft of fuel, munitions, well-provisioned armies, planes, and ships to wage war. All it had to continue was a populace willing to sacrifice their lives for Emperor Hirohito. The emperor did not wish to make a sacrifice of such a magnitude and wanted to surrender, which went against the wishes of the military leadership. This caused a tragic delay, which played into the hands of President Harry Truman and Lieutenant General Leslie Groves, the director of the Manhattan Project, to use the

A-bomb. But the U.S. military chose to use the first bomb on a real target and real people, not the imagined victims of the Trinity test. Hiroshima was chosen as the first target because of its military importance. Nagasaki was included in a long list of potential targets for a second bomb (Townsend, 1985, pp. 53–55). Nagasaki had been the battleground between Jesuits and the Franciscan centuries before vying for converts. The Jesuits were there first and papal support kept the Franciscans from proselytizing in Japan. With a change in popes, the Franciscans got access. But eventually, they antagonized the *shogun* who crucified the Franciscans and their Japanese acolytes — a dramatic history recounted in Charles R. Boxer's (1951) *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549–1650.* There is more to this story, but suffice it to say, Nagasaki was a Catholic city, with a large cathedral. One of the victims was a statue of the Virgin Mary, the Jewish mother of Jesus of Nazareth — what a testament to the inability of religious values to overcome humankind's inhumanity to man! It was thought to be totally destroyed, but a Japanese soldier, at the time also a Trappist monk, discovered her head in the radioactive carnage of the second atomic bomb, Fat Boy, a miracle in its own right.

As our technology becomes more sophisticated, more dangerous, and more dependent on algorithms to make the big decisions relating to "real people," the likelihood of our species hurtling back to the Stone Age looms large. Imagine, just a sliver of our global population left to figure out how to pick up the pieces. Such a dismal fate seems like an inevitability as in the *Planet of the Apes,* the 1968 cinematic version of Pierre Boulle's novel. Pierre Clement, who cataloged Boulle's manuscripts for the French National Library, commented, "It is man [in the film] who has led to the destruction of the planet. But the book is more a reflection that all civilisations are doomed to die. There is no human fault. It is just that the return to savagery will come about anyway" (Schofield, 2014, paras. 27–28). Had President Roosevelt not died suddenly (April 12, 1945) before the A-bombs were ready, which were initially planned for use on Germany, he might have chosen a different path, saved hundreds of thousands of lives and the suffering beyond words to capture — many of them Catholics who endured centuries of persecution. We may have split the atom, but we divided the world between East and West, between the Soviet Union and China on one side of the globe, and Western Europe and the United States on the other. And so, the world remains today, somewhat different on both sides — President Xi in place of Mao and President Putin in the stead of Stalin — of the dividing line but perhaps very much more dangerous than ever. Back to Montaigne!

For Montaigne, his love to shock and to be shocked were all game for his quill. He would have been mesmerized by the gathering of tea drinkers at the night market illuminated by a phantasmagoria of multicolored electric light bulbs, LEDs, light lasers streaming advertisements along the ground. But then again, the Turkish millennials in skimpy bathing suits dancing in their own light show might have been even more exotic than his meeting with Tupinambá cannibals and the French child king, Charles IX. It might have been difficult to choose between the two fantastic light shows, but perhaps he would have been saddened as I was by the full moon, making its solitary transit across the night sky, despondent and abandoned amid the blaze of artificial lights. As Homo sapiens — the apex predator — traversed deserts, snowpacks, seas, oceans and gradually circling the Earth, we have changed — and so much so after hundreds of thousands of years, that in our encounters of distant cousins, 5,000 or more generations removed, we failed to recognize them as extended family but eyed them — and they eyed us suspiciously — as the "other." The Tupinambá had been brought from Brazil to France after a failed effort by the French to establish a foothold in Brazil. The king was a boy of 12 years and subject to the regency oversight by his mother, Catherine de Medici. In Montaigne's (2019) "Of Cannibals," far from being mortified by the presence of cannibals, he celebrated their living in a golden age and "ruled by the laws of nature" (p. 153) rather than governed by corrupt human institutions. Someone asked the Tupinambá what they found "most amazing" about their visit to meet the boy king. They responded:

> … [In] the first place they thought it very strange that so many grown men, bearded, strong, and armed, who were around the king … should submit to obey a child, and that one of them was not chosen to command instead. Second (they have a way in their language of speaking of men as halves of one another), they had noticed that there were among us men full and gorged with all sorts of good things, and that the other halves were beggars at their doors, emaciated with hunger and poverty; and that they thought it strange that these needy halves could endure such injustice, and did not take the others by the throat, or set fire to their houses. (p. 159)

"… [W]e have changed — and so much so after hundreds of thousands of years, that in our encounters of distant cousins, 5,000 or more generations removed, we failed to recognize them as extended family but eyed them — and they eyed us suspiciously — as the 'other.'"

Earlier in his essay, Montaigne (2019) stated emphatically, "So we may well call these people barbarians, in respect to the rules of reason, but not in respect to ourselves, who surpass them in every kind of barbarity" (p. 156). In fact, Montaigne, in his "To the Reader" section of the first edition (1580), stated, "Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I should very gladly portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked" (p. 2).

In his essay "Of Coaches," Montaigne (2019) recounted quite articulately the barbarity of the conquest of the Aztecs and Incas by the Spanish, driven by the lust for gold, but failed to mention Aztec priests sacrificing Spanish soldiers during the siege of Tenochtitlan, its ruins now buried under Mexico City. The beating hearts of their Spanish captives were cut quickly from their chests with obsidian knives. The victim was held separately by each limb with the chest arched upward for quick incision. The still-beating heart of the victim was shown to the sacrificial victim, then raised to the sun, and the body tossed from the altar to roll down the sides of the stairs of the pyramid. Montaigne also failed to note that the flesh was shared according to social status. Human blood, by the way, was mixed with ground-up cocoa beans to enhance flavor — so much for his message "To the Reader" extolling the lives of those living "in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws…." (pp. 693–696). My guess is that he had the Tupinambá cannibals more in mind than the Aztecs. The idea of sacrifice, however, was common to both cultures. For Catholics, receiving communion of bread and wine was consuming the actual body and blood of Jesus. For Protestants it was symbolic. Nevertheless, both groups took turns burning each other at the stake over this theological divide. Along the way, did they forget the Sermon on the Mount, or even to ask the question, "What would Jesus say?"

Two centuries later, the "Citizen of Geneva," Jean-Jacques Rousseau, would add his voice to "the sweet freedom" of the primitive state. His treatise, *The Social Contract, Or Principles of Political Right,* began with his cry for the sovereignty of the people: "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains" (Rousseau, 1968, p. 49). (As an aside, I wish to mention that I applied this phrase to students in my Lilly Foundation post-doctoral mentoring fellowship report for SUNY Empire State College in 1974–1975: "Students are born free and are everywhere in chains.") Then Rousseau went on to verbally cut out the beating heart from absolute monarchy with the surgical precision of an obsidian knife, as well as the heart of every other form of government that did not reflect the will of its people. He gave no credence to the primitive state as having any relevance to more complex societies. Eventually, Rousseau's treatise fanned the ideological flames of the French Revolution, which morphed into the logic that the founder of modern chemistry, Antoine Lavoisier, should be executed by guillotine because of his service to Louis XVI as a tax collector. His innovative recommendations regarding education and prison reform did not weigh the scales of justice in his favor if one assumes collecting taxes warranted the death penalty. But Lavoisier erred in growing rich. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the cold heart of unbridled capitalism, ideological solutions to end the exploitation of labor inspired Utopianism, Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. During the *Liberté-Égalité-Fraternité* phase of the French Revolution, statues were thrown to the ground, decapitated, and buried. We saw analogous actions in the United States after the very public and brutal execution-style murder of George Floyd. It sparked protests throughout the country and all over the world to finally, and for all time, put an end to institutional racism. African American demonstrations calling for racial justice were hugely populated by white Americans and other people of color. Eventually, some demonstrators turned into rioters, tearing down statues of famous Americans who had any association with slavery or racism that impacted not just Blacks but American Indians (called First Nation tribes in Canada), and Latinos (Goodbye, Columbus!). It devolved into looting in a number of cities, including Macy's in Manhattan, the iconic setting of the 1947 Christmas movie, *Miracle on 34th Street.*

I attended a family funeral in North Carolina just before George Floyd's senseless death. I was emotionally moved by two family members, one an in-law and another a blood relative, bragging about African ancestry — identified by DNA tests. Wow! After two terms of a charismatic African American president, I had discovered relatives proud of their genetic heritage and the person with the highest percentage was a conservative Republican. It brought to mind James Watson's (the Nobel laureate and co-discoverer of the double helix) laudable reaction to learning that he had African ancestry. Watson had been quite vocal about linking intelligence to race. Personally, I do not believe that intelligence tests are worth the paper they are written on. They were invented by the descendants of the people whose claim to fame was the invention of the Christmas tree, the very same people who classified Italian immigrants from Southern Italy, including Sicily, as a subspecies of Homo sapiens. Imagine, the people who populated what was once Magna Graecia, who lived among ancestral Greek and Roman ruins, suddenly finding themselves toward the bottom of the chart of human evolution. Oy!

In regard to my family gathering in North Carolina, I wondered why none of us knew of this heritage. It got me thinking that there was no place for babies born white to Black parents to be raised in the South prior to the Civil War — at best, perhaps an orphanage would take them where racial origins could be disregarded. One possible prospect

as more Americans take DNA tests is the emergence of a large percentage of white Americans with African ancestry after 400 years of slavery. If so, we might begin to think of the United States as another Brazil, much of whose character was forged in slavery but without a soul-wrenching civil war. Can we conceive of American patriotism as expressions of an emerging cosmic race and nation? As President Kennedy exclaimed, "We are a nation of immigrants," and now, more than ever, we have immigrants from every nook and cranny of the world, as well as Native Americans. Consider the millions of American veterans and those military women and men yet serving, and their families representing every aspect of the complex ethnic and racial tapestry that comprises these United States to realize that love of nation goes beyond the individual. It truly is about union, "one nation, under God [as we as individuals define our cosmic connection to the Being of Light and Love — through Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.], indivisible, with liberty, and justice for all." Back to Montaigne!

What I find endearing about Montaigne is his constant litany about the insufficiency and inaccuracy of his recollections. It makes him quite engaging, even loveable, although the drone of self-deprecation may become wearisome at times. Of course, neuroscience is completely in league with Montaigne's misgivings about memory. Montaigne is drawn to entertaining his readers with the bizarre customs of other lands that are quite normal in cultural context. He does aim to entertain, but he also wants readers to question their own perceptions of what constitutes "normal" behavior and to realize that their reality is essentially constructed cultural ephemera. Reading Montaigne's (2019) "Of the Education of Children" (pp. 106–131), which he dedicated to Madame de Foix, Comtesse de Gurson, was inspiring, but it brought back some unpleasant memories of my four years of Catholic elementary school, which I will discuss after providing the account of Montaigne's own experience as a child. His message is about what education should not be but what it could be.

Pierre Montaigne, Michel's father, was the architect of his son's education. His military career in Italy in support of French dynastic ambitions provided high-level connections of the first order. These combined with the fortune built by Pierre's grandfather made it possible to provide Michel with a title of nobility, though of low rank. The Chateau de Montaigne was more to reinforce his status as a noble than to serve as an impregnable fortress. In fact, during the wars of religion, Montaigne made no effort at its defense and even kept the gates of the chateau unlocked! Montaigne (2019) observed in his essay, "That Our Desire is Increased by Difficulty," "I have weakened the intent of the soldiers by taking from their enterprise the elements of risk and military glory, which customarily served them as pretext and excuse. … I make the conquest of my house cowardly and treacherous for them. It is closed to no one who knocks" (p. 467).

The cordiality and trust expressed by Montaigne, even with potentially dangerous visitors, reminds me of SUNY Empire's founder, Chancellor Ernest L. Boyer, and his wife Kathryn, during his tenure at the State University of New York. He joined SUNY in 1965 as its first executive dean. Three years later, Boyer became vice chancellor for university-wide services and then acting chancellor in 1970. These were tumultuous times of student unrest. Institutions of learning became the locus for deep-seated distrust about the Vietnam War, civil rights abuses of Blacks, other minorities, and women. Boyer was once held captive in his office overnight by student dissidents.

> Those hours with the students helped lay the groundwork for the agenda that shaped his leadership as chancellor. …The students told him that they shared nothing in common with him or with their professors, stressing that their education was not relevant to their lives and saying the curriculum was too rigid, too directed … [and they were] angry about tuition costs. Ernie was a good listener, and agreed with many of their complaints, and together they found they had many commonalities based on a shared human experience … a major theme in Ernie's later writings. Ironically, that long night that students held him captive, he also had the students as his captive audience. (K. Boyer, 2014, p. 136)

In that night's captivity, we can perhaps see the nucleus for the creation of SUNY Empire State College taking shape.

As a youth, Montaigne might have enjoyed being one of Boyer's captives, if not in the role of Boyer himself. Boyer put his approach to students into practice during the middle of a SUNY board of trustees meeting at the Lincoln Building in Manhattan, opposite the Grand Central Terminal. There was a large, angry student demonstration below. Boyer was advised not to go down by a guard, but he went anyway. He moved through the crowd asking individual students for "… their names and questioned them about their families and hometowns. Taking the time to quietly move among many of the students, Ernie showed them respect, looking into their eyes and chatting. He did not tell them his name, but word spread throughout the crowd that there was someone among them posing as Chancellor Boyer" (K. Boyer, 2014, p. 138). Andy Hugos, the student leader, recognized Boyer and turned over his stand and bullhorn for the chancellor to address the crowd. Boyer asked the students to choose representatives and then brought them up to the meeting of the trustees. At another demonstration, Boyer even promised a meeting with

Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, not knowing that the governor would agree to it. He did (pp. 138–139).

Kathryn Boyer (2014) had her own encounter with students. When she was alone one day at Chancellor House, the residence in which the Boyers were forced to reside when taxpayers' money became a major issue with the media, she answered the doorbell and found a ragtag group of students ready to call it home and make it the people's mansion. She remained cordial, holding the door firmly as they were trying to force their way in. Holding the door and sustaining the conversation, Mrs. Boyer agreed that the state residence belonged to them as much as to the Boyer's but could not accommodate such a large group (p. 137). Discouraged, they beat a retreat. Both Boyer and his wife — subsequently a graduate of SUNY Empire State College — were deeply religious and were active members of Quaker meetings held Sundays in downtown Albany (pp. 106–107). It seems to me, that because Boyer was the acting chancellor of SUNY in 1970, that tragedies like that of the Kent State killings by the Ohio National Guard on May 4, as well as the deadly May 15 shootings of two Black Jackson State College students by Mississippi police, did not, could not, would not happen at SUNY. Boyer steadfastly refused to take actions that were contrary to his deeply held religious values. During World War II, as a student and too young to serve as a medic, he refused to participate in drives supporting the war. He took a lot of flak — no pun intended — from his classmates. Immediately after the war, he was able to join other Brethren in Christ members in bringing war relief supplies to Poland, which included farm animals to replenish lost stock.

In Pierre Montaigne's thinking, a first-rate education for his son, heir to a title of nobility, the chateau and fortune, was perhaps just as important, if not more so. Pierre investigated ways of providing him the best education possible. He discovered that proficiency in Latin was a major stumbling block for students to do well in school. Latin, at the time being a dead language, consumed much of schoolwork that could be devoted to other studies. So, as Montaigne (2019) put it, while he was still nursing "… and before the first loosening of my tongue" (p. 128), his father hired a famous German Latin scholar who could not speak French. He, in turn, hired two Latin-speaking assistants to make Latin Montaigne's mother tongue. Moreover, Pierre and Montaigne's mother, Antoinette, had to learn enough Latin to converse with Michel; and some of the staff at the chateau had to learn some, as well. Speaking French to the young Montaigne became *absolument* forbidden. In his essay on education, Montaigne marveled at how Latin spilled over into the villages on either side of the chateau as it applied to artisan crafts and tools. It reminds me of how the word "mentor" and its grammatical derivations have spread about the world from SUNY Empire State College since our first year, 1971, when Boyer asked Jim Hall, our founding president, "to bring this unusual institution to life" (SUNY Empire State College, 1972, p. 4). The term mentor relates not only to the pedagogy of mentoring but to all sorts of coaching relationships where a mentor is key to a neophyte's success.

A mentor intern fellowship from the Lilly Foundation in December of 1974 made it possible for me to join the college as part of the Niagara Frontier Learning Center. It began enrolling students in the fall of that year and was the last of the regional learning centers. Prior to that time, the college had already established a solid footing throughout New York state and even had a highly innovative unit in London, started Christmas Eve of 1971. It featured prestigious internships and individualized contract learning — the first of its kind epitomizing the pedagogical spirit of the college's innovative learning approaches — unique among 26 other SUNY programs. It succumbed to budget cuts in 1974 but clearly warranted preservation.

The Niagara Frontier Regional Learning Center was housed at the SUNY Buffalo State campus and evolved from outreach efforts (one might say proof of concept explorations) by the Genesee Valley Regional Learning Center headquartered in Rochester, established in the early part of 1972. The center in its first years, much like its counterpart in Rochester, entered a period of rapid growth, creating specialized regional units and a program serving Latino students in Buffalo. In September of 1971, a center for New York City, technically the first, was launched with the highly publicized opening inauguration and with political potentates in attendance. The Metropolitan Regional Learning Center excited high-level political interest because of its major commitment to serving labor union members. To separate themselves from the broader mission of the new center to serve all kinds of adult students, the labor students erected a handsome but not official sign to celebrate the creation of the Labor College. The faculty of the center, however, served students in both programs. Eventually, those programs became separate administrative divisions, the Labor College becoming the Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor

"It reminds me of how the word 'mentor' and its grammatical derivations have spread about the world from SUNY Empire State College since our first year, 1971, when Boyer asked Jim Hall, our founding president, 'to bring this unusual institution to life.'"

Studies. The other division developed special programs for Black and Latino students in Manhattan and the Bronx. In October of 1971, the Northeast Regional Learning Center, located at SUNY University at Albany's Draper Hall in downtown Albany, became the second regional learning center. It reached out beyond the confines of the city to develop programs in the Capital Region, including a program for the staff of the Oswald D. Heck Developmental Center in Schenectady dedicated to deinstitutionalizing individuals with developmental disabilities. The staff needed nontraditional access to college degrees to satisfy state requirements. Also, the Northeast Center created a unit at Rockland Community College in Suffern to serve graduates who wanted to apply experiential learning credits to time-shorten their completion of bachelor's degrees. The unit grew exponentially after receiving a major grant to launch New Models for Careers. The success of this program morphed into the unit becoming the Lower Hudson Regional Learning Center.

The Division for Statewide Programs, established in the latter part of 1972, consisted of a network of small units throughout the state and headquartered in Saratoga Springs, the administrative headquarters of SUNY Empire State College. Its first unit was at SUNY Plattsburg, and within a few years, programs had been established in Binghamton, New Paltz, Oneonta, Queensbury, Saratoga Springs, the London Unit, Extended Programs (merged with the Independent Study Program in 1979 as the Center for Distance Learning), and specialized urban studies programs in Manhattan — Arts in the City, Religion in the City, Media and Communications in the City. The Long Island Regional Learning Center, headquartered at the SUNY Stony Brook campus, came on board for the fall 1972 semester, though the college did not have semesters, just extremely flexible periods of enrollment like the rest of the centers and units to suit the needs of adult learners. This remarkable flexibility, however, caused headaches for the Offices of Admissions, Registrar, and Financial Aid, until a system of longer enrollment periods could be devised. The Long Island Center grew rapidly, establishing programs throughout Long Island with state, county, municipal, and private enterprises.

It is one thing to provide a quick sketch about the remarkable growth of the college in its formative years, but much was happening in threshing out the academic programs and their underlying principles and practices. My own experience is a quick demonstration of how much there was to learn about mentoring, even after being part of a program supported by the Lilly Foundation designed for that very purpose. As the last mentor (intern) to join the Niagara Frontier Regional Learning Center for the 1974–1975 academic year, I quickly learned to value the practical experience of the mentors who came before me. There was a good deal of conferring among mentors regarding complicated degree programs (study plans), conducting prior learning assessment, tutoring of each other's students, and serving on center and collegewide committees. Much learning was acquired in a short period of time. At the Niagara Frontier, we had also the advantage of having a few mentors and staff from the Genesee Valley Center, and access to the policies and procedures developed by the college in its first three and a half years of operational existence. Many were the important mechanical processes, such as filling out course registration forms, advising students about financial aid, and cross registration. The academic dimensions were most important for mentors. The academic guidelines and policies were exacting and had pitfalls. So, it made sense for new mentors to either connect with a buddy mentor formally or informally to double-check their work with students. The more connections a mentor could make within their centers and colleagues across the college, the better. In those early years, there was widespread concern that centers would become so isolated that they might, in effect, become too insular and not benefit holistically by staying engaged with the rest of the college.

In 1972, to ensure consistency in academic practices, Academic Vice President Arthur Chickering brought together taskforce committees composed of faculty and academic administrators to draft policies and procedures that were intimately connected to contract learning and assessment of prior learning. These two dimensions, especially, were at the very heart of why prospective students wanted to enroll. The committees benefited from the experience of faculty working with students one-on-one, who first enrolled in September and October of 1971 and those who enrolled in subsequent months. By this time, mentors had a good deal of experience serving on committees, preparing degree programs and learning contracts for students. As new centers came on board, handbooks became widely available and a new central office of assessment kept adding vital information to what became known as the *Resources and Criteria Handbook.* Another dimension of our institutional glue was the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE). They conducted a steady battery of research, a significant way of monitoring the strengths and weaknesses of our programs. Because we had such a strong research arm, we were able to win major grants at a time of shrinking state revenues to float programs until tuition revenues could support them.

Because of the newness of SUNY Empire State College, the complexity of the faculty and administrative roles had professional pressures that were unique to American public higher education. New mentors who thought they might be teaching at a Shangri-La campus when they began their graduate studies in the early 1960s entered a totally

different kind of world: Teaching and administrative positions were virtually nonexistent, and the national economy had turned decidedly down. Those who were fortunate enough to hear about SUNY Empire State College and very much tuned in to what students found wrong with American higher education, even education in general, were instantly attracted to this new and very promising entity. Some even surrendered tenured positions. The college benefited enormously by attracting top graduates from the best universities. Ultimately, the implementation of what was sketched out for students created a highly stressed work world for mentors and administrators; some endured this in silence, others did not. Now, in looking backward in time, I remember a number of stress-related incidents and behaviors that fit a pattern. In the meantime, President Hall continued negotiating with SUNY System Administration to lower full-time enrollment requirements for faculty and to increase the amount of funding for auxiliary instruction. At the same time, he reduced funding of the learning modules program, originally implemented to reduce the workload of mentors, but failed to catch on except in the Division of Statewide Programs. In its stead, the college moved forward with the creation of the Center for Distance Learning, a major objective being the reduction of the workload. All these years later, workload is still an issue because mentors are steadfast in their commitment to personal engagement with students — in all of our professed modalities of learning. Yes, back to Montaigne!

By age six, Montaigne became, in effect, a native speaker of Latin, and this gave him an extraordinary advantage over other students and even his instructors at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, some 30 miles west of his home. Three of the instructors were prominent Latinist in this era of Humanism. Montaigne (2019), who was rarely (obviously) boastful, recounted: "… my private tutors, have often told me that in my childhood I had that language so ready and handy that they were afraid to accost me" (p. 129). Montaigne boasted again when he spoke about his great acting ability, performing in Latin tragedies produced by the three Latinist faculty. There is more to this story: Montaigne's educational journey was beyond mastering Latin and its schoolboy benefits. It was education in his words "without the whip and without tears" (p. 128). During the years of tutoring, before his son entered the Collège de Guyenne, Pierre made certain that his child's learning was to be joyful and motivated by curiosity, another outcome of his father's research. By the way, such principles were echoed in Ernest Boyer's (1997) "The Basic School" address to the National Association of Elementary School Principals in 1995. At the time, Boyer was president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For Montaigne's study of Greek, Pierre arranged for the tutor to "teach in a new way, in the form of amusement and exercise. We volleyed our conjugations back and forth, like those who learn arithmetic and geometry by such games as checkers and chess" (p. 129).

"'We volleyed our conjugations back and forth, like those who learn arithmetic and geometry by such games as checkers and chess.'"

Montaigne (2019) went on to say that his father should not be blamed for his own failure to reap the benefits of this early education, claiming that he was so overcome by laziness that "… they could not tear me from my sloth, not even to make me play" (p. 129). But then he opined, "What I saw, I saw well, and beneath this inert appearance nourished bold ideas and opinions beyond my years." Pierre then sent Michel off to the college but kept control over the choice of his son's tutors and barred the use of physical punishment. As a reward for being a native speaker of Latin, Montaigne was advanced to classes with much older students. He also had a private tutor who gave him free rein to read Latin literary classics that he found of particular interest and even Italian comedies, so long as he kept it a secret and did not ignore his other studies. Montaigne observed, "If he had been foolish enough to break me of this habit, I think I should have got nothing out of school but a hatred of books, as do nearly all our noblemen" (p. 130). One can only imagine how Montaigne was treated by other students, but he remained silent. No lifelong friendships emerged from his schoolboy days as far as I could discover. This might explain why he bonded so quickly with Étienne de La Boétie, a fellow scholar whom he met while serving in the formal affairs of the Bordeaux *parlement,* after studying law. They only knew each other for a handful of years before the plague took La Boétie's life. Montaigne's regard for him, often defined as love, was so great, that he risked his own life remaining with Étienne, his wife, and other family members while he struggled to live until he took his last breath. Montaigne never recovered emotionally from this great loss (Bakewell, 2010, pp. 102–106).

There was most likely an additional psychological toll regarding Pierre's educational experiment. This may explain Montaigne's emotional attachment to Étienne. In Montaigne's formative years, his relationship to his parents lacked the spontaneity of speaking in French, especially so in regard to his mother. She did not breastfeed him, a common practice among the elite women, but it may have prevented both from bonding as mother and child. His wet nurse was from one of the villages. Moreover, Pierre chose two peasants to serve as his godparents, which most likely further

restricted his familial ties to others. It seems that in addition to not having French permeate Michel's world, Pierre wanted his son connected to the life of ordinary people, the peasants, who made the chateau come alive with their toil. Montaigne would hold them in high regard and exclaimed that they were the true philosophers. Both mother and son emotionally continued to drift apart. She spent her time managing the business affairs of the estate, even after kidney stones ended the life of Pierre and then Montaigne's. Antoinette was the daughter of a wealthy family, most likely descendants of Jewish refugees escaping the Spanish Inquisition. France had its version, but the French had forced the invading Moslems to the other side of the Pyrenees over 800 years before, and Jews were not as reviled by the French as they were in Spain where religiosity and ethnicity were fused into a form of extreme nationalism.

Montaigne (2019) began his essay "Of the Education of Children" by exclaiming how little he knew, even less than school children weighed down by Aristotle, the "monarch of modern learning" (p. 107). He complained loudly about tutors who "… never stop bawling into our ears, as though they were pouring water into an empty funnel; and our task is only to repeat what was told to us. … I don't want him [the tutor] to think and talk alone; I want him to listen to his pupil speaking in his turn. … Let him be made to show what he has just learned in a hundred aspects …" (pp.110–111). He went on to say, "Let the tutor make his charge pass everything through a sieve and lodge nothing in his head based on mere authority and trust — let not Aristotle's principles be principles to him any more than the Stoics and the Epicureans. Let this variety be sent before him; he will choose if he cannot; if not, he will remain in doubt. … For, if he embraces Xenophon's and Plato's opinions by his own reasoning, they will no longer be theirs, they will be his" (p. 111). Later in his essay, referring to schools, he stated, "As a boy, a man, and a graybeard, I have always thought and judged them the same way. But, among other things, I have always disliked the discipline of most of our schools. …. They are a real jail of captive youth. … Go in at lesson time: you hear nothing but cries, both from tortured boys and from masters drunk with rage. What a way to arouse zest for their lesson in these tender and timid souls, to guide them to it with a horrible scowl and hands armed with rods!" (pp. 122–123).

Montaigne's accounts of cruelty fill his essays. He even considered it a vice, an addiction. In 1548, and just in his early teens, he witnessed a frenzied mob protesting King Enri II's salt tax on Bordeaux. The mob brutally killed the city's military governor, recounted in Montaigne's (2019) essay, "Various Outcomes of the Same Plan." This "tempestuous sea of madmen" (p. 96) made an indelible impression on the young Montaigne. He provided strategies on how his response to the mob could have resulted in a different outcome, for him and for the citizens of Bordeaux, who consequently endured three months of a brutal occupation by the king's army, aptly called a "reign of terror" (Bakewell, 2010, pp. 62–63). A decade and a half later, French Catholics became concerned about the growing dissatisfaction among Protestants. The half measures granted to them to practice their faith were not enough. Even Montaigne was attracted to this new Christian religion stripped of iconography and the requirement to do good deeds for salvation. But Montaigne drew back on the advice of his close friend, Étienne de La Boétie. One massacre, triggered by the Catholic Duke de Guise in 1562, was followed by a series of uprisings and battles, and one peace accord after another to almost the end of the century. Montaigne's family included Protestant dissidents; he associated with Protestants; he even had a brother who fought in their ranks. But Montaigne remained a Catholic, stoically refusing to be caught in the religious firestorms that periodically swept through France. He remained aloof for the most part and was a trusted mediator, but bloodthirsty passions and deeply embedded insecurities between the factions overruled reason (Bakewell, 2010, pp. 79–89).

In regard to my own early education, it began in a Catholic elementary school. The rod was a 12-inch ruler. It was a cattle prod of sorts. Though not used to draw blood, it stung and was just used to corral us boys. It was rumored that the principal's office had a "spanking machine," but the mention of an Iron Maiden, it seems to me now, would have worked wonders in keeping us on the straight and narrow. The ruler was mostly used for talking in class, arriving late after lunch (because there were more interesting things to do beyond the classroom) — pranks, and such.

Among the pranks I witnessed, one was particularly ingenious: Johnny, who sat one desk ahead of me, in the row on my right, scraped old chewing gum off the dirt-encrusted wooden floor, enough to create a small number of dark gray balls, which he rolled between his fingers, and spaced them in a line across the top of his desk, right above the slot for a long-abandoned inkwell (once used to dip pigtails). The smell of "fresh" chewing gum hovered over his desk and headed my way. I was puzzled. What next? Is he going to chew his gooey confection? Yuk! I was wrong. He began chewing, however, quite noticeably but with an empty mouth and for the benefit of Billie, the student in front of him. Nobody liked Billie for all the good reasons. Between Johnny's fake chewing, the smacking of his lips, and the delicious aroma of what smelled like fresh gum, the trap was ready to be sprung. Billie turned around, and seeing the perfect alignment of gray balls, asked to have one. "OK, came the reply, but just one." Of course, it immediately increased its value. Then, the real chewing started, and the ultimate test of this new confection scraped off the floor of a school well along in years. Billie's

reaction was astonishing. It was as if he were having a grand mal seizure. He could not say anything that made sense. He spat the concoction on the floor. His face produced more contortions than Lon Chaney becoming a werewolf in a 1940s B-movie — but a heck of a lot faster and without a full moon. Johnny could not constrain his laughter and most of the boys, enjoying a cruel trick, joined in. Sister Agnitha, a Blessed Sacrament nun, rushed to Billie's side and hurried him to a restroom to wash out his mouth with lots of soap, not for foul language but for a truly foul mouth. Mark Twain probably could not think of such a joke, even for such a deserving character. But why it smelled so enticing — such a promising treat — shall remain a mystery. Billie became a better person for the experience, however, and enjoyed some increasing popularity. I believe it was because he became one of us, something like a fraternity induction. Other than dragging the gagging, expectorating, whining, and coughing Billie out of the classroom for an emergency cleansing, Sister Agnitha did not conduct an investigation, which the incident clearly deserved. Perhaps she saw it as a mills-of-God-justice in action and lectured Billie about being cordial to other students.

This was in the late 1940s. Classrooms were crowded, desks often shared, and the nuns had their hands full; and gum was plastered everywhere, including the desks bolted to the floors. I think Sister Agnitha was the exception in not dolling out, especially in Billie's case, quick snaps of the ruler. At times, the sisters employed antediluvian teaching methods, which in retrospect may have reflected a degree of personal frustration. Perhaps some of them had lost their husbands or fiancés in the Second World War, even the First World War, and turned to a life devoted to religion but sacrificing one of the most basic of human needs. Also, some families encouraged daughters to enter the sisterhood and sons the priesthood, especially first- and second-generation immigrant families. Women entering the sisterhood participated in a lengthy process of spiritual steps of ascendancy in which, if successful, they became Brides of Christ to dedicate the rest of their lives to teaching and other endeavors of self-sacrifice throughout the world as exemplified by the Albanian nun, Mother Teresa, now canonized as St. Teresa of Calcutta.

I was born in 1943, which seems now an impossibly long time ago. But my first memory of life goes back to the year of the Battle of the Bulge. I remember walking down a long hallway, still wobbly on my feet, looking way up, and seeing something beautiful beyond words, my family Christmas tree. It must have been the evening of December 24, 1944. I was totally consumed by this extraordinary vision. It was not until having an undergraduate theology course that I was able to resurrect this image from my bank of lost memories. The tree was a perfect metaphor for the beatific vision — when a soul becomes one with God. Imagine, my tree (!) remains my first recollection of life, a memory of ineffable beauty! I still have Christmas decorations from that night. The balls, instead of having a metal cap at the top, had cardboard strips below the openings to hold a string with which to fasten them to trees. The cardboard, which was folded like an accordion, replaced metal for the war effort. That Christmas Eve was the time when American soldiers were engaged in the Battle of the Bulge. Many went to midnight mass on the 24th not knowing if they would live to see the sun set on the 25th. Many did not. I am grateful for their sacrifice and to my parents for giving me this burst of dazzling light during one of the darkest moments of human history.

Not long after that, Edward R. Murrow, the co-creator of broadcast radio journalism with William Shirer, followed General Patton's sweep across western Germany and entered the Buchenwald concentration camp with American troops. Among the many horrors he saw, he recorded the following for his broadcast: "Death had already marked many of them, but they were smiling with their eyes. I looked out over the mass of men to the green fields beyond, where well-fed Germans were plowing" (Kendrick, 1969, p. 313). They were slaves of the Third Reich and the parallels to Black slavery in Colonial America and the American Republic are unmistakable, except slaves in America were fed. Nazis wanted Jews, Roma, political dissidents, as well as all others who did not fit the Aryan norm if not exterminated immediately, to be slowly consumed by hard labor, and eventually starved to death. I know of one inspiring case of a German family who immigrated to Brooklyn after the war. While in Germany, the father would walk pass one of the death camps on his way to work and throw a paper bag that held his lunch over the barbed-wire fencing. Eventually, soldiers guarding the camp discovered what he was doing and beat him with their rifle butts. His daughter, by the way, became a nun. Murrow, by the end of the war, had earned an extraordinary reputation, gained from broadcasting live from London rooftops during the Blitz, often risking his life. He even flew on 25 bombing missions, which for the American crews was the magic number to return home. The loss of life among these crews was staggering. I believe Murrow wanted to share the danger with them, to risk his life. His first flight unloaded a bellyful of incendiary bombs over Berlin. By the end of the war, Murrow's standing among Americans was such that he was able to take a strong stand years later against Joseph McCarthy, a World War II veteran. As a junior senator from Wisconsin, McCarthy greatly exaggerated the internal threat of Soviet communism. In so doing, he trampled on the Bill of Rights and destroyed people's lives to promote his political objectives. Murrow delivered a "knockout blow" on his *See it Now* television broadcast, which occurred during the McCarthy hearings supposedly to expose communist

infiltration in the U.S. Army. His closing commentary is one of the finest speeches ever waged against a tyrant. The following is just a telling fragment:

> We proclaim ourselves, as indeed we are, defenders of freedom — what's left of it — but we cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home. The actions of the junior senator from Wisconsin have caused alarm and dismay amongst our allies abroad and given considerable aid and comfort to our enemies. (Edwards, 2004, pp. 115–116)

I was in the sixth grade of public school during the hearings and made the time to watch many of them. I found McCarthy frightening, and I did not need Murrow to tell me. But his speech made the difference for countless Americans and the Senate to take a stand in defense of freedom.

For the sisters of The Blessed Sacrament School in Brooklyn, I am obliged for the sacrifices they made to educate me. I am not grateful, however, for the technique they used to motivate me to read. I was a "tender and timid" soul like the ones Montaigne (2019) referenced in his essay "Of the Education of Children" and probably afflicted with a learning disability. Humiliation was certainly not a cure. When I could not read a word, I was taken to a lower grade. The word was written in chalk on the blackboard and read by a student. The process seems quite mechanical, but the emotional torment was deep. This, I must confess, is in the context of having an older brother in the same school who was promoted two full years beyond his grade level and won every available academic award when he graduated, save one that was unfairly denied him and given to another student. He just felt cheated. I was punished, though the intentions were good, because of a learning disability. We both suffered, but I suffered a heck of a lot more. I was determined, however, to take control of my education.

"For the sisters of The Blessed Sacrament School in Brooklyn, I am obliged for the sacrifices they made to educate me. I am not grateful, however, for the technique they used to motivate me to read."

For me, Catholic school was a prison. I was a free spirit. I wanted to spend my time exploring the world beyond the classroom. There was so much I wanted to learn. The one subject that interested me when I attended The Blessed Sacrament was the missionary history of the Catholic Church, mostly about the Jesuits converting Iroquois and Mohawk Indians in what was not yet upstate New York. The Jesuits made extraordinary sacrifices, which today are viewed as part of the long process of destroying native cultures. The Jesuit St. Isaac Jogues remains, nevertheless, an exemplar in my thinking of a priest willing to make extraordinary sacrifices, motivated by love and by the best of intentions to do good as defined by St. Ignatius Loyola. There is a chapel named in the honor Father Jogues on the eastern edge of Saratoga Lake.

Like Montaigne, I did participate in a play. My oldest brother, Eugene, attended. He had recently completed his military tour in Japan, having volunteered right out of high school. He took me for a treat at an ice cream parlor, which I believe no longer exists in Brooklyn, like hundreds of others. I learned before my brother passed that one of his duties in Japan was locating the bodies of American flyers, often found decapitated next to their aircraft. He had no hatred for the Japanese and admired much about their culture, learned some of their language, taught me some, and traveled in Japan when he had free time. He often went to remote places where former Japanese soldiers were still in uniform. He was never threatened. My brother, however, saw Japan in ruins, and he witnessed American soldiers taking their hatred out on Japanese civilians, themselves horrific victims of a military-controlled regime, infamous for committing atrocities throughout China and much of Asia. He, of course, did not condone such behavior. The Emperor-worship ethos of the military drove Japan to almost absolute ruin. When my brother arrived in Tokyo, starvation was rampant, as was prostitution. Not surprisingly, the two are intimately connected. One of the great miracles of the post-war era, in addition to having the second-largest economy in the world — until recent times — was the resurrection of the country as a constitutional monarchy and its complete rejection of militarism.

By the beginning of the fifth grade, I did manage to convince my parents that Catholic elementary school was not the place for me. I hit Public School 171 just at the right time. The fifth grade and then especially the sixth was my emancipation. My sixth grade teacher, Miss Tomao, an American of Portuguese descent, was amazing. She introduced us to the Portuguese and Spanish languages, which I subsequently studied years later in great depth, and she provided all kinds of activities for creative outlets. In her class, I gave two presentations, one on evolution, which was quite detailed with no notes, and the other on volcanism. The later garnered more interest. I included exhibits. In regard to the former, I am not sure how I got away with it — in terms of it being controversial, though I did not believe that it contradicted my religious beliefs. By that time, I was doing a good deal of independent reading, including reading my uncle's medical school texts. In retrospect, I find this all rather amazing.

The progressive spirit of public education elevated my spirit for learning and a sense of self-worth — exactly what

education should do. Like Montaigne, I read Plutarch, Cicero, and Marcus Aurelius. Eventually, I excelled in public high school, received an academic scholarship to attend a Catholic college — believe it or not. By my junior year, my college academic advisor wanted me to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship, but my heart was set on a Fulbright in Latin America. After the Fulbright, I was offered fellowships for various graduate schools, and finally, I decided to attend Indiana University, which had the best program in my field (Latin American history and cultural anthropology). Eventually, I found my way to SUNY Empire State College. When I first read about the college in a *New York Times* article (Farber, 1971), I was still in graduate school. But I was over the top with excitement! This was a sentiment expressed by thousands of readers, mostly adults who wanted a second or a first chance at earning a college degree. I could not possibly imagine, however, that someday I would become part of SUNY Empire State College. I believe that my first encounter with education made me a much better mentor by being more sensitive to the needs of my students, many of whom had their own struggles with self-doubt, which, I must admit, never left me and have caused me to deeply question the academic achievements I share with you. For this reason, students have been my first priority. One of the extraordinary developments in our institutional history is that graduates have become employees, which gives them a ready-made enthusiasm and an insider's view of the college. This happened within the first years of our existence and continues unabated.

In closing, my enthusiasm for Montaigne's views on education, now approaching 500 years since he first began composing his essays, is not because it is a formula to cure all ills. In regard to women, for example, his patriarchal views fall far short of his fellow humanists, Thomas Moore and Desiderius Erasmus. Both were advocates for the formal schooling of women. As Bakewell (2010) noted, Montaigne, however, did meet a young woman, Marie Le Jars de Gournay, who had lost her father at a young age. She was determined to learn Latin by studying books with their French translations side by side. When she came across a tome of Montaigne's essays, Marie was so enthralled that she insisted that her mother arrange for a meeting with Montaigne when he was in Paris. He was so impressed by her enthusiasm for his work that he invited her to become his adopted daughter, and she soon began assisting him in editing the 1588 edition of his essays. His relationship with her had deep meaning for Montaigne (pp. 293–295). It was as if she filled some of the void left by La Boétie's passing. Eventually, her connection to Montaigne even after his death continued. She edited the 1595 edition of his essays, and she was even invited to live at the chateau with Montaigne's mother Antoinette, his daughter Léonor, and his widow Françoise (p. 301). Marie gained fame not only as Montaigne's editor but as a novelist in her own right. Gournay became one of the founders of the Académie Française, but being a woman, she was banned from attending meetings (pp. 301–302). *Sacre bleu!* Gournay's devotion to Montaigne was dismissed, even scorned by subsequent generations of scholars. But as Sarah Bakewell (2010) observed, "In recent years much has changed, mainly because of the rise of feminism, which recognizes her as a pioneer. Her first great modern champion was a man, Mario Schiff, who wrote a full biographical study in 1910 and published new editions of her feminist works. Since then the journey has been ever upwards" (pp. 301–303).

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Lost Art

Donna Gaines, Garden City

I was an art school dropout. Although I had apprenticed with local artists as a teen, had work exhibited as part of a youth show at the Lever House in Manhattan, and was praised by my teachers for a vibrant color sense and freedom of expression, by age 19, painting left me feeling increasingly dark, alienated and adrift. I eventually located a stronger voice and greater passion in writing. Formal training in sociology and social work offered much-needed discipline, and direction. A lengthy career in journalism provided connection and community. By 1970, I stopped painting. I never thought about it again.

***The 2020,* 2020, Acrylic/spray paint/oil pastel/found plywood, 18" H x 24" W**
Photo credit: Allan Nafte

Inspired by a lifelong collaboration with my junko partner, Nick, a Teamster-artist-musician, I believed creativity was best expressed as lived experience. We called our self-styled project "Artlife." Deeply immersed in the late 1970's NYC music scene, energized by a multidimensional explosion of subculture and style, the DIY ethic was epitomized in punk's seminal band the Ramones. Unwashed, untrained, the punk eruption incited fans to create their own music, art, clothing, hair, and literature. Drawing from every available resource, local, global, and punk was rude, raw, and anarchistic — the antithesis of the dominant corporate music industry and the blue-chip "art world" order of the day.

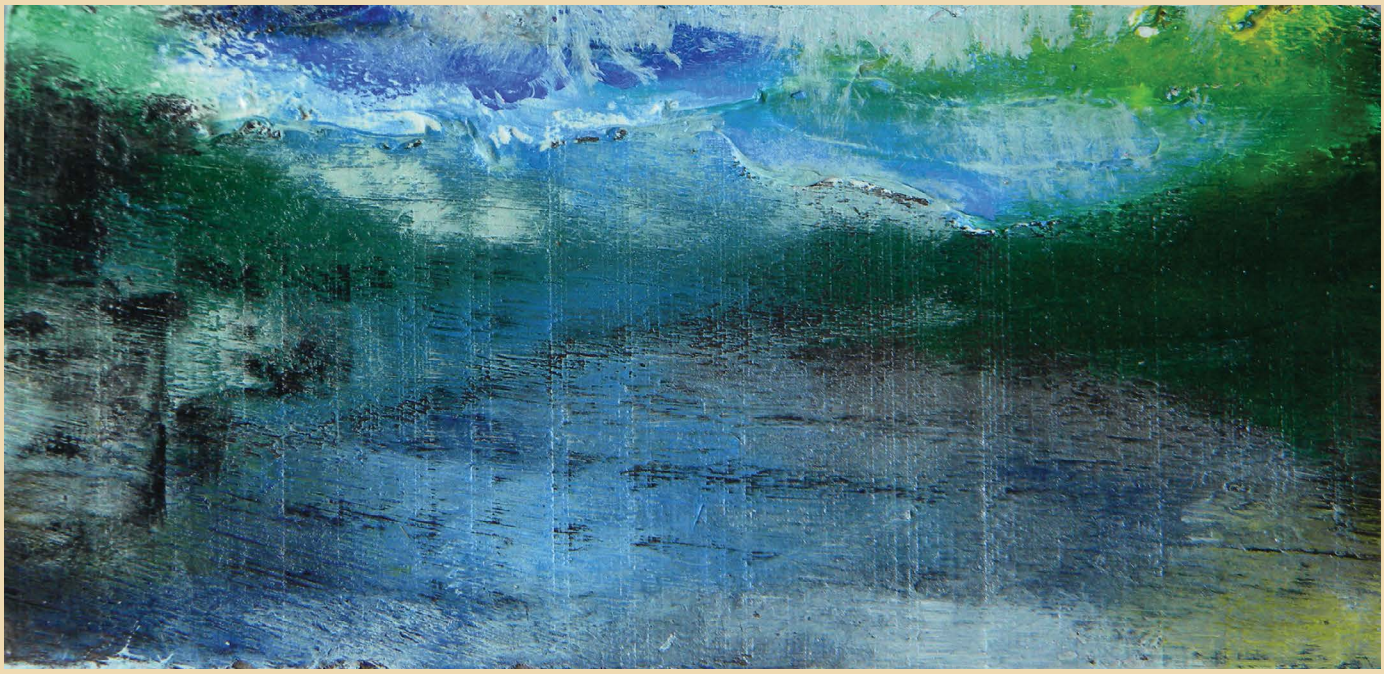
Lost Art: In fall 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated Long Island including my barrier island City of Long Beach. During long, cold, dark, and dirty months of storm recovery, the garage was the only useable space. There, in my grungy command post, desperate to maintain my sanity (and my sobriety), I started painting again. *"Civitas Ad Mare"* [City by the Sea], my first painting was an ode to my precious community — that's on our official seal. A plywood shelf I grabbed off the garage wall in a panic became my first canvas — a hapless barricade against the angry black waters of Sandy. Dried, sanitized, I threw randomly found materials at it — house paint, candle wax, spray paint, nail polish, mascara, sand, dirt, and acrylics, anything salvaged from the storm. I used Q-tips, fingers, razor blades, knives, glue, industrial paintbrushes, working in blues, greens, and darker tones under a grim but hopeful sun, it expressed the deep love, sorrow, and connection I felt to our battered community-in-exile. I aimed to reclaim whatever survived because everything (and everyone) deserves a second chance.

That Christmas, Nick bought me a set of art supplies — acrylic paints, watercolors, oil crayons, and brushes. For their birthdays, friends began requesting paintings. I continued to collect discarded wood on the street, celebrating the cracks and crooked dimensions, the diversity of size, a spirituality of imperfection. I'll never sketch out a plan; I start from wherever I am, working with whatever I've got that day, organically, intuitively. There's no right or wrong, no good or bad here, and only when it's done can I grasp my intention — what it means, what to call it. The sea, garden, faith, regeneration, joy, hope, light, the body, and the power of community are reoccurring themes.

In recent years my work has been displayed as part of group shows in the lobby of our City Hall. In 2019 Artists in Partnership and the Long Beach Arts Council granted me a "Women in the Arts" award for my creative contributions to my community. Today my studio, "Art on Neptune" is a gathering place for friends to mess around and have fun, open to the street like the garage bands of yore. The Ramones believed rock 'n' roll belonged to everyone.

Well, so does art, and poetry, spirituality, dance, the ocean, and everything wonderful and true under the sun.

**Special love and thanks to Nick, Allan Nafte, James Graham, Barbara Kantz, and Barbarie Rothstein.*



Lost Art, 2016, Acrylic/oil crayon/nail polish/found plywood, 9.5" H x 4.5" W
Photo credits (this page): James Graham

(l–r) *Eyes of May,* 2020, Acrylic/oil crayon/nail polish/found plywood, 14.5" H x 9" W; *Discipleship,* 2014, Acrylic/spray paint/nail polish/ *house paint/found plywood, 17.75" H x 21.5" W*

Venus in Taurus, 2013, Acrylic/house paint/oil crayon/gesso/varnish, 11.75" H x 37.5" W

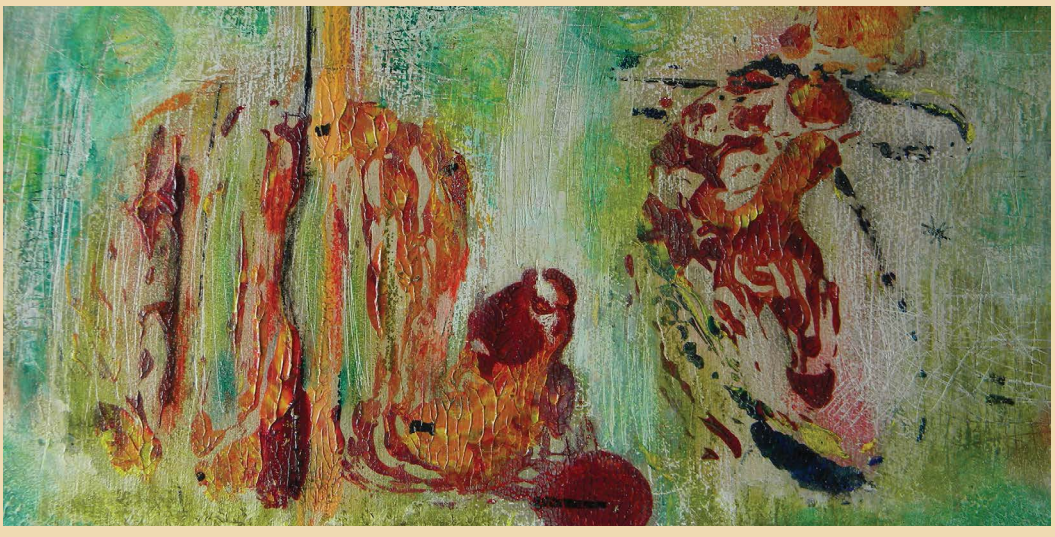
Porch Art (Jazz), 2016, Acrylic/spray paint/nail polish/ found plywood, 11.5" H x 24.25" W
Photo credits (this page): James Graham

(l–r) *Gardiner's Bay (Triple Immersion),* 2016, Acrylic/house paint/found plywood, 9" H X 12.75" W; *Somali Pirates (LBSA),* 2013, Acrylic/canvas, 24" H x 36" W

Civitas Ad Mare, 2013, Acrylic/spray paint/oil crayons/sand/dirt/found plywood, 10" H x 28.25" W

Mambo Son Rise, 2018, Acrylic/spray paint/oil crayon,
10.25“ H x 23.5” W
Photo credit: Allan Nafte

I’ll never sketch out a plan; I start from wherever I am, working with whatever I’ve got that day, organically, intuitively.



(above left)
The Culture (Wisdom),
2020, Acrylic/oil paint/chalk,
13.5” H x 11” W

(left)
Two Kittens in the Bramble, He Said, 2013, Enamel/acrylic/spray paint/nail polish,
11.5” H x 23.25” W

Photo credits: James Graham

Revisiting The 1619 Project: A Heartfelt Response During a Racialized Pandemic

Rhianna C. Rogers, Buffalo

Reading the article titled, "America Wasn't a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made it One," written by Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019), creator of The 1619 Project on the legacy of slavery in America and winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, helped me put into perspective much of my own lived experiences. The events of the past few months, including the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and many others, have brought back into focus the ways that African Americans/Blacks in the U.S. sit on the fringes of its culture. The complex intersections, conflicted histories, and marginalization of diverse historical narratives are things that have not always been at the forefront of historical research or highlighted as an important part of national conversation. As I reflected on this, I remember when I was a 3-year-old child in kindergarten: We were playing with crayons and the teacher asked us to draw a picture of our families. I wanted my picture to look like my family, so I chose a white crayon for my mom, a black crayon for my dad, a white crayon for my sister, and a burnt sienna crayon for me and my brother. I remember a student asking me why I chose the burnt sienna crayon and not black one and I responded, "Obviously, because I am not black, I am burnt sienna." The complexities of race are easily misunderstood and deeply connected to each person's understanding of culture and identity. Hannah-Jones' work has spoken to me not only on an academic level, but a personal one. This paper will interweave my research and lived experiences as a response to the Hannah-Jones' 1619 article.

Even though I grew up in a progressive part of California, an hour north of Los Angeles, my racially pluralistic upbringing was quite unique in the early 1980s. Very few people had openly identified themselves at multiracial at the time. Because my approach to race and ethnicity was so unique, I too faced a lot of adversity from different groups of people. For example, because my physical features and behaviors cannot clearly be distinguished as belonging to a particular racial group, I regularly got asked "Where are you from?" or "Where are your people from?" In most cases, no one was looking for Los Angeles, California. When Hannah-Jones wrote about her school project instructor asking her to pick out an African country to discuss her ancestry, that scenario spoke volumes to me. I am many cultures and made up of many races. If I were put in that same situation, a "simple" report could take an entire year to write … if not more.

To frame this paper, I wanted to call back to a 2015 Diversity Forum I moderated on "Race and Policing in the U.S."[1] As part of my framing speech at the forum, I read a quote from former FBI Director James B. Comey where he addressed the "hard truths" about policing, including his acknowledgment of racial bias among law enforcement officers and a "disconnect" between police agencies' interactions with communities of color. As Comey (2015) stated:

> [W]e are at a crossroads. As a society, we can choose to live our everyday lives, raising our families and going to work, hoping that someone, somewhere will do something to ease the tension — to smooth over the conflict. … [O]r we can choose to have an open and honest discussion about what our relationship is today (para. 3).
>
> [Much] of our history is not pretty. At many points in American history, law enforcement enforced the status quo, a status quo that was often brutally unfair to disfavored groups. (The Hard Truths section, para. 2)

Photo credit: Andrea Wenglowskyj

Rhianna C. Rogers

It is sad to say that five years later, we are still grappling with the same issues, though not surprisingly. Throughout Hannah-Jones' narrative, this became painfully clear as hundreds of years of racialized mistreatments and ignored traumas were discussed in detail. From Lincoln's notion of racialized separation to the legacy of slavery and historical trauma on Black and brown peoples, the tensions within U.S. culture have always been present, though not always openly discussed (Hannah-Jones, 2019).

It is important to note that not all white U.S. citizens, police, or law enforcement contribute to these tensions. Nor

would it be fair to state that all police encounters with people of color (POC) are abusive. Case in point, look at the case of former Buffalo police officer Cariol Horne who, in 2006, stopped a white police officer from killing a suspect, which has led to the discussion of a nationwide ban on police chokeholds (Ross, 2020); but these stereotypes tend to dictate current discussions about police and POC interactions and are often reinforced in our media, local communities, families and everyday lives.

So how can we contend against these broad generalizations of people? First, we have to acknowledge that a double standard exists between white and POC assailants, and that these racial disparities affect both innocent and guilty citizens. Case in point, in 1992, during the Rodney King and Reginald Denny cases/LA riots,

> as part of a report by the ABC news program '20/20,' two cars, one filled with young black men, the other with young white men, navigated the same route, in the same car, at the same speed through Los Angeles streets on successive nights. The car filled with young black men was stopped by the police several times; the white group was not stopped once, despite observing police cars in their immediate area on no less than 16 separate occasions during the evening. (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights as cited in Weatherspoon, 2004, p. 444)

The unequal treatment of POC in our criminal justice system, due to biases and racial profiling, manifests itself in a mushrooming prison population that is overwhelmingly Black and Hispanic. Additionally, the systemic criminalization of these communities has resulted in the decay of communities of color that have given up an entire generation of young men to prison. Ultimately, the alienation of POC's experiences has led to the widely held belief among Black and Latin/Hispanic Americans that the criminal justice system deserves neither their trust nor support. The result is that a vicious cycle has evolved into a self-fulfilling prophecy — more POC arrests and convictions perpetuate the assumption that POC commit more crimes, and more POC feel that police are a threat, which in turn leads to more fear and support for racial profiling in the media and, ultimately, leads to more POC arrests (Weatherspoon, 2004).

So how can we deal with such a complex issue? There are many answers to this question, but in my own worldview, I believe that identity should not be dictated by our skin tone, but rather the cultures that are a part of our upbringing and surrounding. I am multiracial. I am American. I am Black. I am white. Being raised this way made me better understand all my ancestors, much the same as Nikole Hannah-Jones' father had pride in being an American and a citizen of the U.S. My parents encouraged me to learn the "truths" about history (e.g., slavery, racism, limitations on gender roles), which allowed me to confront difficult concepts at a very young age, like why some of my ancestors enslaved others or why others were enslaved.

When I read Hannah-Jones' historical retelling of the last 400 years of African American history, I was drawn to my own parents' firsthand reminder of racial tensions existing in the U.S. Case in point, my parents married in 1974, just seven years after the landmark 1967 Supreme Court repeal of the anti-miscegenation laws banning people of different races from marrying (see the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* case in Lombardo, 1988). Both of my parents were first-generation Californians whose parents had moved to CA just a generation earlier looking for new opportunities after WWII, not much different from Hannah-Jones' family. Both grew up near each other in different neighborhoods of Venice Beach, CA. Having met in high school, my parents married soon after and made plans to begin a family. Even if they felt they could take on the world, the outside world was still adjusting to the new notion of legally married mixed-race couples. On quite a few occasions, the police harassed my parents; both before and after I was born, my dad was pulled over without provocation many times, handcuffed by the police, and thrown on the ground, many times in front of my mom. Yet, my father is one of the proudest Americans I know. He and his entire family have dedicated their lives to military work and service and are some of the first people I know to hang a flag in their lawns, much the same as Hannah-Jones' own father.

Confronting difficult topics like this at a young age allowed me to look deeper at myself, society, and understanding *how* and *why* racist behaviors were believed by those around me. Many times these behaviors were based on a general lack of knowledge of people of color's lived experiences, and other times a complete denial of POC mistreatments. The feeling of othering and the lack of acknowledgment of historical traumas related to racial injustice is not unique to my experience. Case in point, seven years ago (Rogers & Tripi, 2013), I co-wrote a report for the Buffalo Project, a 10-year action-research project I created to study diversity, equity, and inclusion in Buffalo, NY. The data set included the following statement:

> As more students expressed their experiences in [the study], it became apparent that many Buffalo students were uninformed about other cultures and understood each other [only] through their limited exposure in media, textbooks, personal experiences, and commentaries conveyed to them by someone else. (p. 7)

Seven years later and as a direct result of the Floyd/#BLM protests, we are only now starting to see institutions seriously consider the impacts of historical inaccuracies and "whitewashed" histories of POC experiences. A perfect example is the student-led protest at

Princeton University over the ongoing glorification of known segregationist, former President Woodrow Wilson. Though these complaints have been ongoing since 2015/2016, Princeton just decided in 2020 to remove his name from buildings (Tomlinson & Spike, 2020.) Other industries have followed suit, including the Washington NFL team and food manufacturing companies (Sanchez, 2020; Valinsky, 2020). Though these are movements in the right direction, the lack of cultural awareness or concern of these long-standing offenses prior to the recent social unrest is disconcerting, to say the least. As stated in another Buffalo Project publication (Rogers & Woznick, 2015):

> One of the key barriers to cultural openness in higher education has long been the discrepancy in equity and access experienced by students who have been historically underrepresented in higher education. (p. 52)
>
> [O]ne of the most significant barriers is the lack of cultural awareness that diverse students encounter upon entering the (physical or virtual) classroom. (p. 49)

Reading the 1619 article gave me a frame for contextualizing *why* so many people still feel so disconnected to racialized histories. It has only been 56 years since the civil rights movement, which marked the first time African Americans were able to legally participate in many things taken for granted by others, including voting. As Sir Hilary Beckles (2020), vice-chancellor of the University of the West Indies, president of Universities Caribbean, and chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission recently stated:

> From that moment, when the British government in 1636, took the first step to legally classify all blacks in their colonies as non-human, chattel, property, and real estate and proceeded with their European partners to build and manage with it a global business model for 400 years, the greatest 'financial juggernaut' of world history, humanity was poisoned with the toxic pandemic of race hatred. (para. 11)
>
> It is this culture of centuries upon which the American nation is built that continues to choke the air from black lungs. (para. 13)

Learning these "hard truths" can be difficult. When we have been trained in one historical narrative, being exposed to another can sometimes feel like an emotional challenge and/or confrontation of your own "truths," beliefs, and ideals. But these acknowledgments *must* happen if we are to heal as a society.

As I have mentioned in multiple settings, much of the current racial climate in the U.S. is a trigger for many POC. Having had our histories ignored for generations only to now have many of the atrocities exposed and brought up on the news and in the media on a daily basis is exhausting. It is because of many researchers like Hannah-Jones and her 1619 Project that many of these hidden narratives have been made visible to mainstream U.S. culture. Though many are tired, what we are seeing right now is a call to action from the people, POC and allies alike. We no longer want to see inaccurate U.S. histories or POC ignored for their contributions to our society; rather, we want to learn, even if it is painful, about the good and bad of the U.S. culture and how we have built this country together.

As Hannah-Jones highlights throughout The 1619 Project, the confrontation of diverse histories requires that people recognize the legacy of traumas within certain groups, and the repercussions of being exposed to a sanitized view of history and exclusions. Let me illustrate this through my own example … after a week of living in Buffalo and joining my college in 2010, a colleague approached me and asked me questions about my identity. I told them much of the same story I just recited earlier about my family and parents … but there was a long pause and the colleague eventually said, "You have to choose if you are white or black here." I was insulted and I said in response, "Never in my life have I been asked to choose between my mother and my father. I won't do that here." It was the last time that faculty member spoke to me (we continued to work together for five more years until they retired.) Recently, a white colleague at the college informed a group of faculty across the state that he doubted systemic racism existed in the university system and that POC (he focused on me at this point in the conversation) would have to prove to him that it did. In both cases, my colleagues indicated their lack of understanding around my identity and, more broadly, the historical narratives, years of peer-reviewed research, varied identities, and beliefs of POC. Additionally, I have had colleagues say that they were surprised that I was so collegial and articulate, as if highlighting the inaccuracies of their biases and stereotypes should be a shock to me. A few told me as we became friends that they had heard I had a bad attitude. As a person of color in the U.S., this was not something new to me. I face constant stereotypes, "the Jezebel: a sexualized, aggressive black woman whose goal is to conquer men; the Mammy: a lovable, non-threatening, unattractive black woman who was meant to comfort others; and the Headstrong Black Woman: a loud, sassy, argumentative woman who does what she wants and is there for entertainment," which I wrote more about in another publication (Rogers, 2019, p. 171). As the examples highlight, the danger of trivializing a person's lived experiences and speaking about a subject in which you may have limited knowledge leads to further othering and the intentional and unintentional exclusion of diverse voices. As I mentioned on the *Asian American Herald* talk show, we need to do better. People of color are not interested in tolerance (nobody wants to be tolerated); rather,

people of color want an equitable seat at the table to contextualize racism, express their own histories, and create spaces for growth and healing (Rogers, 2020).

In my own life, experiences of othering and racism pushed me to long for a safe space to discuss my worldviews and learn about others. Since I could not find one, I had to create one, which has now grown into the Buffalo Project.

> **The Buffalo Project Mission:** To develop action-based diversity initiatives that focus on utilizing participant observations of culture to inform solution-making efforts in college and community environments. (Rogers, 2020)

I knew that if I felt alone and was forced to conform to the assumptions and biases around me, then others may be feeling the same pressures. Based on the data I have collected from colleagues, students, and the community, I realized I was right: Community members could feel the impacts of racism and forms of alienation inflicted on them just like I did. In an odd way, hearing that others were facing these obstacles helped me to feel less alone. Creating a sense of community and belonging is one of the main reasons why I have so passionately pursued this research for over 10 years. A colleague in Florida once asked me why I made such a drastic change in the focus of my work in New York, given that I had spent most of my academic research in Florida working on Latin American archaeology and history projects. I told him that it was a form of cultural and psychological preservation and a way for me to take negative feelings and build toward something positive; not only was I there to help myself, but the Buffalo Project could also be a way to help those around me. I have been fortunate to win quite a few awards for this project and help co-develop some important programs at the college (e.g., Deliberative Conversations, virtual residencies, SUNY Empire Connects,[2] the Annual Diversity Forum series, and others). The network of individuals that has formed around this work has helped me to develop the community feel I longed for (as did others).

So, where do we go from here? First, we need to recognize and respond to the fact that American colleges and universities are experiencing a dramatic shift in learner demographics (i.e., the rise of adult, so-called "nontraditional" students and the rise of underrepresented minorities (URM) and POC in college and university settings) *and* that students are demanding more representation in their curriculum. Works like Nikole Hannah-Jones' 1619 Project and those from other Black and brown scholars should be staples in K-12 *and* college-level learning. Scholars have pointed to the necessity of "mapping diversity efforts" (Halualani, Haiker, & Lancaster, 2010); that is, the need for institutions of higher education to engage in self-inquiry around the issues of diversity and inclusion, and "close the loop" on implementation processes.

To really meet the needs of our learners, 21st-century academics need to reconsider how they envision curriculum development, history, and the impacts of inclusion practices on the learners themselves. *We need to do better.*

So how can we create a SUNY Empire environment that encourages inclusion, cultural pluralization, the diversification of voice, and call to action?

I would like to pull a few points from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work I have been engaged with, including the SUNY Empire State College (2020) Presidential Town Hall on Racial Justice that I co-moderated with Dr. David Fullard, and my recent work with the organization #BlackandBrilliant. Here are a few tangible action items to move forward this conversation:

1. Develop a mentoring process and DEI training models that utilize cultural sensitivity, and that develop intercultural competencies and values diversity, voices, positionalities, and learning styles.
2. Develop more brave and safe spaces for constituents to voice their opinions, concerns, and to develop their own ideas.
3. Diversify leadership opportunities for marginalized groups and POC (e.g., in corporate America vis-a-vis roles in the C-Suite, middle management, and academia).
4. Recommend up-skilling training and technological funding for marginalized people and create pipelining for professional development and growth.
5. Create a strategic plan of action to make real change and document results (closing the loop).

The change needs to start here with us. On June 30, 2020, Hannah-Jones wrote a new article in *The New York Times Magazine* highlighting additional ways to bridge the racial gap in the U.S. As she argued, one way is to offer reparations, two is to acknowledge the need for deeper understandings of historical context, and three is to review the data indicating the bleak state of Black America today. I would challenge you all to read this latest article and some of the literature she pulled together. It is the responsibility of all of us to prepare culturally competent members of the 21st-century globalized community and workforce. As in the Buffalo Project, the development of more data-driven, participatory action-research projects across the U.S. can offer one way to re-envision appropriate responses to retaining and building environments that are more inclusive and welcoming. By doing so, institutions can raise the educational attainment of diverse populations and increase institutional retention rates, ultimately empowering individuals to impact their

own communities. *Privilege will never disappear, but it is all of our responsibility to make sure that it does not dictate access.*

Notes

[1] For more information about SUNY Empire's Collegewide Cultural Diversity and Inclusion Forum series, please visit https://www.esc.edu/diversity-forum/ (the recording of the "Race and Policing" session is available at the bottom of the page).

[2] In response to the COVID-19 crises, SUNY Empire Connects emerged as a virtual series of synchronous, responsive programming sessions designed to reduce social isolation and build a positive community among students, staff, and faculty. What began as an isolated series of conversations within the college and connected communities merged into a collaborative Office of Academic Affairs initiative coordinated by Student Success with lead partners from faculty member, Dr. Rhianna Rogers, and members of the Student Success team, Seana Logsdon and Ashley Mason. SUNY Empire Connects collaborates with other successful college programming (e.g., the Buffalo Project, Deliberative Conversations, academic support workshops) to offer adaptive programming in response to emerging needs. Programming is open to students, faculty, and staff as both participants and presenters. This program is now permanently housed in Student Life.

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Virtual Student Exchange: SUNY-Venezuela Higher Education Engagement Initiative

Victoria Vernon, Manhattan

Last fall, 12 of my SUNY Empire State College students participated in a six-week virtual exchange project with students from Venezuela as part of their economics courses. Through dialogue with peers abroad, they drew lessons from the current situation in Venezuela, analyzed the impact of economic policies on the daily lives of Venezuelans, and practiced intercultural communication skills. Below, I will provide a short description of how this project evolved. I will also share some of my course resources and my reflections on the experience.

A shiny tourist bus screeched to a stop near a gated community in Cuernavaca, Mexico. A cheerful group of 40 university professors spilled onto the sidewalk, admiring their tropical surroundings. I was among this group of people who represented various SUNY colleges at the three-day intensive training seminar organized by the SUNY Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Center. The goal of this COIL project was to bring together 20 pairs of instructors to brainstorm and create six-week virtual exchange modules to be offered the following term within their existing courses, and to consider continued collaboration for another year or two.

COIL provided this project with world-class support. Joining us as mentors were five veterans of the COIL movement. Among this star team of experienced COILers was our own SUNY Empire State College superstar of international education, Lorette Calix. Mentors shared their own experiences with virtual exchange, offered technologies and tools for remote collaboration, and assisted in writing joint module descriptions, developing measurable learning goals, and creating joint assignments. Advice was well appreciated and needed because instructors within most collaborating pairs taught different courses, often in different disciplines. One set of pairs in my group included a professor of international politics and a professor of nutrition. Other pairs included instructors of Spanish and chemistry, fashion and marketing. These partners successfully found intersections in their corresponding sciences by, for example, focusing their modules on international food policy and GMOs, Spanish for science, and high-fashion marketing. My partner, Eddy Bravo, was a professor of human resource management from Universidad de Oriente, a public university located in the beautiful coastal area of eastern Venezuela. Her field was only a step away from my field of economics. We decided to focus our module on economic policies that influence work, wages, and labor markets.

The meetings in Mexico were followed by a six-week COIL Academy training online, peppered with synchronous Zoom meetings, during which we gave each other feedback on module design. Within weeks, rough drafts of our joint modules were churned into detailed syllabi.

Starting with the bus ride from the airport, and the following days over meals of tacos, refried beans, and guacamole, we learned from our Venezuelan colleagues about the dire straits of their existence. Two decades ago, Venezuela was the richest country in South America, but now it is the poorest. The attempts of Presidents Chávez (1999–2013) and Maduro (2013–present) to reduce inequality drove

Victoria Vernon

most of the population into poverty. For a decade, the country rode the wave of bullish oil markets — it exported oil and imported consumer goods such as electronics, chemicals, cars, food, and medicine, which were sold to consumers at subsidized prices. The government tried to redistribute the country's wealth by taking over private companies and land, and by imposing regulations on private businesses. But these policies failed: seized assets were poorly managed and increasing regulations stifled domestic production. Government policies included currency exchange controls, which made the dollar unavailable for companies that needed to import raw materials and machinery to produce goods locally. Government price regulations made many companies unprofitable, causing them to stop producing and worsening shortages. When oil prices went south, revenues fell, and the country further slashed imports. Combined with the hyperinflation of several thousand percent a year, basic necessities

became scarce and significantly more expensive than they are in the U.S. Meanwhile, wages fell below $100/month and unemployment increased to levels higher than we have ever seen under the Great Depression or the coronavirus. The government blamed its opposition, foreign enemies, and private companies for the food scarcity, accusing them of intentionally sabotaging production in an attempt to destabilize the country.

Our Venezuelan colleagues — who didn't miss an opportunity for a good joke — optimistically pointed out the good part: gasoline was virtually free, you could fill a tank by giving the gas attendant a piece of chewing gum, and also there were no traffic issues anymore since fewer people could afford to own a vehicle. Yet, they also mentioned that they no longer go outside in the evenings because of crime and social unrest, and they built fences and installed security equipment in their houses because of vandalism; they acquired plastic water storage tanks because the water supply is unreliable; whoever could afford generators bought them because of persistent electricity blackouts; and the internet worked with only intermittent success. Some of their stories brought back my memories of the Soviet Union in transition, with its shortages of food and medications, long lines for basic items, barter exchanges, hyperinflation, and reliance on relatives abroad who could send money and medications. Universities in Venezuela have seen an exodus of faculty and students over the last eight years; those who could emigrate have left the country. Public education is free and universities still function, and students are earning degrees, although the returns on education are low. It seems that those who have not left stayed because they own their houses and love their beautiful country, and hope to see a new government one day, perhaps with the help of the United States.

My Venezuelan partner, Eddy, and I set up student collaboration through a private Facebook group decorated with logos of both universities. Despite my worries, none of the U.S. students objected to using social media; on the contrary, they found the mode of delivery easy and intuitive. My other concern was that some Venezuelan students don't speak English. Eddy herself spoke only Spanish, so I used my intermediate language skills to communicate with her. The hope was that the language barrier would be mitigated by automatic translation built into Facebook. In my observation, the language barrier was never completely removed because the automatic translation was either imprecise or required extra clicks, so U.S. students were more likely to respond to those few Venezuelan students who posted in English. Another concern was that Venezuelan students were traditional-age, whereas our students were older. These differences overall did not matter for communication. The only time I noticed the experience divide was in the discussion of ideas for students' own small businesses. Virtually all Venezuelan students said that they wanted to have a store that sells food, drink, or other necessities, whereas U.S. students had service ideas such as a childcare center, gym, or delivery business. This divide is likely due to economic realities that prompt our minds to look for unmet wants and needs.

One other lesson I drew could be generalized to all online courses: Some students post to discussions late, and their posts — however interesting — receive no replies. In my future courses, I will have to set up incentives or rules to require discussion contributions early in the week. I will also require more than two replies per discussion because sometimes interesting thoughts did not generate enough feedback (for example, some economic policies were mentioned but not discussed in depth). Finally, I would like to experiment with the mode of delivery in our next round of virtual exchange by offering it in Moodle. Now that most if not all students in the world are familiar with online learning, access to an online platform shouldn't present challenges, but, as instructors, we would gain extra features for assessment such as being able to pull up contributions by name, and the posts would be more visible and better organized chronologically. The only new concern with Moodle is that translation will have to be done manually, or we may ask Spanish speakers to post Google translations of their posts next to the Spanish text.

At the end of the course, we offered students a three-question survey:

1) Do you think that virtual exchange is an effective way of learning about another country, and why?
2) Was there any aspect of this virtual exchange that was surprising, stressful, or confusing?
3) What would you do differently if you were in charge of organizing a similar six-week virtual exchange?

Most of the answers were very positive, in tune with this student's comment: "I really enjoyed this part of the course. I was able to get a different perspective on the economy in Venezuela that I could not have received from the media." A U.S. student mentioned that she used a different translating service when the Facebook translation was unclear. A Venezuelan student said that he would enjoy synchronous Zoom meetings. We are planning to add a synchronous meeting in the next round of exchanges.

For my students' grades, virtual exchange counted as several discussions and a final project. But I hope that in addition to a grade, students gained something intangible from this virtual exchange experience. Perhaps next time they see a headline about Venezuela, they will recall faces and words of the students they met in the course, and will continue reading. I hope that

Image provided by the author.

when travel returns to normal, they will choose to visit a new country and will connect with more people around the globe. Maybe some of our Venezuelan students will be inspired to learn English, and some U.S. students will develop an interest in a new language or culture. We hope that our students will carry on the curiosity sparked by the course to build bridges that will make this world a friendlier place.

Here is the module we developed for the Work and Wages course:

Description

In this course, students will participate in an online global networking component with students from Venezuela. Through meaningful cross-cultural engagement, students will have an opportunity to learn from each other. The joint module will culminate with a collaborative project in which pairs of students create a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the main points from the weekly assignments. The goal is for students to walk away with a transformative experience that will spark interest in other countries and shape their future cross-cultural interactions.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this COIL module, students will be able to:

1) Research and explain basic facts about the economic environment for workers in Venezuela and the U.S., including income per capita, leading industries, main exports and imports, unemployment rates, and inflation.
2) Identify economic problems in each country for workers.
3) Give examples of government regulations and policies, and explain how they shape the experiences of workers and employers in the labor market.
4) Compare and contrast the operations of socialist and capitalist economic systems as they relate to the labor market and workers' well-being.

Week 1: Icebreaker

Record a short video or write a post with pictures in which you tell us about yourself and your job. Where do you live? What is your town famous for? What is the largest industry or the biggest employer in your area? What kind of job do you have now, or expect to do in the future? What do you like about your job, and what do you dislike about it? What is your superpower (a special skill, something you do better than other people)? Show us something you made at work or bought with your hard-earned money.

Post your story. Respond to at least two other people's stories.

Week 2: Truth or Fake News?

What do we know about each other? Our information comes from the media. Media can be biased. Focusing on economic issues, U.S. students will find an article about Venezuela, and Venezuelan students will find an article about the U.S. Explain what you learned from the article and post the link to the article. Students from the other country will give their opinion on their reality.

Share one article with your comments and respond to two posts by other students.

You are welcome to continue sharing news articles throughout this six-week module.

Week 3: Capitalism and Socialism

U.S. and Venezuela have different economic and political systems. What are your thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of socialism vs. capitalism? What features would you borrow from the other system? What problems would you want to fix in your own system? In answering these questions, consider one of the related questions: Does socialism eliminate inequality? Does your economic system help citizens to obtain an education, find employment, open a business, eat well, stay healthy, live in good housing, enjoy personal safety, and get justice based on the rule of law? Are businesses more socially responsible under socialism, do they care less about profits and more about consumer experience, the safety

of workers, the well-being of families, needs of the society, and a clean environment?

Write a post with your thoughts and respond to two posts by other students. Try to be specific rather than general; give examples based on your own observations.

Week 4: Government and the Economy

Businesses have to play by the rules set by government agencies. Among those rules are laws that allow or prohibit sales of prescription medicines and street drugs. In financial markets, banks have to collect income information on potential customers before issuing a loan. Airlines have rules regarding security. In the labor market, there are minimum wage laws, rules that require that men and women receive equal pay, restrictions on hiring some people (such as undocumented immigrants in the U.S.), and rules about firing people. What kinds of government regulations do you see around you? Share examples of good and bad regulations in your country (let's write separate posts for each rule). Government policy can be good for the economy if it creates good incentives and achieves a good goal. A bad policy may hurt consumers, businesses, employees, or groups of citizens. Explain how your policy sets right or wrong incentives, and why it is a success or a failure.

Write two posts (good and bad policies/laws/regulations; the posts can be short but informative) and respond to two other students.

Week 5: Work and Money

Once upon a time, you wake up in the dream world. In this world, you own a small business and you love it. We call it work, but for you, running this business is a joy. In creating your firm, you took advantage of your superpowers, or special skills and abilities that few other people have (maybe you are a great cook, or the best math tutor in town, or you speak four languages, etc.). Describe your dream business. What does it produce? What do you need to buy in order to start this business? Who are your customers and how do you sell to them? What makes your product/service valuable for the community? How many people do you hire and what do your employees do? Given your costs and sales, how much money will you make per month? What is your role? How many hours per day do you work? What will your business do to be socially responsible, in other words, what will you care about besides profit, and what will you do about it? Tell us why it is better to be your own boss than to work for someone else. What problems have you encountered along the way of setting up and running your business? Post a picture of something related to your business so we can better imagine your line of work.

Respond to at least two other posts.

Week 6: Final Project

Teams of two students (one from each country) create a narrated slide presentation using PowerPoint, VoiceThread.com, or Screencast-O-Matic (https://screencast-o-matic.com/screen-recorder). The goal of the presentation is to summarize your learning about the economic environment and the labor markets in both countries, to demonstrate your research skills, and to apply critical thinking. The teams will record this presentation in English and Spanish, including 12–18 slides.

Presentations should contain answers to the following questions, in any order:

- How different are U.S.-VE economies? Compare average income per capita, unemployment rate, inflation, largest industries, main exports and imports, and any other indicator(s) of your choice.
- Give examples of "good" and "bad" government regulation of the labor market from each country. Describe the impacts of these regulations.
- Describe one economic problem in each country. Explain who is hurt by the problem and what causes the problem.
- How would you solve this problem if you were president?
- What feature(s) of socialism would you recommend for the U.S. to borrow from Venezuela, and why?
- What feature(s) of capitalism would you recommend that Venezuela borrow from the U.S., and why?

Reflections on a Four-Phase Life

Menoukha Robin Case, Mentor Emerita, Saratoga Springs

The first phase was youth; the second was food service worker-adulthood; the third was middle-aged college student to older professor. I'm typical of many of our students who begin education late in life.

I never planned to be an academic. I was an artist/activist with a day job, concerned with intersections of ecology and social justice, who got involved with local farmers to help increase their incomes. We sold their harvests outside the 25-mile radius they serviced and were so successful that we attracted a predator from California. He took out five distributors on the East Coast and landed me on unemployment when I was 45. I found I could collect benefits for a year and a half instead of six months if I earned an associate degree, taking 21 credits per term. That was enough for me, but not for my mother, who had attended college in her 60s.

SUNY Empire State College sounded good. It was gratifying to earn 32 PLA (prior learning assessment) credits under the guidance of the wonderful Catana Tully (now mentor emerita). I reveled in independent studies that embraced my anomalous interests. PLA evaluations altered my self-perception, so when my mother — again — insisted, I applied to Ph.D. programs per Catana's advice: These funded programs could yield M.A.s on the way through in case I, like 50% of doctoral students, stalled at ABD (all but dissertation). I broke a bone, terminating waitressing, so when the University at Albany offered a teaching assistant position, I accepted. Thanks to adjunct income and a rent-free nature conservancy with no running water or electricity, I made it through without loans.

I joined SUNY Empire full time just after I turned 60 and strived to offer students the quality of guidance, support, and freedom I had enjoyed. Each student and colleague I encountered taught me something. Support for crafting educational opportunities let me continue my commitment to ecological and social justice concerns in studies like Roots & Routes of African Diaspora Resistance; Water: Local and Global Perspectives; Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and American Ethnic History. I had been married to an Ojibwe man who passed the summer I started; in his honor, I created Native American Studies offerings. Collaborating with mentors Rhianna Rogers, Cliff Eaglefeathers, Drew Monthie, Allison Craig, Ayana Jamieson, and Verda Olayinka,
I co-created First Peoples of North America; Little Bighorn from a Cheyenne Perspective; Native American Plants: Decolonizing Indigenous Knowledge, Mythology and Modern Life; and African American Experience. Learning from experts in these fields was incredibly rewarding. Dr. Rogers and I followed the late KD Eaglefeathers' initiative and designed a global Indigenous knowledge certificate.

Photo credit: Michelle Quigley

Menoukha Robin Case at Barrett's Woods Nature Conservancy.

This certificate and my book (co-written with Allison Craig), *Introduction to Feminist Thought and Action* (2019, Routledge), which includes five student and five professor contributors from SUNY Empire, offered me a sense of academic completion. At 71, I was ready for phase four, a return to the arts, gardening, and local activism. I'll teach during spring terms so my studies remain available. I will be thinking of you and will remain in touch.

Snow

Zeeva Bukai, Brooklyn

Zeeva Bukai, a specialist for academic support, is the winner of the 2017 Curt Johnson Prose Award in Fiction. Here, she shares a story that was previously published by Flash Fiction Magazine. *We thank Zeeva for permitting us to share her writing with our readers. To learn more about Zeeva's writing, visit https://www.zeevabukai.com/.*

Berta killed the man with a rock she found behind barracks C. Shaped like a potato, it fit in the palm of her hand. She could not remember how many times she had hit him, only that he fell without making a sound. Her 9-year-old stood with her face to the wall. He'd ripped the child's skirt and her woolen stockings were torn and bunched at the ankles. She wore no coat; the afternoon wind bit to the bone. A light dusting of snow fell. Berta wrapped her jacket around the girl's shoulders. Just that morning, the child had picked the last of the summer flowers growing behind the barracks, the blue petals in a heap, wilted and crushed.

They'd been in Kolyma two weeks, the taste of home still in their mouths. Here it was September and the ground was already hard, the permafrost beneath working its way up and the days getting shorter. Morning frost thick on the windows. Summer in the East was the length of an exhalation.

"Come," she said.

But the girl wouldn't budge. Berta was afraid to touch her, afraid she'd scream again and alert the guards in the watchtower with their Kalashnikovs hanging from their shoulders. She'd heard they had no bullets, all the ammunition sent to the front lines, along with the prisoners. Her husband one of them. Gone. The guards didn't need to shoot. There was nowhere to run. Beyond the barbed wire fence was the spruce forest, and beyond that, the tundra. Their one piece of good fortune: the camp was near empty. The zeks were still at work in the mines. In Kolyma, you either mined tungsten or tin, or you chopped down the spruce. She was lucky. She worked in the laundry where a fire always burned under the cauldrons.

A shallow puddle formed around the man's head. She got down on her knees and began to dig, using her hands, scraping as much dirt as she could with her fingers. They were bloody in minutes, but she didn't dare stop. The sharp ring of metal on rock brought her to a halt. Her daughter was there with a shovel. By the time the hole was big enough, snow fell like nettles. Berta rolled the man in, bending his body in half; he seemed asleep inside a womb.

"Don't look," she told her daughter, and waited for the child to turn away. Berta took a nose plier that she used for mending grommets and yanked hard to remove the gold from his teeth. She'd sell it on the black market or parley it for food and blankets. She and the girl made quick work of filling the hole. If they were lucky, no one would find him until next summer when the ground thawed. Maybe by then, the war would end, and they would be home.

Photo credit: Ghila Krajzman

Zeeva Bukai

"Let's go." She pulled the child into her arms. Berta felt her shudder. If anyone asked, she'd say the girl was sick. In the barrack, they watched snow collect in the corners of the windowpane. A gray dusk fell, obliterating the barracks, the barbed wire fence, the forest of spruce pines. The snow outside would change the color of their new world, six inches, seven inches still beating down, but the white could not change all the things it covered.

Universal Design for Learning for Mentors

Allison Moreland, Instructional Designer, Rochester

Outline

In our quest to design and develop courses and curricula that are effective for students, we rely on best practices, instructional design, and principles for learning. At SUNY Empire State College, our individualized instructional options provide an opportunity for students to learn in a way that best supports them as individual learners. An approach to instructional design and development, known as universal design for learning (UDL), has grown out of a need to provide learning opportunities to students with varying abilities.

When UDL was initially developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) in the 1990s it was an approach to developing instruction for students with disabilities. Since then, it has grown into a methodology for providing multiple means, giving students choices in their own learning, in effect, for providing individualized instruction to students. CAST has defined universal design for learning as, "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn" (CAST, n.d., para. 1).

Further endorsement of UDL principles came from the 2010 Department of Education's National Education Technology Plan, which focused on UDL's benefit to all learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). UDL has been adapted for higher education and in 2008, it was recognized as a best practice in the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOP), which described it as key for many college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008; Ingram, Lyons, Bowron, & Oliver, 2012), including, I would say, SUNY Empire students. The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) also recognized UDL as valuable for students, describing it as:

> [A] scientifically-valid framework for guiding educational practice that — (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged, and; (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008, p. 12; CAST, 2016, UDL in the ESSA of 2015 section, para. 3)

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which set new standards and requirements for students with disabilities and focused on providing options for standardized testing for students with disabilities (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). While this act focused on the K-12 learning space, the importance placed on using the principles of UDL to adapt technology for assessment design for all levels of learning cannot be understated.

The Origins of Universal Design for Learning

UDL is rooted in the concepts of universal design in architecture and product development. The universal design movement focused on making physical spaces and products that are designed to be accessible *universally;* that is, any user of the space should be able to access it without special adaptation. An example of this is curb cutouts in parking lots, which were originally created to help wheelchair users navigate over curbs without difficulty, but are also beneficial to users who are pushing strollers or shopping carts.

Allison Moreland

Over time, universal design principles adapted to other areas beyond physical spaces and product development. One such example of this is the audiobook. Originally, the audiobook was developed as a way to present written material to blind and visually impaired readers but has become the fastest-growing market for the publishing industry (Rowe, 2019). Those who wish to listen to audiobooks while they commute to and from work can consume books while they are driving or otherwise unable to focus on reading a paper or an electronic copy of a book. This flexibility is another example of the goals of universal design: providing users with a choice in how they consume information.

In addition, the development of digital media technologies that arose as a result of the internet revolution allowed for the development of learning materials that are truly flexible and

adaptable, enabling users to consume information in a way that is comfortable for them. It allows for greater individuality in the learning experience, as well as for greater experience with multimedia. UDL provides the pedagogical framework for using these various technologies in support of learning that can reach everyone (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). As an example, the migration of the book from exclusively printed material to digital media allows for end-user customization of font and text size via e-book reader to add to ease of reading.

It is worth noting that UDL is often used to create opportunities for students with disabilities through enhanced use of online technologies (Tobin, 2014). At the same time, Tobin was quick to point out that UDL goes beyond simply accommodating students, and also provides multiple means to learn as well as equal opportunity for students with disabilities to access learning. UDL guidelines give educators simple tools for modifying content that will support all learners.

Expert Learning and Variability of Learners

UDL is based in scientific research in neuroscience and is comprised of a set of principles for course development that account for learner variability and provide *all* people equal opportunity to learn (CAST, 2014). The UDL framework suggests that learners exist on a continuum of development and expertise in an area of study and that this variability in learners dictates that different means of presenting content allows mentors to reach students where they are. Each learner has different levels of expertise and preferred ways of learning. Each is guided by motivation, practice, and reflection throughout the learning process.

UDL Principles

UDL is a set of principles that guide instructional designers and mentors to develop study materials that are accessible to all learners. As it is focused on the variability and expertise of learners, UDL offers flexibility and choice. At its core, universal design, and by extension UDL, is:

- *Supportive:* It makes environments, including learning environments, work for the individual, stressing ease of use, and maintenance.
- *Adaptable:* It serves a wide range of users whose needs change over time, such as age-related disabilities such as loss of vision, hearing, or motor skills.
- *Accessible:* The everyday comforts and conveniences that most individuals enjoy are provided to all users of the environment.
- *Safe:* It not only provides environments and tools for the presently disabled but also actually anticipates and prevents disabilities such as repetitive strain injuries (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

UDL Guidelines

UDL provides guidelines for developing studies, selecting materials, and creating learning opportunities that take into account the wide variability of learners in higher education environments. It is a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments.

These guidelines address various outcomes of different learners. Affective networks provide multiple means of engagement, which seek to develop purposeful, motivated learners. Recognition networks provide multiple means of representation, which develop resourceful and knowledgeable learners. Finally, strategic networks provide multiple means of action and expression, which develop goal-directed learners (CAST, 2018).

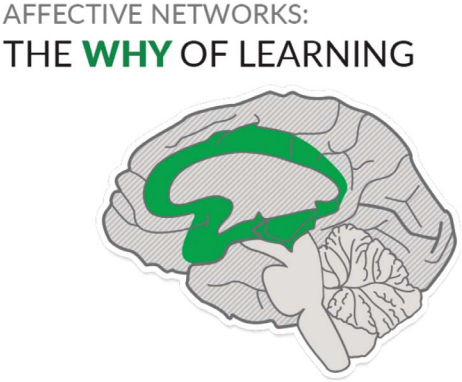

Figure 1. Engagement: For purposeful, motivated learners, stimulate interest and motivation for learning. (© 2020 CAST, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

The first guideline suggests that providing multiple avenues of engagement means that we give opportunities for students to self-regulate, sustain effort and persistence, and recruit interest. Techniques that support multiple means of engagement include:

- Developing self-assessment and reflection.
- Varying demands and resources to encourage challenge.
- Encouraging collaboration and community.
- Highlighting the relevance of goals and objectives.
- Optimizing individual choice and autonomy.
- Minimizing threats and distractions (CAST, 2018).

In practice, online learning activities could include such activities as a reflective journal, in which students think deeply about their learning throughout the course. In an online course, mentors/faculty can create learning outcomes for each module to guide student learning. It is important to focus on goals that are measurable and outcome-oriented. Bloom's taxonomy (Armstrong, 2020) is a resource that

can help with identifying goals that are meaningful and outcome-oriented. The focus on learning at different skill levels is critical to facilitating our students' learning.

RECOGNITION NETWORKS:
THE **WHAT** OF LEARNING

Figure 2. Representation: For resourceful, knowledgeable learners, present information and content in different ways. (© 2020 CAST, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

Provide Multiple Means of Representation

The second guideline encourages the use of techniques that provide multiple means of representation. This means that we provide students with more than one way to access information by providing options for comprehension, language and symbols, and perception. Techniques that support multiple means of engagement include:

- Activating or supplying background knowledge.
- Highlighting patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships.
- Guiding information processing and visualization.
- Clarifying vocabulary and symbols.
- Clarifying syntax and structure.
- Illustrating ideas and concepts through multiple media.
- Offering ways of customizing the display of information.
- Offering alternatives for auditory or visual information (CAST, 2018).

In online courses, this means providing captions for videos and alternative text for visual elements in a course. It also means that we call attention to discipline-specific vocabulary and syntax. We use multiple media to share information. As an example of this, mentors/faculty could provide both a video and a detailed transcript of the video contents, along with a description of what is occurring on-screen.

STRATEGIC NETWORKS:
THE **HOW** OF LEARNING

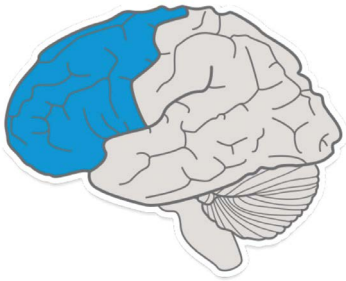

Figure 3. Action & Expression: For strategic, goal-directed learners, differentiate the ways that students can express what they know. (© 2020 CAST, Inc. Used with permission. All rights reserved.)

Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression

The third guideline provides multiple means of action, and expression gives us direction to provide options for executive functioning, expression and communication, and physical action. These include:

- Guiding appropriate goal setting.
- Supporting planning and strategy development.
- Using multiple media for communication.
- Varying the methods for response and navigation.
- Optimizing access to tools and assistive technologies.
- Using text alternatives for visuals.
- Allowing the use of text-to-speech tools or digital text.
- Allowing for multiple representations (e.g., formulas, word problems, graphs).
- Providing language translation.
- Using advance organizers (e.g., KWL method [know, want to know, learned], concept maps).
- Using multiple examples.
- Providing checklists, organizers, reminders, and graphic organizers.
- Offering ways of customizing the display of information.
- Blocking or chunking modules to group similar ideas (CAST, 2018).

Practically, this means providing accessible tools and alternatives for interacting with the content. Mentors/faculty can use different types of media to convey information. Much of this is incorporated into the learning management system, but mentors/faculty should be aware of these features. When structuring a course, it is important to give students appropriate scaffolding to build upon prior learning. Graphic organizers can be used so that students can take structured notes. Students can be given the choice in assignment type by allowing them to choose how they will submit an assignment. When an essay is assigned, the option to create a video or do a presentation to classmates can be given. Providing these options for students doesn't mean that they are being "given a pass"; there are still standards in the course and all students should be held to these standards.

What Mentors Can Do

A little goes a long way: Any effort made toward using UDL in courses will benefit our students. Tobin (2014) offered five strategies for incorporating UDL in online courses. Mentors/faculty can start with the text to focus on the content, eliminating non-relevant content from the course. Next, they can create alternatives by using closed-captioning or alternative text to convey information in different ways. Additionally, they

can allow students to choose their paths by providing different options for assignment submission. Then, they can go step-by-step through course content, offering scaffolding and logical breaks, and giving students opportunities to practice. Finally, mentors/faculty can create content that all users can view or interact with, using tools that are accessible and easy for faculty and students to learn.

In addition, Tobin (2014) offered a path for making content accessible to all students. Initially, mentors/faculty might focus on taking 20-minute increments to enhance individual learning activities, for example, to create a video to supplement lecture notes. Second, they can focus on what can be accomplished in 20 days. They could ask a colleague or instructional designer to provide objective feedback on course structure and learning activities to identify opportunities to change learning activities and not the structure. Finally, in the next 20 months, mentors/faculty can focus on the larger issues in course design, such as how students are accessing content and areas in the course that consistently give students problems.

The bottom line: I suggest mentors/faculty make one change each term in each of their online courses. It doesn't have to be done all at once. When they start small, over time they will incorporate more UDL practices into their courses, moving from one course to all courses.

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Pieces of My Life's Journey: Some Reflections

MaryNell Morgan-Brown, Mentor Emerita, Saratoga Springs

"Our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our jobs"

— Charlie King, "Our Life is More Than Our Work" (1992, 0:25)

During the seventh decade of my life, I retired from my job as an educator. However, my work as an educator, scholar, and singer will continue for the rest of my productive life. In 2018, I wrote a "not to be published" retirement letter with the theme "A New Beginning." I thought it was the first draft of a longer "open letter" that I would write about my journey at the State University of New York Empire State College "to be published" in *All About Mentoring.* I have been struggling with this writing project, haunted by the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic; the routine, unchecked murder of Black people by police; the dismantling of the country's representative democracy; environmental destruction; a crisis in capitalism; and so much more. It has almost become an "open book" on my entire life's journey thus far. As I try to awaken from what seems to be a never-ending daze, I want to share many memories of my seven decades of evolving, learning, working, singing, and traveling.

Early Work and Learning Memories

My reflections on my work begin at age 9. I was a caregiver for three children. They were not my siblings. It was my job to keep them safe, fed, and entertained. I did that to the satisfaction of their parents, who were farmers. While I kept the 2-, 4-, and 6-year-old children safe, I suffered a very serious injury to my right knee. I cut it to the bone on a piece of tin that was covering the fireplace. I could see the gristle of my knee. I needed stitches, but ashes and spider webs were used to treat me. Getting me to a doctor or an emergency room was not an available option. I still have a visible flat scar, instead of a rope of stitch marks that reminds me every day of that fateful incident and my active childhood. Since I tend to keloid, I presume that stitches would have left a more prominent scar than did the sterile ashes and spider webs.

Another key memory from my child care job involves my water fountain story. My employers took me to a five-and-dime store in Albany, Georgia. Since I was a precocious child, I was not closely supervised. I remember that I felt thirsty. I went looking for a water fountain. I found two fountains that stood next to each other. One fountain looked like dingy, white porcelain. The word "Colored" was above it. The other fountain looked like clean, shiny stainless steel. The word "White" was above. At age 9, I had never seen that before. I reasoned that the words above the fountains described the color of the water. I wanted "white," cool water, not colored (Kool-Aid?) from a fountain that looked dirty. A female store clerk caught me taking a drink from the "White" fountain. I have suppressed the memory of what happened between the time I was snatched away from the fountain and taken to my employers. She told them what I had done and said that if I didn't know how to read, they'd better teach me. Upon reflection, my thought was that I could read very well, probably better than the store clerk! I just didn't want "colored" water.

My Mother had never allowed me to go into a store. We lived in a very rural area. I had only been into town to go to the health clinic. After the visit to the clinic, my Mother would go into the drug store and my brothers and sisters

MaryNell Morgan-Brown

and I were always told to wait outside. I realized later that there was a soda fountain in the drug store. My Mother did not want to explain to us that we could not be served — even if she had had the money.

My child care work continued into my teen years. My eighth grade teacher and lifelong mentor convinced my mother to allow me to become a live-in companion for her daughter and son. After I left for college, one of my younger sisters stepped into that role. Our teacher-mentor became a part of our extended family. Sadly, as this article was in preparation, Mrs. Eddie Rhea Walker, our teacher-mentor, passed away. The Celebration of her life was held on October 10, 2020, her 83rd birthday, in Americus, Georgia.

In addition to child care, I did farm work. I chopped cotton. I was supposed to use my hoe to remove the weeds. I removed the cotton, too, unintentionally. I was better at child care. I shook peanuts. I really didn't like being covered head-to-toe by the dirt that I shook off the peanuts. I tasseled corn. Cornstalk leaves can cut like a sharp knife, even if

you wear long sleeves. I picked peaches. I was allergic to the stinging fur on most varieties of peaches. I picked cotton. You are considered to be a good cotton picker if you can pick 200 or more pounds a day. I struggled to pick 150 pounds. Typical pay was 2 to 3 cents per pound. Part of my problem was that I wanted my cotton to be clean and dry — not a good idea. Much of the farm work that I did was sharecropping in a situation of peonage.

My first memory of earning money was at age 5. I sold a pumpkin for a nickel. I grew it in the garden that MaMa, my great-grandmother, taught me to cultivate. Gardening was more natural for me than cash crop farm work. I loved it, and I loved school. The teachers at my segregated elementary, middle, and high schools believed that I had potential and encouraged and supported my learning. During the summer after my sophomore high school year, I worked as a teacher's assistant in a Head Start program. Farm work, including picking cotton, was becoming mechanized. Great Society programs, like Head Start, were becoming available. After my junior high school year, I got my first taste of college. I applied for and was selected as a participant in a summer mathematics program at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) in Tallahassee, Florida. FAMU is among the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). At the end of that summer, I knew that college was for me. But I didn't know how I would pay for it.

Learning and Working After High School

I was valedictorian of my high school class. I received scholarships, grants, and loans to attend college and complete my undergraduate degree at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Mercer University is a predominantly white university that admitted a Black student for the first time in 1965. I entered in 1967, majoring in English with two minors: one in mathematics and one in education. I continued the pattern of working while learning. During the academic year, I was a work-study student in Mercer's library. The summer after my freshman year, I worked for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Americus, Georgia, in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The next summer, I worked for the Bibb County Recreation Department in Macon, Georgia. Thereafter, I took classes during the summer and supplemented those earnings with the $25 monthly allowance provided by my proud maternal Auntie.

"I picked cotton. You are considered to be a good cotton picker if you can pick 200 or more pounds a day. I struggled to pick 150 pounds."

I completed my A.B. degree in English and got a job as a high school teacher of English, grammar, and literature for the 10th and 11th grades in Talbotton, Georgia. Prior to teaching at the high school level, I had had experience with reasonably well-behaved young children. Teenagers were more of a challenge. Some of them, especially the male athletes, seemed to think I was their peer, not their teacher.

I taught high school for one year, and then took a job as a social worker for the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). After a year in rural Harris County (Hamilton, Georgia), I transferred to urban Fulton County (Atlanta, Georgia). Having grown up in a multigenerational household as one of 10 children, I felt grateful to be able to work with families who needed help with services related to housing, health care, education, food, and clothing. It was familiar territory. I had personal experience with all of it. I thought that my work was making a concrete difference in peoples' lives.

Striving for Higher Education

Several years of providing direct social services led me to think that I could contribute to policymaking at the management level. In addition to my experience, I thought that I needed a master's degree in social work (MSW). To increase my options for advancement, I switched my pursuit from an MSW to a master's degree in public administration (MPA). I was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship; I took a leave of absence from my social work at DFCS and completed the MPA at Atlanta University (AU) (now Clark Atlanta University [CAU]). With enthusiastic encouragement from my graduate school professors, I accepted a second Ford Foundation Fellowship in the political science Ph.D. program and was hired as an assistant professor in the MPA program I had just completed.

While working on my MPA, I had supplemented my fellowship by working part time as an equal employment opportunity specialist (EEOS) for the United States Department of Commerce (USDC) in Atlanta. My job as an EEOS was to review applications for USDC funds to determine whether the applicant had complied with affirmative action guidelines. I learned a lot and I gave some thought to becoming a career U.S. government bureaucrat. In retrospect, higher education was the right choice for me.

Teaching and Learning as an Educator

When I accepted my first tenure-stream faculty appointment at Xavier University of Louisiana (XULA), New Orleans, Louisiana, my "highest degree" was ABD (all but dissertation). I completed my dissertation, "The Souls of Women Folk in the Political Thought of William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois"

(Morgan, 1987), while teaching a full load of four courses each semester in the political science department. My studies at AU, designed with a specific focus on African American experiences, had prepared me to be a generalist by requiring concentrations in four subfields of political science. My four fields were American government and politics, public administration, urban government and politics, and international relations. At XU, I taught courses in all of those fields. AU had developed the political science Ph.D. program to prepare graduates to teach in small departments that often require faculty to teach across several subfields. It also turned out to be excellent preparation for teaching at SUNY Empire.

Carrying a full teaching load while researching — with intense interest and great joy — the extensive original writings by Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, as well as writings by scholars who studied him, kept me busy. In addition, I was traveling to and actively participating in professional conferences as a regular research paper presenter and in leadership roles in academic associations. Among my current and past organizational affiliations are the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS — I am a life member); the American Political Science Association (APSA); the American Society for Public Administration (APSA); the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH — I am a life member); the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA); the American Association of University Women (AAUW); the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA); the Association of Black Women Historians (ABWH); and the People's Music Network for Songs of Freedom and Struggle (PMN-SFS). In addition to all those obligations, I pursued my passion for singing by joining the alto section of the New Orleans Black Chorale. For fun, and by popular demand, I sang with three of my XULA colleagues at faculty and staff talent expositions to raise money for the music department. Our group was called The Fabulous Doo-Wops! Singing, like work, has been a constant activity throughout my life.

My career in higher education spanned more than four decades and included teaching at Atlanta University, Xavier University of Louisiana, Skidmore College (Saratoga Springs, New York), the University at Albany (SUNY), Williams College (Williamstown, Massachusetts), and SUNY Empire State College.

From Professor to Mentor, a Transformation

During my 27 years at SUNY Empire (1991–2018), my faculty role as mentor-coordinator proved to be a transformative experience. I changed from working with "students" in a classroom setting, primarily, to working with "learners" one-to-one, mostly face-to-face, and sometimes via postal mail. Most of the learners with whom I worked identified as white, in their mid-30s, employed full time, enrolled for half-time study, and navigating the challenge of balancing work, study, family, and other responsibilities and interests; the kind of balancing that has always been a part of my life.

SUNY Empire was founded for these nontraditional students. Rather than by the number of courses taught during each term, my workload was counted by the number of full-time-equivalent students. I wrote a learning contract (LC) for each student, instead of a syllabus for each course. At the end of a term, I wrote a contract evaluation (CE) instead of awarding a letter grade. Prior to coming to SUNY Empire, I would tell students on the first day of class that if I were required to give a final grade on that day, everyone would get an A. Whether they would still have that grade at the end of the term would depend upon the assignments that they completed and the learning that they demonstrated throughout the term. That grading philosophy provided guidance for writing my CE narratives.

I regularly recruited new students for the college by conducting information sessions in the evenings, after regular business hours. At other colleges in my life, new student recruitment was done mostly by a professional employee in the registrar's office and by alumni associations. Actively recruiting new students was one of several administrative activities that were part of my work as a member of the faculty. Rather than joining an academic department, housed on a single campus, I joined a small unit (Saratoga), which was a satellite location of the Northeast Center (NEC) in a geographically and administratively decentralized college. Teaching during the summer months became the norm rather than an option. Instead of school year holidays, I earned annual leave and sick leave in the same way as New York state employees. I filled out a time and attendance report each month. Let it suffice to say that it was necessary for me to demonstrate the veracity of my resume's statement that "I am flexible and I learn quickly."

A New Vocabulary: The SUNY Empire Alphabet Soup

At SUNY Empire, members of the faculty, as well as students, develop a new vocabulary. Faculty are mentors and tutors rather than professors or instructors. Prior to joining the faculty at SUNY Empire, my definition of "mentor" had been someone who takes you under their wing and guides you in their area(s) of expertise of knowledge and skill. I understood "tutor" to be someone who helped a student to successfully learn a subject that was difficult for her/him. At SUNY Empire, I revised those definitions; a mentor is a faculty advisor who serves as a liaison to the college's resources, and a tutor is an instructor. Members of the faculty wear both of those hats: mentor and tutor. These

are just two of the concepts that take on new meanings in this nontraditional college for adult learners.

The college's glossary includes nontraditional concepts and acronyms that I refer to as the SUNY Empire "alphabet soup." A number of acronyms evolved during my tenure. Two of great and enduring significance are the degree program plan (DPP) and credit by evaluation (CBE), also known, more recently, as prior learning assessment (PLA). One practice that I adopted as a way to facilitate an understanding of SUNY Empire was to say that at the undergraduate level, the entire college is a college without walls. In a college without walls, each student, along with input from their advisor or mentor, designs their individualized curriculum or DPP. Most prospective and matriculated SUNY Empire students are drawn to the college because they want to be awarded credits for college-level learning acquired through their work experiences and life interests.

Throughout my tenure at SUNY Empire, the constant features of my work were the challenges and rewards of helping students design a DPP and successfully acquire CBE or PLA credits (especially individualized PLA [iPLA]). The process starts in an information session for prospective students. Many, if not most prospective students come to an information session because they have heard that the college awards credit for work and other life experiences. Without scaring the student away, the process of defining "credits for experience" as "the award of credit for college-level learning" must begin during that information session.

How does one sustain the interest of a prospective student who is hoping that 10 years of work experience should equal two years of college credits? I tried to do that by sharing an example of an actual student who had been keeping the books for 12 years in a small family business. The knowledge needed for that work was equivalent to 8 introductory or lower-level credits of college-level learning in accounting. The credits are determined by what you need to know to do the work, not by how long you have been doing the work. Bubble burst! Then reinflated by finding out that the student had college-level learning in business law (8 credits, introductory), taxation (4 credits, introductory), recruiting and training (4 credits, advanced or upper level), supervising (4 credits, advanced), and practicum (16 credits, advanced — the equivalent of one full-time term). So, toward the 64 credits needed for two years of college, the student is eligible for 44 credits based on work experience. In the area of life interests, the student had learned the theory and practice of the blues harmonica (4 credits, introductory). This total is less than what might amount to two years of college courses, yet it is a substantial number of credits for less than the cost of tuition. The cost is incurred in the time commitment and the labor-intensive process of identifying and validating the students' learning.

The Only "Required" Course at SUNY Empire

Much of the work of developing a DPP is part of a unique course that is variously called Educational Planning, Academic Planning, or Degree Program Planning. During my tenure, all undergraduate students were required to complete a minimum of 4 credits of educational planning studies. The ultimate goal of educational planning is the design of an individualized curriculum or program of study. In addition, students or learners might explore what it means to be an educated person. They are encouraged to develop an understanding of liberal and applied learning, the difference between introductory and advanced-level learning, and the difference between associate and bachelor's degrees of arts and sciences.

After a few years of designing and redesigning my Educational Planning learning contract, I decided that two seemingly unrelated classics would be unique, informative, and probably provocative reading in exploring what it means to be an educated person and the importance of education for an individual, a group, a nation, and the world. The classics are *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass (1845) and *The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois (1903). In part, my rationale is that through these books, students would examine their understanding of the educated person and the importance of questions about education through the lens of African American experiences, and would see the universality of the value of education in social, political, cultural, economic, scientific, and all aspects of human experiences.

Several questions are explored. What can be learned from the criminalization of education for enslaved people? How did Douglass devise independent learning strategies? What do we learn about the value of a Black person's life? Although Douglass' autobiographical *Narrative,* the first of three book-length autobiographies — *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845); *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881; rev. 1892) — covers his life from childhood to his self-emancipation, students would often find online and read an abbreviated biography that includes highlights of his life after enslavement. Those highlights include his work as an abolitionist, women's suffrage advocate, and his government jobs that included diplomatic appointments in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

In 1903, more than a half-century after the publication of Douglass' 1845 *Narrative,* W.E.B. Du Bois published a collection of 14 essays on the history and sociology of African Americans titled *The Souls of Black Folk.* While the entire book is about education, the essay that most easily allows a comparison to Douglass' *Narrative* is "Of the Coming of John," the only fictionalized essay in the

book. I refer to the essay as "faction" because it is based on true stories from Du Bois' experiences of living, learning, and teaching in the South. "Of the Coming of John" is the story of John Jones, Black, and John Henderson, white. As children, they were playmates in a rural Georgia town. They both went off to college and people looked forward to the day when they would come home and use their education in the service of their separate communities. While they were away, their paths crossed via an incident that sharpened John Jones' awareness of white skin privilege and compelled him to take his opportunity to get a college education more seriously. He returned home and started a school. John Henderson returned home with the intention of enjoying the leisurely life that his father's wealth assured him. Again, they met, they clashed, and the ending was tragic for both of them.

Throughout the story, the attitudes toward education are inserted. According to his father, education will make John Henderson into a man; but it will spoil John Jones. In the story, the educational value of experiencing the exhilaration of arts and cultural expressions is acknowledged. Probably, most importantly, education is portrayed as a tool for liberation. Discussions of these readings were engaging and enlightening for students in all of SUNY Empire's areas of study.

Sharing Educational Planning Learning Resources

Several of my colleagues at the Northeast Center incorporated portions of the Du Bois reading into their individualized Educational Planning learning contracts (EP-LC). At the former Saratoga Unit of the NEC, students participated in a study group that supplemented their individualized EP-LC. Working as a team, mentors at the Saratoga Unit held four specifically focused study group meetings: 1) The Degree Planning Process and Career Resources: Finishing Your DPP on Time; 2) PLA Requests; 3) The Educated Person; 4) The Rationale Essay. My late colleague, George Pilkey, and I co-led a discussion of the question of what it means to be an educated person and the questions generated by the Douglass and Du Bois readings in study group number 3.

It should be noted that at the NEC, after the DPP was completed in the Ed Planning study, it would be reviewed by a faculty committee and an assessment specialist to ensure that appropriate guidelines for the area of study, concentration or major, general learning, and the type of degree had been followed. After review at the center level, a final review would be conducted at the collegewide level to confirm that the student had designed a degree that could be awarded by SUNY Empire. I have always thought that this labor-intensive process involves too much duplication of effort.

Mentors in a small unit work with students who are pursuing a degree in any and all of the areas of study available at the college. I did that; in doing so, I deepened my appreciation of *The Souls of Black Folk* as a multidisciplinary teaching and learning resource. Also, it is my songbook. Each of the 14 chapters is headed by bars of music from a traditional spiritual: "The Sorrow Songs," and lines of poetry from the literary canon of the 19th century. Dr. Du Bois (1903) said these songs are the only American music. They are the expressions of an "unhappy people" that voice sorrow as well as struggle, triumph, and jubilation.

It has been and will continue to be my life's work to learn from and teach the lessons found in *The Souls of Black Folk* by Du Bois (1903), a significant textbook in virtually all of the social sciences, arts, and humanities disciplines, including music!

Singing "The Sorrow Songs"

My earliest memories of singing begin with my mother's mournful crooning in a voice that literally gave me chill bumps. Sometimes there were no words, just a sound that revealed her sorrow, her struggles, and her joy. Her

"Sometimes there were no words, just a sound that revealed her sorrow, her struggles, and her joy."

amazing voice was only shared at home and in our small Baptist church. In our church, there was no organ, no piano, no drums or instruments; just our voices and our bodies — hand clapping, foot stomping, finger snapping — making a joyful noise and praising God! Our singing was a cappella. I still prefer it.

Renowned folk singer, songwriter, and activist for social justice, Pete Seeger, once told me that what he noticed about my singing was that it is "so free" and that he wanted to help people "like [me]" build a career in music. He told me this as an aside after I had sung my praise song ("Soldiers for Freedom") for Paul Robeson at a summer gathering of the Peoples' Music Network — Songs for Freedom and Struggle (PMN-SFS). Pete demonstrated the seriousness of his observation by graciously headlining a concert in May 2009 in Greenwich, New York, that included performances by local musicians. I was the primary organizer and one of the performers at the event. Sometimes I wonder what might have happened if I had further followed up with Pete on his comment.

Throughout my life, I have been singing. For the last three decades, I have been singing with and have been a member of the PMN-SFS. Pete Seeger was a founding member of this association of singer-songwriters that provides a network for socially conscious artists who are workers for a just society. After retiring, I had planned to sing more than just for PMN-SFS gatherings and for special celebrations of historic people

like the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Du Bois, and others. I am still working to make that happen.

Travel is a Learning and Teaching Resource

Traveling has contributed significantly to my learning, my work, and my singing. The extent of my travels is minor, but the impact of my travels is major. I have made meaningful visits to about half of the states in the USA. One of the most memorable is my trip to Honolulu, Hawaii, for the annual meeting of the American Society for Public Administration. I have vivid memories of the black sand on the beach, the stunning beauty of the people and the vegetation, the luau that featured a tutorial on the pig roasting process, the missed opportunity to taste authentic poi, and the genuine sense of joy that was exuded by conference participants. My memories of the conference sessions are vague.

I traveled to Jamaica to attend the destination wedding of a Jamaican and a Nigerian in Ocho Rios. I was a part of a group of mostly Nigerian graduate students who were studying in the USA. We made a harrowing bus trip from Ocho Rios to the U.S. Embassy in Kingston to get visas for the foreign students to return to Atlanta, Georgia. I learned important lessons about U.S. immigration policies and infrastructure, especially about the roads in developing countries. That was my first of several trips to the Caribbean across a period of almost five decades. I have also traveled to Europe and, more recently, my husband took me on a Mediterranean cruise to celebrate a milestone birthday and my forthcoming retirement.

I am especially grateful for my travels to several countries in West Africa. Among the countries that I visited are Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana. I waded in the Bani (Mali) and the Niger (Mali and Nigeria) rivers and was inspired to write a song, "Roll Bani Roll, Roll Niger Roll." In Lagos, Nigeria, I was hosted by a Yoruba family. The children spoke to me in their native language because they thought I was a member of their tribe. My research focused on the impact of petroleum on the political, economic, and social conditions in Nigeria.

In Dakar, Senegal, I was hosted by a Wolof family. The children spoke to me in French, their official language. My research project in Dakar, Senegal, focused on food production and distribution. I was keenly interested in the role of women in agriculture and in the ways that colonization adversely affected subsistent and cash crop farming. While in Dakar, I visited the castle on Gorée Island where enslaved Africans were kept until they walked through the "door of no return" to board a ship bound for either North or South America or the Caribbean Islands. I had the visceral experience of standing near that door.

Many of my most significant memories are from my visit to Accra, Ghana, as part of a group of educators, artists, and activists. William Strickland, African American studies professor and director of the Du Bois papers collection at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, assembled an impressive group of scholars, artists, and racial justice advocates that included David Graham Du Bois, David Levering Lewis, Maya Angelou, Betty Shabazz, Tom Feeling, Roberta Flack, Charshee McIntyre, Eleanor Traylor, several additional celebrities, and me. The primary purpose of our trip was to reenter the body of Du Bois and to inaugurate the establishment of the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Centre for Pan African Culture. David Levering Lewis was doing research for his Pulitzer Prize-winning, two-volume biography of Dr. Du Bois. I was doing research for my dissertation on Dr. Du Bois and women's issues. There is an article as well as pictures of this historic event in an issue of *Ebony* magazine (Whitaker, 1986). If you look closely at the left side of the picture of "The Funeral Procession," you will see Maya Angelou in the foreground and you will get a glimpse of me in the background (p. 176). During this trip, I promised Levering Lewis that I would get permission to give him contact information for Dr. Y. Du Bois Williams (now Irvin), granddaughter of W.E.B. Du Bois. The promise was kept; Du Bois and I still talk about her interview with her grandpa's biographer. We also discuss our memories of her talk at SUNY Empire as part of a Women's and Gender Studies Residency. My conversations with Du Bois also include recollections of my interviews with her. One was for my dissertation and one was for a biography of her grandma, Nina Gomer Du Bois, her grandpa's first wife. We often speak about our collaborations on lectures at several colleges and universities. In 2006, we participated in a weeklong convention to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Niagara Movement's meeting at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Memorably, the late U.S. Senator Robert Carlyle Byrd was one of the speakers, even to his surprise. The event was open to the public, sponsored by the U.S. National Park Service, and a group from the Ku Klux Klan made a taunting appearance. There was an impressive roster of participants and attendees. When I write my memoir, this event will have its own chapter. We also talk about how close proximity to Great Barrington, Massachusetts, influenced my decision to move to Saratoga Springs, temporarily, at first, and then permanently. Recollections of conversations and other projects with Du Bois also include reflections on her interview with Louis Massiah, director and producer of the documentary *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices* (Massiah, 1996). I was one of the consultants and I have been and remain a fellow traveler on a journey to promote and preserve the life and legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois.

My Journey Continues into "A New Beginning"

Traveling invigorated my work as a mentor-coordinator. Mentors shared the coordination of the Saratoga Unit. Our collaborations strengthened our collegiality and enhanced our work with students. Through intra-unit collaboration, we developed model study groups taught by the entire team (or roster) of full- and part-time mentors, for example, Educational Planning, and Perspectives on Analytical Thinking and Writing." Team members were Karen Garner, Elaine Handley, Linda Jones, the late George Pilkey, Kathy Tarrant, and me. Elaine Handley and I co-taught a study group on U.S. Slavery in History and Art (4 credits), and U.S. Slavery in Literature (4 credits). Through NEC cross-center collaboration, we developed a team-taught study group on U.S. political experiences called Liberty and Justice for All? Team members were Christopher Grill, Nadine Wedderburn, Ralph English, Efrat Levy, Joseph Yogtiba, Sylvain Nagler, and me. My study group session focused on political participation and voting. Chris Grill and I co-taught study groups on U.S. political processes, institutions, and issues such as "So You Want to be President," which included an October 2012 collegewide teach-in titled "Vote! Or Let Others Decide!" Through further collegewide collaboration, I participated in planning, teaching, and singing at women's studies and cultural diversity residencies. The team members are too many to list here. I remember introducing our keynote speakers, Barbara Seals Nevergold and Peggy Brooks-Bertram (2009), editors of *Go, Tell Michelle,* at the Women's and Gender Studies Residency in 2010. That was one of many memorable highlights of those collegewide learning adventures. Other collegewide participation included presentations at the All College conferences, All Areas of Study meetings, and the Fall Academic conferences. As I call up these reflections, I marvel at the volume and variety of work and opportunities that is the complex web of SUNY Empire!

My work with the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region (URHPCR) has been a major part of my scholarship, service to the community, and service to SUNY Empire. Currently, and for the last 15 years, I have served on the planning committee for the URHPCR's annual Underground Railroad Public History Conference. In 2016, SUNY Empire was one of the sponsors of the annual conference. The dean of the Northeast Center, several of my colleagues and students attended the opening keynote address as well as panel presentations during the weekend conference sessions. The conference serves as a learning resource for students and provides opportunities for presenting scholarly and creative work that focuses on the history of the Underground Railroad Movement, then and now. In 2014, I conducted the annual Educators' Workshop for teachers in the Capital Region. My workshop title was "Education, Equality, and Electoral Politics: Teaching W.E.B. Du Bois." Teachers were awarded continuing education credits for participating in the workshop.

Throughout my tenure at SUNY Empire, workload loomed large in the form of the number of primary mentees (advisees); the number of different studies or learning contracts; and the amount of administrative and governance work in the form of service on committees at the unit, center, and collegewide levels.

My service in college governance has included standing and ad hoc committees, including: the student academic quality committee; the student portfolio review committee; several search committees for faculty, administrators, and support staff; the Academic Personnel Committee; the Program Planning and Budget Committee; and the Middle States Accreditation Review Committee. Most memorable is my service as chairwoman of the college senate (1995–1996) during the year that SUNY Empire celebrated its 25th anniversary!

I am thankful to SUNY Empire for awarding me two, yearlong sabbaticals (1998–1999 and 2008–2009); for accommodating a leave of absence for me to accept the Sterling Brown Visiting Professor of Africana Studies professorship at Williams College (fall 2005); for accommodating my participation in the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Institute titled "The Significance of Place in African American Biography," sponsored by the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), Williams College, and the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail (2011); for providing professional development funds for attending and making scholarly presentations at academic conferences; and for recognizing the value of my scholarship in the form of a Scholars Across the College award (2003–2004).

My journey at SUNY Empire has enhanced my professional and personal development while allowing me to contribute to making a difference in the lives of students, colleagues, and the larger community. It has been a privilege to serve a publicly-supported university system in a college established to give working adults the opportunity to earn a college degree.

I will close with a statement from the letter I mentioned at the beginning of this essay. "My retirement marks a milestone that is a New Beginning in my life and work. I treasure my memories and relationships with colleagues and students. I know that [SUNY Empire] will always be a major part of me and I plan to stay connected in every possible way."

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"Whether or not a crisis of civilization is indeed upon us, the problems before us require that [our colleges and universities] regain a clear image of the human personality. … We should take adult development as our unifying purpose and by directly addressing the problem attempt to help individuals and society reach those as yet unrealized potentialities of caring and complexity, interdependence and integrity."

— Arthur W. Chickering and Associates, 1981
The Modern American College: Responding to the New Realities of Diverse Students and a Changing Society
Jossey-Bass, p. 11

How Did We Get Here?

Ian Reifowitz, Manhattan

As a Scholar Across the College for 2019–2020, I presented three different, albeit related projects. I was fortunate to be asked to present at a number of regional governance meetings, two department meetings, a Saturday afternoon meeting of the Black Male Initiative at the Manhattan-Hudson St. location, and an ESC Connects gathering organized during the COVID-19 shelter-at-home period. Each of the presentations also included lively and stimulating comments/questions from participants, which I was happy to answer.

All three were elements of my recently published book, *The Tribalization of Politics: How Rush Limbaugh's Race-Baiting Rhetoric on the Obama Presidency Paved the Way for Trump* (Ig Publishing, 2019).

In each of my three presentations, I tied the material to the broader conclusions I drew in the book as described below (this excerpt is reprinted with full permission):

"How did we get here?" is the essential question right now in American politics. How did we go from a society that elected Barack Obama twice to one that, popular vote loss aside, elected Donald Trump (and which may well give him a second term)? Although there are no simple answers, we do know that white anxiety, fear, and anger aimed at non-whites and about demographic change became far more strongly correlated with support for the Republican Party between 2008 and 2016. We also know that the right-wing media played an outsized role in encouraging that development, specifically through the way they talked about President Obama. During those years, the individual media figure who played the largest role was Rush Limbaugh.

"While Obama was president, Limbaugh constantly, almost daily, talked about him using a technique that scholars call "racial priming" — in other words, he race-baited. Limbaugh aimed to convince his audience that Obama was some kind of anti-white, anti-American, radical, Marxist [B]lack nationalist, and possibly a secret Muslim to boot. This was neither a bug nor a supporting element of his presentation, but instead stood as a central feature deployed strategically in order to accomplish a very specific task. What were the results of his efforts? He helped lay the groundwork for the election in 2016 of a president who essentially adopted his view of the Obama presidency.

"A detailed, nuanced exploration of Limbaugh's racialized rhetoric about Obama offers valuable insight into how the conservative media machine operates. I examine that rhetoric as a case study whereby the most influential part of that right-wing media during those years represents the whole.

"Since *Talkers,* a radio industry magazine, began keeping records in 1991, Limbaugh has always had the largest audience of any radio host. As a result, he has been the single most potent media voice worsening the tribalization of our politics. Limbaugh's efforts on this front trace back much further than the emergence of Obama as a national figure. Nevertheless, to say that Obama's years in the White House saw that push break new ground would be an understatement. Limbaugh's most direct objective was to define the president in a way that would scare his older, overwhelmingly white audience. Racial fear stands at the core of Limbaugh's telling of the story of the Obama [a]dministration. And white conservatives have been listening.

Ian Reifowitz

"Additionally, Limbaugh has spawned multiple other media voices who spread a similar message built around the politicization of racial anxiety and hatred, with some on the fringe forging an even more radical path than he has. Limbaugh planted the most fertile seed by far in what has now grown into a full-blown extremist ecosystem. He has thus played a major part in one of the most impactful transformations in American politics, one that placed hate at its center.

"Examining how Limbaugh ginned up white racial anxiety about a [B]lack president sheds light on why our country chose as his successor a man who began his campaign for the White House by serving as the nation's birther-in-chief and who, in his reaction to the white nationalist terrorist attack in Charlottesville, Virginia, among many other examples, has shown his continued fealty to white identity politics. As Jamelle Bouie wrote: "You can draw a direct line to the rise of Trump from the racial hysteria of talk

radio — where Rush Limbaugh, a Trump booster, warned that Obama would turn the world upside down."

Below are the three presentations, all of which were drawn from the larger book project:

1) A presentation that focused on rhetoric Limbaugh used to "other" Obama by branding him somehow "not American," by questioning his American birthplace; anti-American, by claiming that he hated America largely because of its racism; and anti-white, by accusing him of wanting to redistribute resources from whites to minorities, most specifically to African Americans, in order to right historical wrongs. According to Limbaugh, Obama was essentially Santa Claus for (only) Black people because he gave them welfare and free Obamaphones. Finally, Limbaugh scared whites by stoking fears that they would face race-based retributive violence because a Black man had been elected president.

2) A presentation that examined Limbaugh's rhetoric on immigration during the Obama presidency. In addition to playing on white Americans' racial and cultural anxieties by talking about Obama and African Americans, Limbaugh also did so when talking about how the president dealt with issues of great significance to Latinos. The most prominent of these was the matter of immigration reform and undocumented immigrants. When discussing the latter in particular, Limbaugh race-baited in ways that prefigured the Trump presidential campaign and presidency, and my talk explored these parallels, as well.

3) A presentation that explored Limbaugh's racialized rhetoric on Barack Obama and the deaths of young Black men killed by police — with a focus on the ways Limbaugh criticized Obama's response to these events. Over the eight years Barack Obama served as president, Rush Limbaugh did not just offer a broad condemnation of his approach to the matter of race, he also sought to directly tie Obama to various groups, movements, and individuals whom the host depicted as representing Black radicalism, professing anti-white ideas, and pursuing anti-white aims. This was one of Limbaugh's primary methods of "othering" or, in this case, "blackening" Obama.

This presentation examined how Limbaugh race-baited by contending that the president stood with Black suspects, criminals, and prisoners — and against law enforcement officials. The host did so when discussing the president's policies and proposals on police and criminal justice reform, and, in particular, his reaction to a series of race-related events: the violent deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, and other young Black men, along with subsequent protests and unrest, and the killings of police officers in New York, Dallas, and elsewhere. According to Limbaugh, the blood of these dead cops was somehow on Obama's hands because the White House supported Black Lives Matter activists. The host encouraged his listeners to believe that the president hated the police and loved the protestors and maybe, in his heart of hearts, the cop-killers, too.

Tales of My Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain

Gohar Marikyan, Manhattan

Introduction

There was little to no contact between those behind the iron curtain and the outside. Therefore, people on both sides of the curtain had created their own perceptions about the other side, which were not necessarily true. Therefore, I felt the need to write this story. This is my first try at talking about my life in Armenia, which was then one of the republics of the Soviet Union. These are my memories told the way they stayed in my mind; a huge mixture of good and bad, happy and sad, easy and difficult. I used to tell one of my American friends stories about my past life in Armenia. In the beginning, my friend was biased; slowly he became more open-minded, and once even commented: "It is surprising how children in the evil Soviet Union were raised by such high moral rules." He was the one who supported my idea of publishing this story and helped me come up with the title.

Love for Education

I am the youngest of four children of a highly educated family. When I was 4 years old, I could easily add and subtract numbers up to 50. All neighbors knew me as an extraordinary wonder child, in that respect, anyway.

Armenian custom is that parents teach their kids arithmetic and take pride in their preschool children's calculating skills. The problem that the very little had to solve was: You have two apples; if I give you three more how many apples would you have? Or even in a more abstract manner: What is 2 plus 3? This develops children's reasoning skills and respect for logical thinking. This custom was a result of love and respect people in the Soviet Union, and especially in Armenia, had for mathematics, natural sciences, and education in general. Armenia's love for education was passed through generations from the very beginning — from the third millennium B.C., if not earlier.

Christmas and the New Year

Although during the Soviet era people were not allowed to celebrate Christmas, in Armenia we celebrated Christmas on January 6th in our houses in a discreet manner. Christmas was not officially recognized and celebrated in the Soviet Union; moreover, Santa Claus was renamed to Frost Grandpa (although he looked exactly the same) and would visit families on New Year's Eve instead. As you might have guessed, the New Year was the biggest holiday everyone looked forward to; people had two days off to celebrate, whereas January 6th was a workday. All employers had to organize New Year parties for their employees' children. A male staff member would dress up as Frost Grandpa and a female staff member would take the role of the Snow Maiden. Frost Grandpa was very popular among children since he would bring presents, play with all of them, watch them dance, perform and hear them sing. In fact, both parties and presents were funded by the state, that is, by the Communist Party.

The Dinner Table

A big part of the Soviet lifestyle was the gatherings around the dinner table. All the food we had back then was organic. Why? Because chemicals were too expensive to be used in agriculture.

The grocery stores were always supplied with bread, meat, dairy products, fruits, and vegetables, etc. All the produce and the products were of high quality; as a matter of fact, Armenian fruits and vegetables, to this day, are delicious. I remember how my mom would buy caviar from the deli; she was sure that

Photo provided by the author.

Gohar Marikyan

it was very nutritious for us kids. We always had plenty of apricots, grapes, watermelon, and other fruits. Mom would keep them in the balcony of our apartment because there was not enough space in the refrigerator. Back in the day, refrigerators were not as large as they are now. Passing by, we would often grab something to eat. The only time my mother was not happy seeing us eating fruits was before dinnertime. She was concerned that we would lose our appetites and not finish our dinner. Dinnertime was considered cherished family time. Everyone had to be at the family dinner table on time to take their usual seats; mine was next to dad. Engaging in pleasant and often intellectual conversations was something we always loved to do while enjoying the delicious dinner. I miss my mom's cooking.

Movies, Cartoons, and Shopping

Back then, cartoons and movies were all about love and friendship, where the good was always the winner. Foreign movies would appear in movie theaters of the Soviet Union only if they fit the communist ideology. Nudity was

forbidden and there was no violence in filmmaking. Not everything was censored — healthy criticism, witty remarks, and mockery of the Soviet Union could also be seen on the screen.

I fully understood why the feminist movement was so important in the U.S. after I watched old shows where the host would kiss all women on their lips, and make fun of their clothing and appearances. It was just disgusting. I hadn't seen anything similar on TV in the Soviet Union; however, there was some discrimination against women. A good example would be how it was common to think that men were smarter than women; the consequences of this way of thinking were lower salaries for women, lower chance of getting promotions, etc.

I was 8 when I watched *Tom and Jerry* — the famous American cartoon — for the first time. I was so shocked seeing those two constantly fighting. Needless to say, I had a hard time rationalizing their fights as a child. I would question myself: "Why do they have to fight? Can't they be just friends?" I don't think I ever got answers to my questions. The other cartoon that we were allowed[1] to watch was *Bambi*. This one was somewhat similar to Soviet cartoons and had a deeper meaning behind it. As a kid, I definitely enjoyed *Bambi* more than *Tom and Jerry.* Children in the Western world normally had their own room filled with toys. I, growing up in a well-to-do family, had toys that I would keep in a box that was approximately two feet long and a foot wide and deep. My toys were not as colorful as toys here, but I have to admit that, to me, my dolls had much prettier faces than the dolls I see in toy stores here.

It was hard to find nice things in the stores. Everything was of low quality and tasteless. My parents managed to dress us nicely. Mom, an educated woman, had to sew our clothing. She had good taste, and she could sew well, too. She had to learn out of necessity. Dad would buy us nice clothes when traveling to present his scholarly work at nuclear physics symposiums. At least once a year, he would present his work, mainly within the Soviet Union since travel abroad was heavily restricted and expensive. However, my father's success in his work led to the opportunity to present his research at international conferences in Japan, France, and Italy. Conference organizers had to pay all expenses because a scholar from the Soviet Union couldn't afford it. Dad was also invited to present in the U.S. but the KGB (the former Soviet Union secret police and intelligence agency) refused to allow him to leave the country. I remember how disappointed he was. Later, during the post-Soviet era of independent Armenia, all restrictions were lifted, fortunately, and my older brother was able to start working with Americans on a project in a nuclear physics company in Newport News, Virginia.

The Schooling System

All schools in the Soviet Union had to follow the same curriculum and use the same textbooks translated into the local language. Textbooks in Armenian schools were in the Armenian language. We didn't have elementary, secondary, and high schools. Children would be admitted to school at the age of 7 and graduate from the same school at 17. Depending on the total number of students per grade, students were divided into classes of 15 to 25. Students were in the same class and stayed with the same classmates from the first grade to graduation. We grew up with our classmates. Spending 10 years together helped me and many others make good, lifelong friends.

During our school years, we tended to make friends with the smart kids; intelligence was appreciated even by the youngsters. Being cool was never associated with having low grades and skipping school, as it was sometimes the case in the other parts of the world. Although we were not friends with some of our classmates, there was no bullying in our schools. We were like siblings growing up together, showing love and kindness to one another. Until now, I have sweet memories of my classmates and school days.

There were special schools for languages, mathematics and physics, music, etc. I graduated from a special school for languages where we started learning three different alphabets when we were 7: English (Latin), Russian (Cyrillic), and Armenian. Besides studying the English language and grammar, we also studied English literature from *Beowulf* to contemporary literature. Special geography and history courses were taught in the English language, too.

At school, mathematics was too easy for me, though I had my struggle with history. It was terribly uninteresting to me; I was bored during class. I now know why: What child could be interested in heavy-duty Soviet history rammed down one's young brain?

The students were taught to complete all assignments in time whether they liked the course or not. Education was the most important duty we had on all levels. This helped us develop a strong work ethic from a very young age. Mind you, we would never miss a class, although our education was free. During our schooling, from elementary to Ph.D., even in our wildest dreams we couldn't imagine missing or skipping class unless there was a health-related or some other valid reason. As a professor, it blows my mind when today I see my students pay the tuition and miss classes.

From the fifth to the 10th grade, we had to pass exams at the end of each academic year to be transferred to the next grade and eventually to graduate from high school. The majority[2] of exams in the Soviet Union then, such as admission exams, end of the year/ semester exams, as well as state exams, were oral. Three randomly selected topics covered in the course were

printed on numbered index cards; we would call them tickets. Each topic could appear in two or three tickets.

This is how our parents raised us. Parents were and still are an authority. They are the most respected and loved people in one's social circle. Parents are just precious.

Image provided by the author.

Figure 1 Little Octobrists pin

The Communist Pipeline

During our childhood and youth, we had to go through the communist pipeline.

In the Soviet Union, all 7- to 9-year-old children had to be "Little Octobrists." We had to wear school uniforms and a pin — a ruby red pentangle badge with Lenin's childhood portrait (see Figure 1).

Little Octobrists were organized in groups, each representing one school grade level. The groups were divided into subgroups called Little Stars. Each Little Star was under the leadership of a Young Pioneer.

Image provided by the author.

Figure 2 Young Pioneers pin

I had to have that pin on my school uniform[3] too, of course. I didn't mind because I liked the combination of gold and red; Lenin's childhood face was shiny gold, surrounded by a red glossy star. Besides, we had to learn a number of children's poems praising Lenin. To this day, I remember some lines from those poems. Here is a line: *Grandpa Lenin once was a child just like us; little, cheerful, and cute.*

Every child of the ages 10 to 14 had to be a Young Pioneer. The motto of Young Pioneers was "Pioneer, be prepared!" and the response was, "Always prepared!" The representative pieces of Pioneers' attire were the red triangle necktie[4] and the badge, the red star with a flame and Lenin's bust in the center, and "Always prepared!" written in Russian at the bottom (see Figure 2). In fact, we were not allowed to step into school without these two Young Pioneer symbols.

Having the pin on my pinafore was not a big issue for me; I put it there, it stayed there, and I forgot about it. My mother had to wash and iron the necktie almost every morning, otherwise, I could be accused of not being dressed neatly. Most kids didn't like the red necktie and found it annoying.

At the age of 14, we had to become a Komsomol[5] and we could stop being a Komsomol at age 28. The good part was that we didn't need to wear the hated red necktie, but we had to pay membership dues (for those who had no income, including high school students, the dues then were 2 kopeks[6]). The Young Pioneer badge was replaced by another red pin, the Komsomol membership badge. It was a red flag with Lenin's bust. The letters underneath are the Russian abbreviation for the "All-Union Leninist Young Communist League" (see Figure 3).

Being a member of the Communist Party then was an honor and a privilege. Only members of the Communist Party could be in higher/managerial positions. The number of Communist

Image provided by the author.

Figure 3 Komsomol pin

Party members had to be proportionally distributed among occupations. If scholars had difficulties becoming communist, blue-collar workers and collective farmers, on the other hand, were almost pressured to do so. It is understandable because there were very few opportunities for them to get higher positions, while communists with higher education had a better chance of becoming managers, principals, directors, etc.

I Was About to Become an Anti-Communist

We were in the 8th grade. The day when our class was scheduled to become members of Komsomol, I was out sick, therefore I didn't become a member with my classmates. I didn't worry about it because I was uninterested, and that is why I never contacted the school Komsomol office to become a member.

Two years later, in June, I successfully passed nine graduation exams in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History of USSR, Armenian Language, Armenian Literature, English Language and Literature, and Russian Language and Literature. On the day of my last exam, the leader of our school's Komsomol approached me and said with a smile, "Hi, congratulations! You are graduating." "Thanks," I said. It was the first time I was talking with her. "Are you planning to go to college for a degree? I think you should. You are the best student in our school in mathematics and physics," she

continued. "Yes. I plan on going for my bachelor's and master's in computer science." I still couldn't understand her purpose in talking with me about my future. "I'm concerned that you are not a Komsomol, you risk not getting admitted to university. If you decide to become a Komsomol, come see me tomorrow afternoon. I'll arrange it for you. Don't forget to bring your 3-by-4 photos.[7] I need two of them." "Wow! Looks like I am forced to become a member," I thought and said nothing. "Your future is more important. Think about that. I'll be here tomorrow," she said and left. I watched her leave, feeling squeezed into a corner. "I better ask my dad," I thought and went home, excited to share with my family the news about me successfully passing the last exam and graduating from high school.

After receiving congratulatory kisses and hugs from my family, I said to my father, "Dad, today the chairwoman of our school's Komsomol approached me. I didn't like what she said," and I told him about the conversation I had with her and continued, "I don't want to be a member." "I know how you feel. Don't you think that your future is more important? She is correct. The university may not accept your documents if you are not a Komsomol. Besides, yes, they are forcing you to become a Komsomol, but they are not forcing their ideology on you. Their concern is to make sure that all graduates are Komsomols. I suggest you go tomorrow and apply to become a member," said my dad. "I will," I responded, although I could see that dad deep down was not happy with his advice to me, but he knew the consequences firsthand.

Artem Alikhanian,[8] an internationally well-known nuclear physicist, was the founder and the president of the Yerevan Physics Institute, the scientific institute where my father worked. Dr. Alikhanian was not a member of the Communist Party, and the Soviet Government was giving the institute a really hard time. Many times, Artem Alikhanian had asked my father, "Please be the communist leader of the institute, otherwise, communists will destroy my institute." Dad had great respect for Artem Alikhanian, and stayed in the position of the communist leader of the Yerevan Physics Institute for many years. I remember his conversations with mom about his meetings with the communist leaders of Armenia. I was too little to understand the details, but from their faces, I knew that it was extremely stressful for them. On top of his scholarly work, as the communist leader, he was responsible for all of those meetings and organizational work. In the year when my father was not the communist leader of the institute, a group of communists from the institute conspired against Artem Alikhanian and removed him from his position. They were after my father, as well, trying to and eventually getting him suspended unfairly from his position. Shortly after, Artem Alikhanian passed away and my dad became sick with Parkinson's disease.

Although I didn't want to become a Komsomol, I did what my dad said. I knew that whatever he said was for my own good; I always trusted my parents. Yes, it was good advice, and I will always be grateful to my dad for that.

The next day, I went to see the chairwoman of our school's Komsomol. "Hi," I said sticking my head into her office. She was sitting behind a desk reviewing some files. There was a long table with chairs around it, perpendicular to her desk forming a T-shape. "This other table is for meetings. So there are this many people who are working in our school's Komsomol," I thought, looking at the chairs around the table. "Hi! Come in and have a seat. Have you brought your photos?" she said with a smile inviting me to her office. I gave her the two photos and sat on the chair closest to me. "Great! I'll prepare the necessary paperwork." In some five minutes, I signed a few papers and the chairwoman handed me my Komsomol membership booklet. "I wish you big success in your education, career, and most importantly in your life. I am sure you will successfully pass all university entry exams and will be admitted," she said and gave me a big hug. I thanked her and left.

"That was fast. No questions were asked about the party's ideology. What dad said was very true. In reality, the chairwoman of our school's Komsomol was only preoccupied with the formality. Her only concern was having my name on the list. She neither questioned my devotion to the Komsomol nor forced its ideology upon me. Maybe the chairwoman used precaution — eliminating the possibility of someone accusing me of not being a Komsomol and using it against me. As a matter of fact, I must also give her credit for knowing that I was not a member and for offering her help.

University Years

After graduating from high school, I had a month to study for the university entrance exams. To get accepted to a university, one had to pass serious entrance exams; as a matter of fact, from hundreds of candidates only the best ones would get accepted: the cream of the crop. Wealth played no role; one had to earn the honor. From several hundred candidates, I was one of the top five. This is how I started my journey into the world of mathematics and computers.

We had two terms a year, from September to December, and from February to June. At the end of each term, we had to pass a good number of exams. There were three to four days between exams. As one could imagine, during January and June, students were overwhelmingly busy with exams.

I passed a good number of exams during my schooling and I have to admit that I only cheated once, just once. Here is the story of how that came about.

The pass-or-fail exam for Physical Training class was held in the Victory Park situated in the capital. It was the only class that boys and girls were in separate groups. The instructor informed us that to pass the exam we had to run 10 kilometers, which equal about six miles. During the semester, we had run up to 200 meters, and running 10,000 meters was not easy for many of us, including me. Although the instructor hadn't trained us to run such a long distance, we couldn't complain because no one would listen. We had no choice; we had to run. At the time, it was the biggest challenge for me, someone who was never athletic.

The instructor explained the route, lined us up at the start line, and shouted, "Start!" pushing the button of his stopwatch. We started running. In no time, I was behind the lead group. I and other girls were running, hardly breathing, and we were falling more and more behind. It was the only time that I was seriously concerned about passing an exam and there was no way I was getting to the finish line. We were not even halfway finished when I saw through the trees that the lead group was finishing the distance. I immediately turned left, passed by the trees, and joined the group of leaders. All those who were running with me followed me. As a result, nobody failed the class. Although I cheated, I think it was unfair to make us run six miles without providing us with the proper training. Needless to say, I was happy that I was able to unintentionally help others pass the exam.

It was a requirement that all university students in the Soviet Union had to study the History of Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, Political Economics,[9] Scientific Atheism, and Scientific Communism.

None of these subjects were my favorite. The only textbook I read cover to cover was the scientific atheism textbook written by an Armenian author in the Armenian language. The author had done a good job providing deep knowledge of the Christian faith. I consider him to be a brave person to dare to write about Christianity in that manner in a textbook on atheism during the Soviet era. The author had no choice; he had to include some criticism of Christianity to cover himself. After all, it was a textbook for scientific atheism. Wisely, the author had come up with those funny unimportant "criticisms" such as the thought that kissing the cross could pass various viruses from one person to another. It was the first time that I was reading about Christianity, although, I always knew about the existence of God. When I was 4 or 5, I explained to my childhood friend, "Eliza, God always wears white, he has long hair and a beard. God lives in the clouds. He is very kind and loves us." Until now, I do not know when and how I had learned about God. No one in the family ever talked about God. It was punishable to read religious books in the Soviet Union. I don't think it was even possible to find any religious book.

A few years later, I saw my sister reading a book. Noticing me looking at her, she hid the book. Her behavior made me curious. "I saw you were reading a book. What book are you reading? Show me," I demanded. My sister gave me the book without any explanation. I opened it and read the title, *New Testament.* I remembered reading about it in my scientific atheism textbook. "Can I read this book?" I asked my sister. She gave me the book and warned, "Read it only at home. Our department head found this book in the drawer of my desk and told me — I would say frightened me — not to bring in this book again." Her story troubled me and I kept the existence of the book a secret.

I was very interested in the classes I was taking at the university and was enjoying studying them. Besides completing all required courses, for both bachelor's and master's degrees, we had to work on an unexplored research topic, write a thesis, and defend it. The procedure of defending both bachelor's and master's thesis was the same.

The thesis had to be submitted to an assigned "opponent." Then, on a set date, the student had to present the research to the committee consisting of the dean and other professors. After the presentation, the opponent had to point out the issues found in the student's work. Then the student had an opportunity to respond to those issues, which had to be accepted by the opponent. Then the adviser had to present the student and the completed research. After listening to all the presentations, the committee would release the grades. All students were invited to be present. The defense of the Ph.D. thesis followed a similar procedure. There were statewide committees for each specialty, consisting of nationally-known scholars. The defense was open to the public.

I Was About to Become an Anti-Communist Again

I had successfully defended my thesis for my bachelor's degree, and later on for my master's degree. Lastly, we had to pass the state exam on Scientific Communism. Students failing the state exam could have one more opportunity to pass the exam a year later. Those who failed the exam the second time never received the degree. State exams were conducted by a special committee made up of the dean and professors, a representative of the university president's office, plus a representative of the Department of Education of the country. The state exam was open to the public, which is why it was being held in one of the auditoriums of the university.

Our professor of Scientific Communism was a nice person. He knew that we were not interested in his subject and did not make an issue out of it. Unfortunately, the committee was in charge of grading us, not just him.

The date for the state exam was set, and I had no choice but to study very hard to pass the exam. My mom isolated me in my room and would check on me from time to time. Reading the book for Scientific Communism would put me to sleep. Every time my mom would catch me sleeping, she would bring me a cup of Armenian coffee[10] to keep me awake. Caffeine would keep me up for some 40 minutes. Then I would fall asleep again. In a day, I would end up drinking about five to eight cups of coffee. It's not a surprise that after passing the exam, I struggled to quit my coffee addiction.

On the day of the exam, after finding the auditorium, I sat next to my classmate who had passed the exam the day before. "I had the following topics on my ticket," started my friend. "Please, stop, otherwise I will forget everything I have learned," I interrupted her impatiently. My friend was not happy hearing my response but said nothing.

The committee members arrived at 9 a.m. and took their seats at the table. The secretary to the dean brought the exam tickets and gave them to the committee chair. The chair reviewed the topics and checked the paper sheets and passed the pile of tickets to other members of the committee. After the tickets were examined, the secretary spread them upside down on the table. Everything was ready to start the exam.

The secretary called out the names of the first three students from the list. One-by-one they chose a ticket and went to sit in the area allocated for students' preparation to present their topics to the committee and the audience. Any committee member could interrupt and ask related questions. After the presentation, students would be graded by all members of the committee. The auditorium full of students was quiet. Everyone was carefully following the presentations and the questions that the committee members had for presenters. Soon the secretary read my name. I chose a ticket and went to get prepared for the presentation.

When my time was up, I presented my topics and answered all the questions the committee members had for me. The committee was satisfied with my presentation. "Good," said a committee member and continued, "What is the fundamental law of socialism" "Those who work they eat; those who don't, do not eat," I responded. "Is that true in capitalism?" "No," was my response, to which my professor nodded his head, approving my response with a smile. He was happy with my presentation. The next question was, "Who in capitalist countries do not work … ?" Hearing this, I thought about the young man I had a crush on. He had just graduated with his Ph.D. and was in search of employment.

> *"'Please, stop, otherwise I will forget everything I have learned …'"*

"Unemployed people," I responded with a smile. To my surprise, students in the auditorium started laughing, my professor's face turned purple, and the representative of the Department of Education shouted out jumping up from his chair, "What?" I couldn't understand what happened. Totally confused and scared, I looked at my professor, who signaled to me to leave the room. I immediately went out to the hallway.

"Are you crazy?" asked my friend. "What happened? Why did everyone get angry at me?" I said. I was shaky. "Didn't you hear the question? Who in capitalist countries do not work but eat?" she repeated the question, and continued, "The answer is capitalists." It was clear to me what had happened. "They may think that you are anti-communist and can fail you," she said. "Hearing the first part of the question I thought about my friend," I said with a trembling voice. "Let's hope for the best," she said, and we went out to the street for a short walk. All that time my heart was racing. I could kiss my master's degree goodbye forever, or worse, I could end up in jail. When we returned, the grades were already announced and the list was on the wall. I had passed the exam with the lowest grade. Most probably, my dean and my professors had managed to convince the representative of the Department of Education that I was not an anti-communist.

Although I could have easily gotten an A, I ended up with the lowest grade. I was happy regardless; I had graduated with my master's in computer science.

My First Job

In the Soviet Union, it was against the law to be unemployed; the person had to either be at school or work. There were times when designated people could stop anyone in the street during the working hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) to question why they were out. Of course, that was too much and the surveillance only lasted a couple of months. The fact is, anyone could be persecuted for not being employed. Moreover, a private business sector was absent from Soviet society, hence, there were neither poor people nor rich people, excluding those who had high positions in the Communist Party hierarchy. The latter were the only ones who could make big money. Others could be questioned and persecuted about the source of their wealth. On the brighter side, there were no homeless nor hungry people.

Then companies would contact corresponding university departments requesting X number of graduates for employment in their companies. We, new graduates, had to choose from a few companies from the list. We had to start working no later than October 1st, and the requirement was to work there for at least two years in order to get our diplomas. Fun fact: firing any employee (including graduates) was a complicated, almost impossible, procedure for the employer overall.

I chose the Yerevan Scientific Research Institute of Mathematical Machines. I had to be a programmer. It was a large and well-known company.

There were some 15 to 20 people in the department I joined. The whole department was in a large room. We didn't have cubicles; all we had were desks with four drawers. A senior coworker was assigned to be my coach. I adopted the new programming language pretty fast, and soon enough, I was assigned to develop my first program.

"We are upgrading our operating system. You have to develop the program that Armen had previously developed. Here is his program. You can use it," said our department head, Jano, handing me the printout of the program. He continued, "This program does one function, the new program has to perform two more functions." Then he explained in detail all three functions.

Armen was a nice young man from a well-to-do family. He was the cousin of Jano's wife. Armen was Jano's and other managers' favorite, probably because of his dad who had good connections.

I was happy to get an opportunity to develop my first program and immediately started working on it. While others were still developing their programs, I finished coding and went to check it. There were two or three syntax errors. After fixing those, the program was flawless; it was perfectly performing all three functions. I was happy because this meant that I could dedicate more time to my Ph.D. thesis research topic, on which I was already working.

"Have you finished your work?" one day Jano asked. He was not happy seeing me working on my research. "Yes! My program works." "Show me the printout of your program," said Jano with an unhappy face. I gave him the printout. He and everyone in the office could see that my program was more than three times shorter than Armen's program. While Armen's program was performing only one function while mine was performing three, my program was at least 10 times shorter than Armen's program. I am sure Jano understood that, too. He said in an unfriendly way, "Let's go and check if your program really works. … "

We went to the computer lab. He was checking my program for half an hour as if he wanted it to fail. Watching him working on the computer, I thought, "This guy is smart, but, man, so nasty."

"It works," mumbled Jano. His face was maroon from anger. I never understood why Jano was angry at me for finishing my assignment early; I had done an excellent job.

"Did he check your program? What did he say?" asked one of my coworkers when I got back to our office. "He said, 'It works,'" trying to imitate Jano's mumbling." Everyone laughed. "Yours is 10 times shorter than Armen's," said the same coworker. "Yes, it is," said another coworker. No one liked Jano's behavior.

I was successfully continuing my research, writing articles, presenting at conferences, and publishing in scientific journals. My Ph.D. adviser was happy with my research. Soon, I defended my thesis and got my Ph.D.

Independence

In 1987, my brother-in-law started an ecological movement. He was organizing meetings and discussions on ecological and environmental issues in Armenia. These culminated in a petition that had to be signed by as many people as possible. I decided to collect some signatures at my workplace. The next day after I collected a few signatures, I was called in to see the higher manager. I had no idea why. When I was in his office, he told me, "The KGB informed us that you were collecting signatures at work. You have to stop it before the KGB gets serious about this issue. You can go." I left his office and stopped collecting signatures. I told the story to my brother-in-law. In response, he said, "There is one KGB agent in each department. As a rule, no one knows who it is, and it's hard to guess. So, be careful!"

In February 1988, the ecological movement grew into a political movement. Armenia was the first in the Soviet Union that started demonstrations against the Soviet regime, demanding independence. My brother-in-law was one of the leaders of this movement for independence.

After the earthquake of 1988,[11] it was imperative to have an organization to help people survive those hard times, and my brother-in-law founded the first and only independent charitable organization in the USSR. To help him, I went to work at my brother-in-law's charity as the head of the public relations and foreign affairs department.

A few years later, on September 21, 1991, the people of Armenia voted in a referendum to proclaim independence from the Soviet Union.

Notes

1 We watched those cartoons as a part of our English language class.

2 The Armenian Language exam was an essay on a topic we could choose from three given topics. For mathematics, there were oral and written examinations, both made of proofs and problem-solving.

3 The school uniform for girls in the Soviet Union was a dark brown dress with a black pinafore. In spring or for festive occasions, we were allowed to wear a white pinafore.

4 The necktie was a red isosceles triangle with a 39-inch base and 12-inch height.

5 "The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League," usually known as the Komsomol, was a political youth organization in the Soviet Union. Often Komsomols were also called Young Communists.

[6] Then, a ride on tram cost 3 kopeks.

[7] All documents in the Soviet Union required 3 cm by 4 cm (1.18 in by 1.57 in) photos.

[8] Artem Alikhanian (24 June 1908–25 February 1978) was a Soviet Armenian physicist, the founder and first director of the Yerevan Physics Institute. He was one of a few physicists who laid the foundations for nuclear physics in the Soviet Union, and is known as the "Father of Armenian Physics."

[9] Political Economics was proving that a socialistic economy had advantages over a capitalistic economy.

[10] To brew Armenian coffee, a special copper pot called ջազվե (jazzvé) is used. It has a long handle and comes in different sizes, depending on the number of cups one needs to brew. The coffee cups are small — 2–3 oz.

[11] The earthquake of December 7, 1988 destroyed one-third of Armenia.

"The Seven Vectors: General Developmental Directions.

(1) Developing Competence.
(2) Managing Emotions.
(3) Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence.
(4) Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships.
(5) Establishing Identity.
(6) Developing Purpose.
(7) Developing Integrity."

— Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser, 1993
Education and Identity, *Jossey-Bass, pp. 38–39*

The SUNY Empire State College Adirondack Environmental Studies Residency

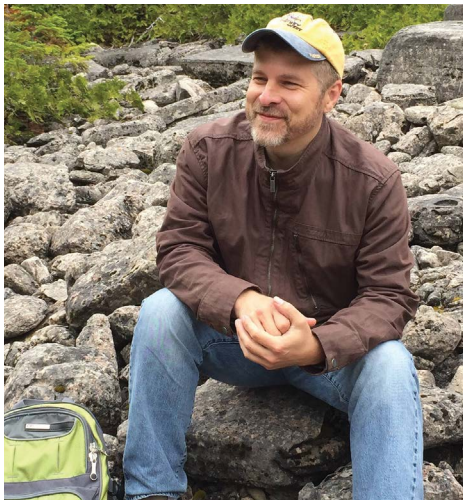
Drew Monthie, Saratoga Springs

In the autumn of 1995, I enrolled at SUNY Empire to earn my bachelor's degree. I was 30 years old and had completed an associate degree some 10 years prior at a traditional (SUNY) college. I had looked at various options, including traditional college, but as an adult working full-time, SUNY Empire seemed to be a better fit for me. I wasn't sure what to expect with distance learning and thought it might have some major advantages for me as an adult student. One of the downsides that I didn't contemplate at the time was the effects of school without a classroom and thus with little in-person communication with other students or instructors.

My degree plan was an environmental studies program to earn a Bachelor of Science degree. In 1997, my then-mentor, Dr. Marlene Evans, recommended that I look at some of the courses offered in a new residency the college was offering beginning in the fall. The Adirondack Environmental Studies Residency looked interesting and I asked Dr. Evans if I could enroll in the residency that would take place in October at historic Huntington Memorial Camp on Raquette Lake in the Adirondack Mountains.

The camp has a storied history. Its construction began in 1877. Its builder, William West Durant, was considered one of the originators of the Adirondack style of architecture. Durant's father was the owner of the Union Pacific Railroad and made a fortune that he would leave to his children. Young Durant led a life of travel and leisure in his early years, visiting Europe and Asia and living abroad. Originally, the camp was called Camp Pine Knot and was intended to lure investors to help finance the construction of a railroad

Photo credits (this article): Drew Monthie



Drew Monthie

in the Adirondacks and various land development schemes that the Durants had planned. W.W. Durant is also reputed to have had a mistress who he kept ensconced in a cabin, built for her, on one side of the peninsula, where Camp Pine Knot was situated. It was known as the Kirby Camp. At the same time, he built his wife an elaborate houseboat with a kitchen, bedrooms, and bathroom to ride out "black fly season" on the other side of the peninsula. "Black fly season" was likely an opportune time to spend with his mistress. Both structures survive today and have been restored by SUNY Cortland, although the houseboat is kept on land to preserve it.

A subsequent divorce, poor money management, and a lawsuit by Durant's sister to provide accountability for the distribution of their father's estate divested W.W. Durant of most of his money, and to settle one of his debts, Durant ceded Camp Pine Knot to industrialist Collis P. Huntington in 1895. Huntington died there in 1900, and other than caretakers and some

staff, none of the Huntington family ever lived there again. SUNY Cortland faculty, canoeing on the lake in the 1940s, discovered the vacant camp and were able to convince Huntington's son to sell it as an outdoor education center to SUNY Cortland in 1947 for the most reasonable sum of $1. Durant would also build Great Camps Sagamore and Uncas, which along with Pine Knot are all National Historic Landmarks today.

Some of the residency courses in which I enrolled the first few years of the Adirondack Residency (ADK) were Wilderness and Philosophy with Mentor Wayne Ouderkirk and The Interpretation of Landscapes with Marlene Evans. I also worked with Marlene Evans and Nikki Shrimpton at each residency from 1998–2007, helping lead ecology field experiences for students, both during and after my bachelor's program. Plants are my lifelong passion and this site in the central Adirondacks with no roads and abundant vegetation was a perfect fit.

This was the beginning of my ongoing affiliation with the "ADK residency." I eventually began my master's degree in ethnobotany through the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at SUNY Empire and as a final project, designed and taught a course on the botany of native peoples at the residency. Upon graduating, I was hired as an adjunct by SUNY Empire and began teaching for the Science, Mathematics, and Technology (SMT) area. Each year, I continue to teach a course at the Adirondack residency, sometimes by myself and sometimes team teaching with other faculty members. Mentor Menoukha Case and I developed a blended course on Native American Plants: Pathways, Prophecies, and Survivance that we have team-taught for several years at the residency, and I worked with Mentor Kevin Woo on another blended course that we team-taught on ecology and extinction titled, Life in the Age of Man.

In the early years of the residency, SUNY Empire had no residency coordinator for events like this and the faculty did all the organizing and administration for the event. Camp Huntington has a limited staff, so faculty and students perform most of the cleaning of dorms, KP ("kitchen police") duty, and cleanup of classroom spaces. One of my duties, in addition to teaching, was to set up KP lists and make sure students and faculty showed up to bus tables and serve food. These mealtime gatherings add camaraderie and equity to the residency. All of us, faculty and students, pitch in to make the event work. Students and faculty are invited at each meal to share thoughts or readings such as poems or even to sing a song. One year, SUNY Empire's then-President Joe Moore showed up and I assigned him KP duty. Joe was a good sport about it and did his part, and remembered it when I ran into him a few years later.

In the mid-2000s, SUNY Empire hired a residency coordinator, Lori McCaffrey. Lori does an outstanding

job coordinating the event for enrolled students, faculty, and for the residency alumni who have the opportunity to return to Camp Huntington each year during the second half of the week. She organizes our agenda, sets up our meeting places with our students if we need classroom space or technical assistance, helps provide coordination for transportation for students, and answers the many queries from students about the format and accommodations at the camp. Her work allows faculty to focus on their students during the residency, which enhances the experience for all.

One of the most memorable things about the Adirondack Environmental Studies Residency for me is the interaction with others. SUNY Empire students spend the vast majority of their academic time alone, reading, studying, researching, and writing. I can attest personally as a former student to the loneliness aspect. Online learning can prevent students from making as many connections as they might with face-to-face learning. I met many other students and the feeling of isolation was an experience we shared. In the early years of the residency, there were also many FORUM business students (a college program started in 1985 that focused on management studies supported by corporate sponsors), and so the makeup of the residency was quite diverse at the outset and continues to be each year. When I was in my 30s, I thought nothing of staying up all night by a campfire talking with my fellow students, and most years this is exactly what we did. We talked about the environment, our families, the camp, and many other subjects. Eventually, we would realize that we should probably get a few hours of sleep before our classes began.

Residencies afford students the opportunity to get to know their instructors as people and this in turn makes students more likely to reach out if they need assistance. The format of residencies also allows them to make contact with their fellow students, interact, share experiences about life and academia, and forge friendships and support systems. If I know someone in a class personally, I am more likely to reach out to them to talk, ask questions, or seek advice or feedback.

The residency format lends itself well to this. Students arrive at the boat dock at the Antlers Camp, also part of SUNY Cortland, on Raquette Lake, and then take a pontoon boat to the peninsula where Camp Huntington is located; there are no roads to the camp. Once at camp, we typically have a plenary session for introductions and camp protocols such as KP duty, dorm assignments, etc. Students then go to the first tutorial or study group with the instructor for their course. If the weather permits, many of the instructors spend time outdoors doing fieldwork with students. Depending upon the course, the fieldwork may be photography, writing, drawing, or science-based. Later in the afternoon, there is free time and then a social hour, followed by dinner and either a speaker in the Carlson Classroom or entertainment in Metcalf Hall, a rustic building that once housed billiard tables and Gilded Age entertainment. The residency has in the past hosted speakers such as Bill Webber of the World Wildlife Fund, environmental philosopher Dr. Jim Hill of Valdosta University, and James Howard Kunstler, the author of books such as *The Geography of Nowhere* and *The Long Emergency.* This past fall, we hosted John F. Sheehan, director of communications for the Adirondack Council, who spoke about the damage from overuse on Adirondack trails. In Metcalf, we have listened to the tall tales of Adirondack storyteller Bill Smith and learned square dancing with musicians Dan Duggan and our own SUNY Empire Mentor Peggy Lynn. Afterward, students may stay in Metcalf by the fire or head down to the dock to make a fire outside and sit by the water. The next day, the cycle repeats and there is typically a science talk, some free time for students to hike, and historical tours of Camp Huntington. Before the residency ends, we have a second plenary session to wrap up.

Camp Huntington is a place to detach from the complex, technological society in which we live in for at least a few hours each day we are there, while still focusing on our studies and on our

students. There is also camaraderie among the faculty. We get to have coffee together with our students and watch the sunrise or sunset on the docks; we eat together, bus tables, and sit around the fire and talk. For me, as an instructor, working remotely almost all of the time, this is a special experience. We get to catch up on what is going on in both our academic and nonacademic lives in a less formal setting.

According to SUNY Empire's Decision Support office, statistically, residency students have higher success rates than students in non-blended course models. The completion rate for blended (residency studies) is about 87% compared to online courses, 80%, independent studies, 85%, and study groups, 91% (K. Dorsey, personal communication, July 2, 2020).

I have no doubt this success rate is due to the interaction that occurs and the humanization of instructors to students, and vice versa. The ability to get to know one's fellow students is also part of this experience, helping to facilitate the feeling of belonging to a group rather than working alone. I know for me it was an incredibly valuable experience and why I continued to attend each year. I met other environmental studies students interested in wildlife, environmental law, conservation, or some other relevant topic that was not the focus of my own studies. The exposure to a wide range of environmental perspectives from fellow students helped me to grow as a student and person. Many students also bring their cameras to photograph the incredible Adirondack scenery or the historic buildings, and I am an avid photographer (since high school) so I was one of those students and as an instructor, I continue to photograph this site each year. This has allowed me to note where certain plants and plant communities are found to share with my students. The affinity for photography has also resulted in some lasting friendships with former residency classmates from my student days. We talk to compare cameras, photos, or photo software. The residency now offers a photography course each year, which is received enthusiastically by students.

As an instructor, it is valuable to me to get to meet some of my students in person. Working in the area of SMT, I have often had students from my other courses as residency students. After talking with them and spending time in the field in person, I feel I have gained some insight into which modes of learning work well for them.

Residency courses also meet SUNY General Education requirements, allowing students to not only fulfill those requirements but also to have an interactive experience. I would urge mentors working with their students to look at the many excellent residencies offered by SUNY Empire to see if they might be a good fit with their mentees' degree planning. Some of the courses that have been offered at the Adirondack residency in past years are Environmental Ethics, Community Supported Agriculture, Nature Writing, History of the National Parks, Environmental Geography, Plants and Society, Nature Photography, Adirondack History, and the History of Hiking, just to name a few. Each year may have a few studies repeated, while new ones are added.

The residency has been a constant in my life for almost a quarter of a century, through some turbulent times: two bouts of cancer, the deaths of both of my parents; and some good times: earning two degrees and finally being able to legally marry the person I love after decades together. When October arrives each year, I know I will get to see old friends and colleagues, meet my students, learn new things, and make new friends. We'll have coffee on the dock, take pictures of the sunrise or sunset, perform fieldwork, hike, meet for social hour, listen to music, and sit around the fire at night talking.

Note

2020 will be the first year that the residency will not be hosted at Camp Huntington due to COVID-19 and instead will be a virtual event. It should return to an in-person event again in 2021.

Reflections of a Retiree

Lear Matthews, Mentor Emeritus, Manhattan

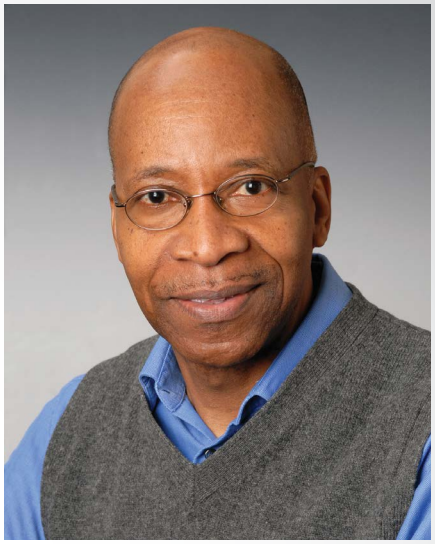
"Regardless of your accomplishments, never forget your community, be humble, but always stand up for your rights." — My father

I joined the SUNY Empire State College faculty at the Metropolitan Center, then located at 225 Varick Street, in 1998. I was somewhat familiar with the college's mission, curriculum, and student population from a previous one-year adjunct position. The initial interviews for a full-time position afforded me the opportunity not only to meet some of the college's administrators and faculty but to observe two fundamental aspects of the institution that were important to me as I made my decision to join what was to become a significant part of my academic/professional life.

For me, teaching does not occur in a vacuum. The measure of a good institution lies both in its academic excellence, opportunities for the development of scholarship, and the extent to which the curriculum reflects its human and structural environment. In the years immediately before joining SUNY Empire, my residency in New York City informed me through participant-observation that I was part of a "salad bowl" and not a "melting pot." I was honored to have had the opportunity to visit the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, under the auspices of SUNY Empire to conduct a cross-cultural project. It enhanced my perspective on adult learning and work. Indeed, one of the greatest rewards for me over many years at the college was the level of engagement when leading groups with such a diverse student population. There, I had many opportunities to challenge our assumptions and to recognize the power of storytelling.

During my tenure at SUNY Empire, I witnessed a remarkable institutional transition, which felt as though the college was in the depths of a metamorphosis in management and curriculum. The changes may have been exasperating to some of us, who envisioned the "phasing out" of a well-grounded nontraditional model — the bedrock of the college's educational model. Familiar embedded terms such as "mentor," "study group," "group study," "group tutorial," and "studio workshop" were to become student contact approaches of the past. I was part of a handful of mentors who began to see themselves grasping at the threads of a fading ideology. Nevertheless, I felt that we painfully adjusted to the transition, mostly with critical compliance.

Although empathetic to the inevitability of changes, I never fully grasped the rationale for some of them, and suspect the same to be true of some of my colleagues. Perhaps that was part of my own resistance to change. In retrospect, I found myself participating less in formal discussions about the change repercussions. Instead,



Lear Matthews

I would have individual conversations with colleagues, quietly expressing views on the situation and providing a private milieu for venting and coping. However, my commitment to quality instruction and dedication to students was never altered.

Unfortunately, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic highjacked the kind of retirement farewell I anticipated. Nevertheless, the "Virtual Tribute" provided a creative forum for the expression of love, appreciation, and generosity of colleagues and friends. I left SUNY Empire State College with a sense of unfathomable growth and accomplishment in my professional, academic, and collegial life. The experience heightened my resolve to commit to my father's mantra. His spirit lives in me!

Hand and Head: Making and Knowing in the Labor Studies Program

Barrie Cline and Rebecca Fraser, Manhattan

Introduction

In 2018, we launched the exhibit *Breaking Divides* at SUNY Empire State College's Harry Van Arsdale Jr. School of Labor Studies (HVASLS), presenting a compilation of the art and writing of rank and file trade unionists, construction workers who are students at the school, and those whose works embody its pedagogy.[1] The exhibit explores student's reflections about how class, race, and gender intersect with their tradecraft and unionism. The original catalyst for creating the exhibit stemmed from reading Kristin Ross's (2015) book, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune.* Her book concerned the 73 day "reformed society" that was constructed in 1871 by working-class Communards, where Ross described, through the voices of the Communards themselves, their goals for inclusion and shared public beauty[2] — what a federation within their ranks called "communal luxury." Aligned in this federation were writers and artists, painters and sculptors, etc., defined largely as those who produced works for contemplation; and ***artisans,*** *those who chiefly craft functional objects and who have come to be viewed lower in status than artists.* They saw communal luxury as constituting equity in educational practices and art that "spread art everywhere" (p. 53), and following the emancipatory teachings of educator Joseph Jacotot to urgently address "the world divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words and images" (p. 50). The Communards' address of culture by calling for a "communal luxury" has been the chief inspiration for our own creation of a platform that makes space for the words and images of working-class students at HVASLS.

Part of the HVASLS mission derives from Harry Van Arsdale Jr.'s belief that:

> [T]he ability to think critically and to read and write at the college level are essential skills for all citizens of a modern democratic society. But especially for trade unionists. The Van Arsdale program is designed to ensure that trade unionists acquire the skills and knowledge required of them to be leaders at their worksites, in their communities, and their union. (SUNY Empire State College, n.d., para. 2)

Van Arsdale's vision echoes the way that the Communards prioritized addressing the division between manual and intellectual labor by setting up education for boys and girls where trades education was required alongside philosophy and other academic pursuits for *everyone,* where one who "wields a tool can also write a book" (Ross, 2015, p. 42).

The result of such an education would level the playing field. No individual would ever necessarily be predestined to a certain kind of labor regardless of one's origin, while the educational structure would also bestow upon the trades — and the labor associated with them — equal value. These goals are evident in the HVASLS pedagogy. IBEW[3] Local 3 mandates that apprentices go to college collectively (in classrooms, not online, if possible); therefore, they come to HVASLS to get that education, while they are also receiving training (for which they receive credit) at their Local's training center. Our courses are taught via a participatory pedagogy.

Therefore, the *Breaking Divides* platform was conceived to offer space for creative expression, as well as space for sustained moments of student reflection and dialogue from a distinct labor studies-informed perspective.

The *Breaking Divides* exhibit explored the tensions between the academic and the vocational, head work and handwork, artist and artisan/craftsperson, as well as the individual and the collective or communal. Inherent in these tensions is also the class divide and the idea of working toward creating equal access to the same luxuries those of privilege have. This work entails connecting the working class (our students from a variety of races and different genders) to institutions of knowledge (our college) and furthering artistic and literary creation. Hopefully, together we would be crafting and characterizing a political imaginary along the lines of what Ross (2015) has described as the ability to imagine what society could be, might be if inequality were abolished. In this article, we explore some of the unique contributions that our students/workers have made to this imaginative work, drawing out aspects of the pedagogy that prompted their creativity. We arrive at the belief that these contributions by students/workers offer an expanded understanding of the figure and workings of the artisan and writer. Though this may suggest an emphasis on student's own (or their trade's own) craft skills, we believe that our students' contributions ultimately point to a collective purpose, akin to the goals of the Communards in calling for a better quality of life for workers, for luxuries that are communal.

We chiefly touch on the pedagogies and student work from the following classes: College Writing for Workers (associate degree class), Educational Planning (bachelor's degree class), and Workers/Artists, as well as Public Art (associate and bachelor's degree classes, respectively). The pedagogies of these courses entwine and overlap with each other and express the mission of HVASLS.

College Writing for Workers: *Labor Writes*

College Writing for Workers is the first course required of our apprentices who will earn an associate degree; a common syllabus is constructed, and it changes every other year, following instructor and student feedback. Foundational to the syllabus is the current issue of the student publication *Labor Writes.*[4] The anthology serves at least two purposes: First, it provides students with examples of what their fellow apprentices can produce, in both writing and the visual arts; Second, it showcases the best writing of our courses, and as such, provokes discussions on many levels, inviting students to think ahead to courses and topics they will encounter while pursuing their degrees.

One motivation in creating the curriculum for College Writing for Workers is to assist these construction trade apprentices to become acclimated to the experience of being in a college classroom. Many of our students come to college with a great deal of both resistance and reticence.[5] They are pretty confident in the work they do with their hands (on and off the job), but they are not as sure of themselves sitting behind a desk, with a group of other mostly uncomfortable students. They may not have had good experiences in other colleges or high school and don't view themselves as students (or writers or artists, for that matter); after all, they chose a trade over college only to discover that the local union they've joined requires students to get a college degree.[6] One student, in his entrance essay, responded to the challenge by writing an apology for the essay he had written; he wrote, "I don't write, I work" (Fraser & Mavrogiannis, 2017, p. 167).

The writing assignments in the course, both formal and informal, are meant to engage students in what Mike Rose (2004) called "reflective practice" in his book, *The Mind at Work.* Reflective practice, according to Rose, is the act of stepping back to take a look at the work you have done, to put some critical distance between you and the work you've been doing. Rose specifically referred to the job site, and we use it to describe the reflection of the work of writing, reading, and discussion, as well as the work (through their own writing and that of their fellow apprentices) that situates them socially and politically in the labor movement and the world.

Instructors of this first course have a challenging job, as they work to engage students in reading and writing assignments, to engage their minds in thinking about why they are where they are in these classrooms and on their job sites. Whereas the Communards were fighting the intellectualism that prevailed during that age, we, at times, encounter a pronounced anti-intellectualism in some of our students. We work with these perceptions to negotiate a beautiful form and function someplace between school and work, namely pieces of writing that are expressive of both the individual and the collective.

Educational Planning: Reflective Practice

Rose's (2004) *The Mind at Work* is a central text in our Educational Planning course. Ed Planning is a required group study for our bachelor's degree students; the course is designed to help them create a degree program and to introduce them to "labor studies." These bachelor's degree students spend time reading and discussing the "tension between" or the "intersection of" the academic and work, as well as other essays and articles about the current economic situation with unions and the building trades. By the end of the semester, students will have written rationale essays that explain why they've designed their degree in the way they have, why they've chosen particular courses over others, and perhaps most importantly, why they think it is important for a worker to get a college degree.[7]

Students look at how Rose examined a number of occupations — from waiting tables to hairdressing to carpentry and electrical work — and the implicit and explicit intelligence that is needed to accomplish these jobs successfully. Rose teased out the skills necessary to do a good job, to feel pride in one's work, to value the work of others. In a section of student Karen Hansen's (2013) rationale essay, which is part of the exhibition as a large poster, she applied this concept to her job when she delineated those skills, used in just one day:

> I had to combine teamwork, cognitive reasoning, attention to detail, past acquired memory of jobs completed, proficiency of tool handling, special engineering, acquired knowledge of electrical hardware and wiring, tricks of the trade, reflective reasoning, sensory perception, concentration, alternative problem-solving, systematic figurative expression, personal integrity, safety for myself and others, and time management. (p. 30)

Rose (2004) broke down the mind/body division that is pervasive in our culture and certainly in the ways in which we often judge whether a job is "good" or "bad." As construction workers, our students internalize the stigma for "only" working with their bodies and not engaging their minds in their work. This stigma is further extended by the gradual devaluation that has taken place in Western culture of the functional work artisans or craftspeople do, as compared to how so-called

"high" culture values the individual achievement of artists. Rose illustrated the fallacy in this dichotomy throughout his book, and perhaps most especially in his chapter titled, "Reflective Practice," where he watched apprentice electricians do their work and then step back and take a look at what they've done: Is it plumb? Does it look "pretty"? Are the wires arranged in an orderly and attractive fashion? Rose pointed to the aesthetics of the work these junior electricians (and in other chapters, carpenters, waitresses, hairstylists, etc.) performed.

In pointing to this aesthetic dimension, Rose raised the notion of being an artisan on the job, and our students are eager to provide examples, from pulling wire to bending and laying pipe. Over and over again, they say that doing this work is "an art." To do it well brings about a sense of pride that is shared by fellow workers who are participating in the pull perhaps, or those in the vicinity who witness the pipe bends that are "pretty." One student explained it this way: "Like especially running pipe and [making] bends and going certain angles. … The electrician that's doing it is like a Picasso because they're taking pride [in] their work" (Anonymous, personal communication, May 2018). Sometimes students talk of this good work in terms of leaving their signature behind — not an actual signature, but a mark of work that has been done with care and with respect for those who will follow and open up a panel and see an orderly arrangement of wires, for example.

Head and hand, mind and body start to come together for them as they reflect on their practices as students/workers.

A Way of Knowing

"They don't know about bruised hands, blistered feet. …"

— John Parente, "The Artisan in the Worker" (2018)

Similar to Rose's (2004) argument and returning to the working-class Communard's priorities for re-elevating the status of the artisan, much of the HVASLS writing/art pedagogy is built upon the belief "that laboring bodies harbor an epistemology, a way of knowing and understanding the world that comes out of the physicality of work" (Zandy, 2004, p. 3). Janet Zandy acknowledged the risks of being reductive or romanticizing this very physicality in scholarly writing, but decided the risk is worth it (as we do) to address "the deep and unacknowledged resistance to working-class experience in the academy, the persistent elitism that delimits knowledge and the study of culture" (p. 4). And in fact, she made a strong point that her writing in *Hands,* "seeks reconnection of the metaphorically dismembered working hand to the whole body … the intended tone is cautionary, not celebratory … I am testing new forms, using collage and juxtaposition, story and analysis, as tools to penetrate the wall of bourgeois cultural assumptions." Always concerned about colonizing her subject, she instead offered "a process of recovery and retrieval, a struggle for reciprocal visibility, for sustained rationality, for humble witnessing" (p. 2).

The first event to which Zandy (2004) was a humble witness was the accident of "Mrs. C" whose hands were crushed and dismembered in a manufacturing accident. In telling the bit of the story of Mrs. C that she could conjure up, she was memorializing those lost hands, as was done on the cover of an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) pamphlet where Mrs. C stood holding out her arms without the hands. Both the telling of the story and the picture on the pamphlet stand as witnesses to the violence of work, and the violence that can happen to hands at work. Two of the artworks in our show, Donald Turner's (2017) *Reverse Saw* and Danny Ferreyra Nguyen's (2014) *I am a Worker* also stand as a testament to the integration of the hand, the work, and the violence to the hand merely by working with one's hands. Zandy (2004) pointed out how much our hands can tell us about a person — i.e., the difference between the soft hand with clean, trimmed fingernails versus the calloused hand with dirty and rough fingernails.

Photo provided by the authors.

Donald Turner, Reverse Saw *(2017)*

Turner (2017), in his piece, pointed out the violence to hands by making the handle of his saw the blade, shiny and with sharp teeth, and the saw itself an ineffectual but beautifully polished piece of white cedar. Working with this saw is impossible, just as repetitive work with any tool can lead to injury — cuts, callouses, even loss of limb as illustrated by Mrs. C. *Reverse Saw* speaks on many levels, not only about potential injury but also about OSHA regulations on the job, and the way in which they are not always sufficient to protect a worker's hands and body. Donald Turner has written of the piece in an undated email, "Tools can cause irreversible damage to our bodies, but it is what we do to provide for our families and live the life we want. Sometimes because of this we enjoy our later years with a bad back or bad knee." One student also pointed out that the saw "eats away at the person as much as it does the work at hand" (remark from an art class in the summer of 2018).

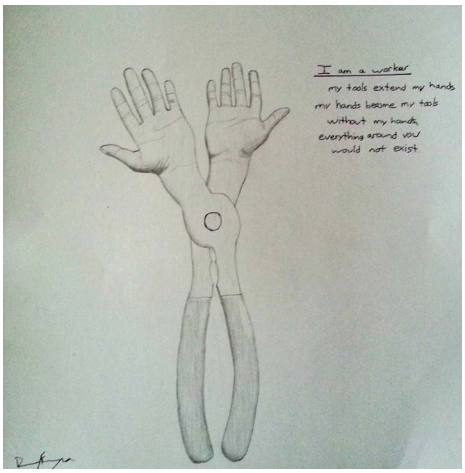


Photo provided by the authors.

Danny Ferreyra Nguyen, I am a Worker *(2014)*

Danny Ferreyra Nguyen, on the other hand (literally and figuratively), has drawn a picture of his hands coming out of the handles of a pair of pliers, the tool most used by electricians, the tool used so often that as Nguyen points out, they "become" a part of the worker's body. In a recorded discussion of the exhibition, a student made the point that electricians use pliers "as an extension" of their bodies (Anonymous, personal communication, July 2018). And Nguyen says in the text next to his drawing that without [his] hands, none of the things around you (walls, electricity, plumbing, etc.) would exist. He points to two aspects of the hands at work.

The first aspect is their very necessity and how hands become one with tools, so that there is implicit, deeply embedded knowledge in those hands and the way that they work with the tools. This is, in part, the epistemology that Zandy (2004) referred to — the knowing in the body of the worker. And second, related to this first point, is the absolute necessity of the tool/hand connection, the flow of information that goes from the worker's body/mind through the hands to the tool and vice versa, the flow of information that comes back through the tool to the hand and on to the body/head. This is something Rose (2004) also discussed in delineating the intelligence of people who work with their hands and their bodies and a variety of tools. In discussing his mother's work as a waitress, Rose explained how she came to know the exact weight of a tray, and the exact place to balance that tray on her arm, how to carry multiple cups of coffee without spilling the hot liquid during the trip she made to her next table. Carpenters come to know their saws (as Turner points to in his sculpture) — the balance of them, the weight of them, how to use them efficiently and properly. This is knowledge that is built up over time and with experience.

"We learned how to improvise,
strengthen some other muscle,
deeply embedded memory. …"

— John Parente, "The Artisan in the Worker" (2018)

According to Rose (2004), "Knowing is visual, tactile, practical." Rose made a connection between the work of a surgeon and that of a carpenter — namely, to "complicate easy distinctions between abstract and concrete knowledge, what is seen and felt is freighted with meaning, and abstractions about physiology or pathology are useless unless **embodied** [emphasis added]" (p. 151). Rose also quoted a physical therapist, who like the surgeon, the carpenter, the electrician, the artist, remarked, "You need to get a sense in your hand" (p. 153). Rose went on to explain that good use of a tool sends information back to the hand. When the students first encounter this phrase in the Educational Planning class, there is a great deal of discussion about how true this is, how awkward they are with tools until they learn to listen to them, to hear what they are saying.

Shantar Gibson's *Pliers and Money* (2013) complicated this notion of mind and body working together by reminding the viewer of the economy behind those pliers, the electricians' essential tool.

Photo provided by the authors.

Shantar Gibson, Pliers and Money *(2013)*

Public Art Class: A Seat at the Table

"I lift my pipe-bender this time with a different approach
I'm Miles Davis on Air guitar
Can't ignore the need to make it button, stronger than any chemical, yet modest and subtle
We have an eccentric vigilance to make it plumb and level
Everything we make with our hands is beautiful and useful."

— John Parente, "The Artisan in the Worker" (2018)

The art classes expand on the role of the artisan in public culture, situating students' own tradecraft within it while examining the historical and economic roots of the artisan/artist divide. As the Paris Commune had sought to overcome the division between manual and intellectual labor by prioritizing combining both into integral education for all children, so too do the art classes seek the reappraisal and elevation of artisan skills — as conceived internally by workers in the field, as well as in a more public-facing way. For Shantar Gibson, gaining proficiency with her pliers asserts that this ability — in the hands of a woman of color — can become a powerful vehicle for the "overlooked and underrepresented voice." These skills have allowed her "to rise above …. and manifest that which does not discriminate. …" For Gibson, who is a practicing artist, the artisanal skills she practices have also become a

"unique opportunity" to express herself as an artist (personal communication, February 2013).

In detail, students determine that which they consider constitutes artisanal labor on their jobs, including feats of "big picture" systems thinking that responds to discrepancies between architect's designs and the actual guts of the building; as apprentice Jasmine Spencer (2014) noted, "What happens when [the architect's] visions fall short of the reality" (p. 90)? Students are asked to reevaluate the value of their work and challenged to give form to their ideas. Discussions that follow reconsider the beauty and value of function, the individual as well as the collective labor involved.

Photo provided by the authors.

Robert Gouldsbury, A Seat at the Table *(2016)*

For example, *A Seat at the Table,* made by student/plumber Robert Gouldsbury (2016), utilized his plumbing skills — to both call out official Art (with a capital "A") culture for its exclusionary practices and to stake out a space, a seat, for (organized) worker power. In contrast with art practices with their emphases on individual authorship and keeping with an artisan's ethos, he detailed to the class how he made the work step-by-step. He has recently pointed out what he terms an interesting "duality" of the double shadow of the chair in his photograph, claiming its status as both "Art *and* a functional piece" (personal communication, October 2018), thereby calling for equal visibility and recognition.

Still another example of claiming space for artisanship, while further connecting it to issues of equity, came in the form of a project by student Scott Demel (2013), then a Local 3 apprentice in the art class. Reflecting on the history of post-World War II socioeconomic development in the city, Demel created a series of photographs of conduit bends he admired. Each was accompanied by a written response to the public art classes' study of structural racism and classism in urban planning:[8]

> When Robert Moses started tearing down tight communities for his view of his illustrious highways, he started to aid the machine. When he ran his highways out to Long Island so that Levittown could be reached with ease, he aided the machine. …
>
> But what is this machine, you ask? The machine is the lack of life. …
>
> Life is not working all day and seeing your family briefly before you must go to bed and repeat this insane cycle to only live on the weekends. …
>
> However, life always has a way of breaking through the machine. Like the graffiti artist tagging one of the bridges created by Robert Moses — the rebellious nature of the graffiti is a sign of life poking through. Graffiti artists can take pride in the quality and placement of their art. In the eyes of the graffiti artist, the graffiti is a sign to forget your bridges because you cannot take our pride. Even though many neighborhoods were destroyed by the bridges, they are now [a] canvas to show that your machine will not prevail. (p. 38)

Demel connected the collective artisanal labor of his and his fellow workers (running conduit in "the machine") to the coded "sign" of graffiti as he termed it, and as a "life force" of youth of color in response to its violence:

> Much like the pride taken from graffiti work is the pride in a good conduit run. … Most of the time, you don't know who ran the conduit. It is as anonymous as graffiti on a bridge. But like graffiti, people have their own ways of running conduit so certain people know who ran it. … The attention is to detail and precision. The math that is behind excellent concentric bends always gets my attention. The way that I could see eight, 10, even 12 ¾ pieces of EMT flow bend after bend, perfectly spaced, gives me hope. Hope that even on the job site, in the heart of the machine, life still prevails. Pride can be taken in something that will be covered up by a wall. Pride is taken in knowing other people will see your work before it is hidden behind [S] heetrock and think 'wow that's nice.' This pride is a part of life, which the machine will not take from me or from society as a whole. (pp. 38–39)

Photo provided by the authors.

Paul Allen, Untitled *(2017)*

Solidarity

"Who can teach comradery
or brotherhood?"

— John Parente, "The Artisan in the Worker" (2018)

Demel's (2013) assertion of faith in the creativity of the artisan is less concerned with the larger public appreciating the conduit bends than with his fellow workers taking notice. Asserting this collectivity as a sign of life breaking through the machine posits solidarity as yet another possible feature of the artisan identity. This is related, as well, to the general invisibility of workers and with building trades (especially electricians and plumbers) and the invisible beauty of their work; *it gets covered up* by Sheetrock or runs behind walls and above ceilings.

Jaime Lopez (2012) began an art essay writing about craft and ultimately points to the collective power of workers — *all workers* — combined. In *Craft, Art and Unions,* a piece in the show, Lopez concluded, "As a predator separates his prey, then conquers the weakest, these big money influences create legislation in the government that separate[s] the most powerful weapon we have, strength in numbers" (p. 51).

John Parente's (2018) long-form poem, quoted throughout this essay, focused on the sacrifices it takes "to hold a union card" in terms of such qualities as Local 3's training, skill, work ethic, camaraderie and brother/sisterhood. Yet he repeatedly returned to the even more collective *"value of the working class."* Invoking Rose (2004) specifically, he equated the skill of the electrician with a hairdresser and reminded us that the worker (not just the tradesperson), "is this maestro, a director, a composer." Finally, by the end of his poem he does lay claim to being an artist while also concluding his writing with a shout out to *"all workers: 'the working class' because we work it all out, may not have it all together but together we have it all"* (p. 51). Ultimately, collective work and being organized are valued on par with individual craft skills.[9] As Stella Fafalios (2010) stated in a letter to her union brother, "We must stand strong together" (p. 88).

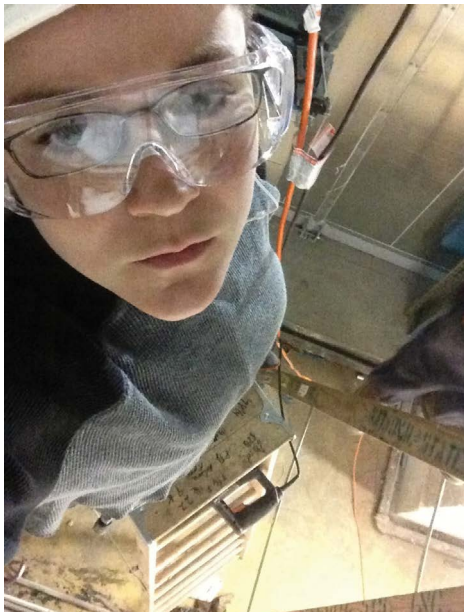


Photo provided by the authors.

"We the rank and file 2013, united by the work that lay ahead, divided by the fear of losing. Our power is in defying this tradition."[27] *— Hana Georg,* Self-Portrait at Work *(2013)*

Like Parente, some of our students recognize their own potentially expert status as artisans. Works in the exhibition (both art and writing) illustrate the collective and extremely physical labor construction workers perform together. The artisan's physicalized way of knowing (or as Rose (2004) put it, "the wisdom of heavy lifting" [p. 162]) includes instances of embodied solidarity. Some students describe repeatedly putting differences aside, working through differences rather, as a distinguishing characteristic they perform in their often perilous work. Carpenter student Stephanie Lawal has likened this process to a "ballet," with people from all trades whom you may not like or share political beliefs with: "You are responsible for each other's bodies … and you make it work" (personal communication, 2014).

Photo provided by the authors.

James Oliva, Iwo Jima *(2011)*

James Oliva's (2011) *Iwo Jima* is another work in the exhibit that gave form to this sentiment. It resonates with students visiting the exhibit, both for its intense physical collectivity, as well as for the sculpture's skillful reuse of mongo, or leftover copper wire. Oliva, who produced this work before joining the armed services, stated that he wanted to express his deep feeling for the humility and teamwork he'd witnessed amongst his brothers and sisters in the union before he left for his tour of duty.

Communal Luxury and the Exhibition Platform: A Conclusion

The ways that students have enriched, expanded, and politicized the figure of the artisan as described here points to the value of an exhibition populated with texts, forms, and ideas that have emerged after a sustained immersion in the HVASLS program. The exhibit itself posits the breakdown of an institutional barrier that asserts cultural work is only the domain of established intellectuals and artists. This divide is further breached if this platform fosters the growth of a community of workers/artists/writers.

As HVASLS colleague, Richard Wells (2019), stressed in his recent essay, "Teaching Austerity," it is of great importance that the kind of educational practices embodied at HVASLS — and the resulting student work — extend beyond the classroom, beyond school, and onto the job site and further, particularly in the political moment in which we find ourselves (pp. 17–18). Such an extension challenges both

cultural and ideological assumptions that show up in class inequality, and the divisions of head/hand, union/nonunion workers, individual/collective identities, as well as aesthetic/functional purposes of both art and writing. These educational practices seek *to break through* "entrenched hierarchies and divisions" as the Commune did, particularly of who can afford to play with words and images (Ross, 2015, p. 50). Ross wrote: "When that division is overcome, as it was under the Commune [or as it is conveyed in the phrase 'communal luxury'], what matters more than any images conveyed, laws passed, or institutions founded, are the capacities set in motion. You do not have to start at the beginning; you can start anywhere" (p. 50).

We have aimed to represent our students as people whose capacities have been set in motion. In fact, in this space and these pages, amongst other offerings, they have contributed to a reframing of artisanship that not only enriches the term with respect to labor studies but also creates an invitation for the wider public to revisit their own misconceptions of who construction workers are. The invitation to fellow workers to contribute to the political imaginary with their own writing, artistry, and artisanship, to not only start anywhere — but venture anywhere — is also created in these spaces. We speak against the way these student/workers have been "consumed" and look toward their future cultural production, using — for example — hand and head, individual and collective, men and women, black, brown, white, etc., as well as union and nonunion all together.

Notes

[1] With thanks to a SUNY Empire State College PILLARS grant.

[2] Ross stated, "Beauty must flourish in spaces shared in common and not just in the privatized preserves … fully integrated into life" (p. 58). The Communards also prioritized that the federation of artisans/artists have control over museums, decreeing that none should get any more funding than any other, refusing the imposition of hierarchies of any sort.

[3] International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

[4] *Labor Writes* is our annual anthology of student writing and art, which is used as a text in College Writing for Workers. The publication can be found at https://www.esc.edu/news/magazines-journal/labor-writes/.

[5] See colleagues Szymanski and Wells (2013) "Labor Studies: Redefining a College Education" for analysis of this resistance as a "market based calculation" and the unique role labor studies can play as a means of empowerment in the ever-increasing corporatization of a college education.

[6] Students without associate degrees are required by their union to get an associate degree. Those with associate degrees can choose a 20-credit program or to pursue a bachelor's degree.

[7] Countering the resistance to college mentioned earlier, student Patrick Meyers writes in the *Breaking Divides* exhibit, "… [K]nowledge is power; life is not just about making money." Again see Szymanski and Wells (2013). One student quoted therein stated, "For me college is a way to do the critical thinking I'll need to accomplish moving my family out of poverty" (p. 67).

[8] Along these lines, the exhibit features three texts about the High Line by students Ardam Antonetty (2015), William Cawley and Brandon Kai Chung written for The Political Economy of New York class as they aptly describe the "look but don't touch" ethos of a place that at one time "aid[ed] the working class and the city" but now serves "no practical use other than allowing someone to charge triple the amount for prime real estate" (p. 61).

[9] See fellow colleagues Szymanski and Wells' (2016) *Blue-Collar Classroom: From the Individual to the Collective* on the kinds of dangers posed by binding skill to wage levels posed to the collective power of workers.

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"Small, significant conversations"

Shantih E. Clemans, Brooklyn

A Review of:
***SoTL in Action: Illuminating* Critical Moments of Practice**
Edited by Nancy L. Chick

I read *SoTL in Action* and penciled notes for this review while visiting my 80-year-old mother in New Jersey. My mother, a poet and former English teacher, was the person who first ignited my love of teaching and learning, the joy of ordinary moments and end-of-the-year surprises in the lives of students, teachers and a high school, which was the heart of our family.

I like to believe that I inherited my mother's passion for teaching and learning as much as I inherited the shape of her eyes and the curl of her hair. Our dinner conversations were invariably about what her students were reading, or the first drafts of their essays, or who was excelling and who was struggling.

"What is SoTL?" she asked me as she picked up Chick's book to get a closer look. As I explained to this veteran teacher that SoTL refers to the scholarship of teaching and learning, I realized that my mother's confusion was not unusual. Many teachers and educators dedicate themselves to the work of teaching and learning. However, I'm guessing that for some, SoTL as an umbrella term, is relatively unfamiliar, even when the practice of teaching and learning comes as second nature. Illuminating this paradox, the chapters of *SoTL in Action* offer a context, a roadmap, for readers navigating familiar terrain with fresh eyes.

I first heard Nancy L. Chick speak in 2017 when I traveled to Calgary, Canada to present a poster at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) conference. I was only vaguely familiar with what SoTL referred to, although my full-time reassignment as director of the Center for Mentoring, Learning and Academic Innovation (CMLAI), which had begun the previous month, continues to lead me through many inspiring and challenges experiences that, in some ways, mirror Chick's book.

Neatly divided into three parts, the 16 chapters in *SoTL in Action,* a comfortable-in-the-hand and easy-on-the-eyes book, orient readers to the history of SoTL. James Rhem's Forward, "A Brief (Somewhat) Slanted History of SoTL," provided insights into the newness of SoTL with a historical context. "But the inquiry into how we learn and therefore how we should teach has remained insistent throughout history. … Teachers now understand that lasting learning begins in points of discovery" (p. x).

In her relatable introduction, Chick shared how she was influenced to pursue SoTL as a career (readers may have their own "aha" moments) through her membership in a group of teaching assistants, a cohort charged with learning about teaching and learning and to report back to their respective departments. "What I remember — what lasted and changed everything for me — were the conversations. I remember Amy in psychology talking about her research on early childhood eating patterns, and how she approached teaching the complexities of nature versus nurture. I remember Tim in biology talking about preparing and grading exams …" (p. 1). (Honoring the bond she shared with her teaching assistant colleagues, Chick dedicated her book to these "small, significant conversations.") She articulated that the purpose of the book was about "illuminating SoTL in action by putting its critical moments under the microscope to carefully

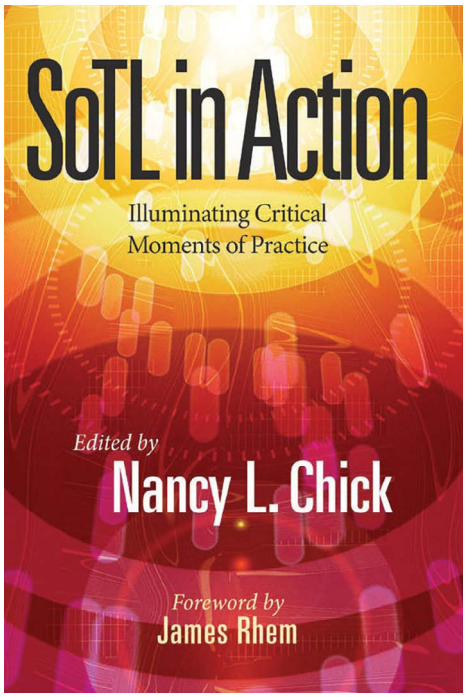

Image credit: Amazon.com

analyze how they happen and then using that knowledge to improve SoTL performance" (p. 2). Expanding across departments, disciplines, and students, SoTL, an emerging field just 20 years old, simultaneously unites, divides, and continuously has to defend its place among scholars and practitioners. This book is an effort for SoTL to claim legitimacy and acknowledge the tensions, opportunities, and future directions.

Part One, "Strong Foundations," began with Chapter 1, "Using Intuition, Anecdote, and Observation" (by Gary Poole). With an effort to demystify the elements of a SoTL project, quickening first in our minds and hearts, followed next with how to bring such a project to fruition, Poole wrote, "We need to turn our beliefs about students into curiosities because those beliefs, especially when based on emotionally-charged conversations with others, might be less than accurate" (p. 11).

Chapter 3, "The SoTL Literature Review: Exploring New Territory" (by Margy MacMillan), made a strong case for researchers taking their time with literature reviews. A SoTL literature review shares the duality of "process" and "product." A scholar needs to be able to "identify patterns, gaps, key voices, and missing perceptions" (p. 23). Synthesizing the work of others is a crucial step for the actual study at hand, and also to bolster the broader credibility of SoTL. SoTL literature reviews present unique challenges for scholars. "SoTL work can be difficult to find efficiently … most researchers will have to step outside their disciplinary comfort zones" (p. 25). Indeed, such a tension between what is a discipline-specific quest and what is a broader educational inquiry is one of the ongoing debates among faculty and administrators here at SUNY Empire State College.

How the scholarship of teaching and learning differs from educational research was the theme of Chapter 4, "Educational Research and SoTL" (by Kimberley A. Grant). Grant explored the "contested spaces" to which each area laid claim. Territoriality is one issue that has the potential to weaken SoTL; the other is confusion. What is SoTL and what is not SoTL? Is SoTL a field of practice or a type of research? Here is where the description of SoTL as part of the "big tent" movement may be helpful for readers. Cutting across disciplinary and departmental boundaries, SoTL welcomes and learns from teacher-scholars across many disciplines. Teaching and learning remain the common denominator. Opportunities to learn from multiple perspectives is one argument that SoTL is distinct from education research.

Any research (and, by association, researcher) enters a project with assumptions about the process. Exposing those sometimes-hidden assumptions while engaging in a SoTL research project was the crux of Chapter 5, "Identifying a Tradition of Inquiry: Articulating Research Assumptions" (by Carol Berenson). Contrasting positivist and constructivist paradigms, Berenson reminded readers that putting words to our assumptions can be a "messy and complicated" process. What are a researcher's assumptions about "what counts as reality and knowledge of it?" (p. 44). Many questions remain unanswered: How can we learn more about how our students learn across various disciples and departments? How can (and should) researchers spread this tent high and wide across all areas of student interest to cull the nuggets of what learning is happening for students and in what ways learning is "bottlenecked" (a term that popped up throughout the book)?

Ethical research was taken up in Chapter 7, "Respect, Justice, and Doing Good: The Ethics Review" (by Ryan C. Martin). Martin reminded readers that, since SoTL inquiry is indeed research, proper ethics reviews (i.e., an Institutional Review Board) must be in place. Necessary reading for anyone embarking on research, this chapter asked: "Why must I do an IRB application?" "What if my research is not approved?" Martin offered a definition of research: "Systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" (p. 66). Publishing is a way that SoTL gains legitimacy, as Martin concluded: "I argue that by not publishing our findings, we miss out on an opportunity to do the most possible good and provide the most possible justice" (p. 67).

Part Two led readers into an exploration of the nitty-gritty of methods and methodologies. Chapter 8 was a standout that furthers an understanding of SoTL work. "Methods and Measures Matter" (by Trent W. Maurer) pushed researchers to make sure the actual questionnaires developed for SoTL research are actually designed to answer the SoTL questions. (This seems to be relevant to any research.) Chapter 9, "Classroom Observations: Exploring How Learning Works" (by Bill Cerbin) was equally informative as it laid out the process of classroom observation as a method of data gathering. "Observation can also play a key role in understanding key interactions between teaching and learning. … In SoTL, we want to understand how teaching affects learning, in terms of not only what students learn but how teaching facilitates and supports learning" (p. 90).

Chapter 10, "Conducting Interviews: Capturing What is Unobserved" (by Janice Miller-Young) praised the benefits of interviews for SoTL research: "Interviewing students gives instructors an opportunity to listen and learn from students, voice their perspectives on teaching and learning, and offer suggestions for improvement to a course or program. A good interview also allows the unexpected to emerge …" (p. 93). This guidance seems relevant for researchers conducting interviews of any kind.

One of the more intriguing chapters in the volume was Chapter 11, "Close Reading: Paying Attention to Student Artifacts" (by Karen Manarin). An example of a researcher who finds comfort in both her discipline and her SoTL practice, Manarin wrote, "… language shapes rather than merely records experience. … Doing close reading means being willing to consider multiple interpretations of a text, even those that don't seem immediately obvious because of our assumptions" (p. 100).

This book primarily focused on students as learners and as the focus of SoTL projects. Unfortunately, there were missed opportunities to expand the inquiries to include teachers as learners worthy of SoTL attention. The experiences, challenges, questions, and intuitions of all types of teachers are needed as researchers imagine and develop and carry out scholarship

of teaching and learning projects that strengthen our understanding and practice of teaching.

As I write these words, schools of every shape, size, and philosophy, including preschools, elementary, middle schools, and colleges and universities, are facing highly complicated decisions about when (and how) to safely reopen for students, while carefully attending to both health and learning. There are many ripe opportunities for SoTL scholarship — research projects, conference presentations, reflections on practice. Chick's book, written pre-COVID-19, certainly offered practical guidance for the legitimacy of researching this very question: How do students learn? Coupled with practical components, *SoTL in Action* pushes scholars to bring their passions, questions, and intuitions one step further: to research, writing, and publication. Our students and teachers are waiting.

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"Good practice in undergraduate education:

1. Encourages contact between students and faculty.
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students.
3. Encourages active learning techniques.
4. Gives prompt feedback.
5. Emphasizes time on task.
6. Communicates high expectations.
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning."

— Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, March 1987
"Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education"
American Association for Higher Education Bulletin, 39*(7), p. 2*

New Educational Technologies: Almost Out of Thin Air

Jason Russell, Buffalo

A Review of:
25 Years of Ed Tech
By Martin Weller

The summer of 2020 is a regrettably appropriate time to write a review of the evolution of distance learning educational technology, regardless of the merits of the book under consideration. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed all aspects of global society for an indefinite time period. The virus's impact has been particularly acute on education from kindergarten to colleges and universities. Distance learning and educational technology, which are the subjects of Martin Weller's new book, are no longer considered a secondary option to in-class instruction. Distance education is now a key mode of learning available to policymakers at all levels until methods of safely returning students to classrooms and lecture halls can be implemented. Reviewers will occasionally describe a book as being timely; Weller's has indeed come off the press at the right moment.

Weller is a faculty member at The Open University in the United Kingdom, and that institution is an acknowledged global leader in distance education and nontraditional student learning. His narrative is organized around the comparatively brief history of computer and internet-based educational technology. People who work and teach at institutions that were already making extensive use of distance learning now often consider its presence to be second nature, but Weller shows that a lot happened in the years between 1994 and 2019. Educational technology quickly became second nature in the institutions that used it. Weller's analysis is divided into 25 chapters, each of which is short considering this book's overall length. Beginning with 1994, each year is the subject of a chapter. This is a clever and appropriate way of organizing a recent history, and it immensely adds to its accessibility. The result is a book that is a primer on how educational technology developed over a quarter-century period, but it also misses some issues whose inclusion would have strengthened the author's overall analysis.

1994 now seems very distant and even simple from the view of a world that lived through 9/11 and is now enduring a global pandemic; such is the nature of hindsight. The internet, which is key to everything that now happens in distance learning, was in its infancy and it was beginning to shake the foundations of long-established socioeconomic practices. Books were still predominantly purchased at physical bookstores, films were watched in theaters and on videotapes, but a new online music service called Napster was about to completely alter how the music business functioned. 1994 was also the year when online Bulletin Board systems first appeared, and they would be used for online education.

1995 ushered in the World Wide Web and acronyms like www and HTML entered popular discourse. The creation of search engines made it possible to find webpages, something that is now a simple task, which concomitantly enabled the use of rudimentary sites on which educational materials could be posted. The following year saw the arrival of computer-mediated communication, and that made asynchronous learning possible. Constructivism was introduced in 1997 and it essentially meant student-centered learning. 1998 was the year that the first wiki was developed, and

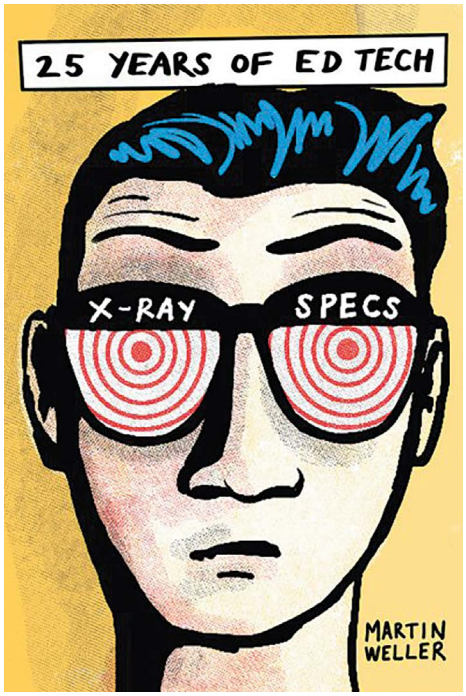

Image credit: aupress.ca

the term e-learning went into usage in 1999. The distance learning building blocks were clearly falling into place by the turn of the 21st century.

Educational technology accelerated in the 2000s: the learning object was created in 2000, the learning management system in 2002, blogs in 2003, and the first open educational resource (OER) written in 2004. Video and the flipped classroom were used in 2005, the term Web 2.0 rolled out and the first tweet sent on Twitter in 2006, Second Life developed in 2007, and e-portfolios premiered in 2008. All of these heady developments were followed by massive open online courses (MOOCs) in 2012, digital badges in 2015, and Blockchain in 2017. A veritable cornucopia of new terms and acronyms entered the higher education lexicon.

Weller's (2020) interest in learning technology is keen and he is on firm footing when recounting the emergence of successive new forms of it. He opens the book by saying that there is no shared concept of history in the educational technology field, but the book is not especially well-situated in the broader discussion of learning technology even since the mid-20th century onward (p. 4). The chalkboard was invented in 1801 and can still be found in use. The IBM Selectric typewriter, a heavy, rapid-fire machine that was ubiquitous in higher education until the late 20th-century, was invented in 1961. The overhead projector used to display acetate slides on screens was also first sold by 3M in the early 1960s. Educational technology prior to computerization involved devices like chalkboards, electric typewriters, overheads, film projectors, film strips, reel-to-reel recordings, and audio cassettes. It was all mechanical, manual, and did not undergo much evolution. Situating modern educational technology within even a brief discussion of what preceded it would have helped emphasize its impact.

This book offers many insights on different tools that are now employed in distance education, but there is little said about what it takes to maintain them. Something like a learning management system requires significant infrastructure to keep it running including hardware, frequent system updates, and skilled staff to hold it all together. New occupations appeared to facilitate the implementation of new educational technologies — especially instructional designers — yet they are not described in the book.

Weller (2020) briefly refers to the social implications of educational technology, but attempting to introduce any broader policy analysis puts him on less secure ground. For instance, he comments on the cost of higher education in the United States and how Europeans still tend to view it as a social good, but he then tacks back to describing more changes in technology (p. 134). He also talks about the problem of educational technology dystopia and primarily links it to privacy issues. Maintaining privacy online and ensuring that personal information of any kind remains confidential is indeed a serious matter, as Shoshana Zuboff (2019) argued in a compelling new study.

The vexing issue of how policymakers at different levels view the economic utility of new educational technology is as important as privacy and is unfortunately not fully explored in the book. Simply put, a lot of people in higher education administration, government, and business have concluded that educational technology makes it possible to move away from traditional in-class learning because it is cheaper. The reality is that using educational technology is not necessarily cheaper, but it does provide more learning options. It has become possible for people who could not attend a bricks-and-mortar institution to earn their degrees. Weller is writing from a U.K. perspective and that country does not have fully online, for-profit universities on the scale of those in the United States. His perspective would surely be different if he were on faculty at a place like SUNY Empire State College or any other American public university or college that offers online programs.

Weller also does not talk about the implications of new educational technology for students. Technology can be democratizing as it expands access to education, but it can also be exclusionary if students cannot access it. It also requires a level of technical familiarity that goes well beyond knowing how to turn on an overhead projector and center an acetate slide over its light source. Technological literacy is now part of the learning dictionary and has become a field of academic study.

Those issues aside, the weaknesses of this book are outweighed by its strengths. New forms of educational technology appear almost out of thin air and faculty commence working with them with varying degrees of success. Learning management systems are updated, new social media platforms appear, and the learning experience changes. Predicting the future is difficult, but it seems certain that educational technology will become even more integrated into higher education even after COVID-19 has been dispatched by a vaccine. Martin Weller helpfully shows readers where this technology came from, who created it, and the changes that it brought in a crucial period in the history of global higher education.

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From the Archives

Anastasia Pratt, SUNY Empire Archivist, Plattsburgh

What better way to begin celebrating SUNY Empire State College's 50th anniversary than with a photograph of its founding fathers, Ernest Boyer and Nelson Rockefeller? The two men, in their respective roles as chancellor of the State University of New York and governor of New York, created this college and enacted Boyer's vision of an institution that operated differently. Rather than traditional, campus-based courses, Boyer envisioned a college where students would create and use contracts to study with mentors; rather than a focus on external research, he envisioned a college in which teaching itself became a form of scholarship and service.

Boyer's vision of flexible, lifelong learning is the hallmark of this college that we love. And it all started with these two men: Rockefeller, whom Boyer referred to as "one of the most remarkable public figures I've known" (Goldberg, 1995, A Time of Growth section, para. 1); and Boyer, of whom Rockefeller was a "friend and admirer" (Manzullo-Thomas, 2015, para. 5).

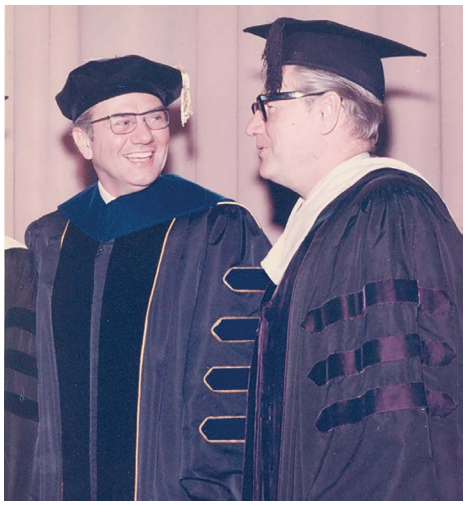

Photo courtesy of the SUNY Empire State College Archives.

(l-r) Ernest Boyer and Nelson Rockefeller.

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Remembering Our Colleagues

Arthur W. Chickering

Arthur Chickering, founding academic vice president, was a central voice and an abiding spirit at SUNY Empire State College. He came to SUNY Empire in July 1971, already having made significant contributions to nontraditional higher education, notably at Goddard College and through his book, Education and Identity *(1969, Jossey-Bass), which won the National Book Award from the American Council on Higher Education. Chickering's lifetime commitment to individualized education was reflected in the basic academic vocabulary of the college that he was so instrumental in creating and championing: the learning contract, the degree program, and especially a new faculty role as "mentor." In 1981, he wrote/edited another classic of alternative higher education,* The Modern American College: Responding to the New Realities of Diverse Student and a Changing Society *(Jossey-Bass). His belief that learning, human development, and the quest for a more caring world were inextricably connected was at the core of his incredibly rich personal and professional legacy, which included a final autobiographical reflection (with contributions from many significant adult educators),* Cool Passion: Challenging Higher Education *(2014). Arthur Chickering died on August 15, 2020.*

From James W. Hall, president emeritus

SUNY Empire State College has lost one of its founding creators. Dr. Arthur Chickering, known best as "Chick," brought his formidable knowledge and experience to a team that forged an entirely new model for higher learning. As founding academic vice president, he championed a fresh new approach to learning that would come to define the heart and soul of the new institution. He envisioned an educational practice that would redefine the role of the student in designing an often unique study plan in collaboration with a faculty mentor. This approach to learning, with few exceptions, was virtually unavailable in the world of undergraduate academe. Empire State College would fully engage the student in the conception, design, engagement, and evaluation of her or his degree program, providing reflection and motivation for the student, and full engagement of the faculty mentor across a wide range of topics and methods. Despite 50 years of significant growth in the student body and faculty mentors, this central facet of the college continues to drive the learning experience. Empire State College could not have succeeded without it. Arthur Chickering brought this central process to life.

From Tom Clark, retired administrator

I came to Empire State College because I wanted to work with Chick. As dean of the Northeast Center and the director of the Center for Individualized Education, we had the opportunity to implement educational experiences with students that started with the student rather than solely with the curriculum. This vision of higher education was but one of Chick's gifts to the process. He believed that individuals were different, had different interests and goals, and learned in different ways. This was the theoretical framework for Empire State College's academic program, a model of mentor and student working together as a pair to actualize the student's interests and goals through a process of developing the learning contract. His theories about how people learn became the mainstream for all of the college's academic processes. Chick believed that learning was a lifelong endeavor and that learning takes place at every phase of the life cycle, which led to a model that revolved around the adult learner.

From Rhoada Wald, professor emerita

There was no one like Arthur Chickering. For me, he was a model of a great administrator, one who had a secure belief system for what education is and might be. He was the first person I met at Empire State College; he interviewed me for a faculty position at the Long Island Center. The college was just beginning and we, the faculty, were learning our new roles. He became my mentor, not only for learning my new role but by giving me the chance to help him formalize it for the college and New York state. I became the chair of the academic program committee; Chick was the administration's representative. Together, we organized and designed the theory underlying degree programs that reflected his thinking. No doubt, Chick's ideas and theories about education and the adult student became the pivotal concept regarding nontraditional higher education in the 1970s and beyond. The model of Empire State College that Chick created led to interest from many colleges, here and abroad, wanting to emulate this design. A final memory: Once, we were doing a workshop at Goddard College in the middle of the winter in Vermont. Chick and Jo (his wife of 69 years) gave me their bedroom for my one night stay so that I could see the snow falling through the window.

William C. Ferrero

Bill Ferrero came to SUNY Empire in 1974 as vice president for administration. For four decades, he was responsible for creating and overseeing myriad administrative systems that knit together the far-flung learning centers, smaller units, and many programs of the college. With great care and always a human touch, Ferrero kept the books. He died on July 1, 2020.

From Paul Tucci, former assistant vice president for administration

Bill hired me as his assistant vice president for administration in February 2006, and until July 2008, he was my boss or "Chief," as my predecessor Dennis Belt use to refer to him. I was very fortunate to have Bill return in a part-time capacity as the college's director of capital facilities for the next

three years when he retired again in July 2011. My time with Bill at SUNY Empire was relatively short compared to Bill's 40 years of full-time employment at the college beginning in 1977 and his part-time gig that extended his career.

I had first met Bill in the early 1980s when I was a young auditor working at SUNY Central Administration and was sent to SUNY Empire to work on various audits of student financial aid funds and then again examining the college's administration of self-funding programs, such as the bookstore and certain academic programs not supported by state funds in those days. Bill had actually worked at SUNY Central's budget office prior to his coming to SUNY Empire, so he knew my bosses from University Audit, and our audits at the college were coincidentally scheduled around the racetrack season in Saratoga. I had also met Bill's wife Wendy when I first started at SUNY in 1979 as she was a secretary working just outside my cubicle in SUNY Plaza.

I recall my interview with Bill and the search committee that consisted of Geri Arpey, Linda Ryan, Evelyn Ting, Eileen Corrigan, Leslie Cohen, Bob Milton, and Bob Trullinger. Bill asked me what my career goals were and I replied, "I want your job," to which he stated, "Right answer." When Bill called me to offer me the job, I believe he gave me one night to think about the offer; he wasn't one to waste time.

My fondest memories of Bill were the road trips, meeting with the deans while looking at various existing and potential new lease opportunities. We also spent time checking out sites for the new centers to be built for the Genesee Valley and Long Island Centers, two eventual outcomes that obviously took much longer than Bill or I could have anticipated: "glacial speed," as Bill would refer to it. Train trips to NYC with Bill were completed with a stop at the bar in Penn Station and having a beer and something to eat, or if in a hurry to catch the train, grabbing a brown paper bag with beer to finish the day's work and relax on Amtrak for the ride back to Albany. The car and train rides were filled with Bill stories about folks we had both known and worked with during our careers at SUNY.

The college and I were fortunate that Bill, Dennis, Joe Moore, and others had left the finances in good shape, as we utilized those reserves to weather future budget cuts from the state and SUNY beginning in 2009 as a result of the 2008 recession. I enjoyed reading Bill's budget memos to the President's Council, as they did not just dwell on the numbers but were great narratives that laid the financial situations of the times in Bill's terminology. He would set the expectation for the deans if they came to the budget hearings looking for funds depending on meeting their enrollment targets, and he was equally tough with the other VPs if they could not support their budget requests based upon past performance or realistic expectations of what the additional requested funds could accomplish.

Bill's resignation letter as VP for administration to Interim President Joyce Elliott was eloquent, but in words that only Bill could convey. He noted how truly blessed his career in higher education had been, especially his time at SUNY Empire. He stated that had anyone told him 40 years ago of the career ahead of him, he would have laughed "and had them arrested for illegal drug use." He continued by stating what a privilege it had been to be working with some of the "most brilliant people on the planet on a project that has to be the most innovative 'experiment' in higher education in a century." I think we were the privileged ones having worked with Bill.

When Bill tendered his final resignation letter from his role as director of capital facilities three years later, he started the letter by stating, "Once more with feeling!!" He once again gave credit to those who helped lead the college, Jim Hall, Jane Altes, Joe and Joyce, and then-President Alan Davis. He told me that I should feel the same pride as a member of the senior staff tasked to living up to great expectations and reminded me that we could never accomplish the jobs we do without the assistance of a fantastic supporting cast, which we did indeed have. He was a great mentor to me, and one of my few regrets was that he should have coached me on my golf game, as well. I think of Bill now as though he's finished his round of golf and he's gone to the 19th hole to have a beer.

Marilyn Grapin

Marilyn Grapin, who died on May 29, 2020, came to SUNY Empire as a mentor in the Verizon Corporate College Program and then joined the Hudson Street, New York City location community. Grapin worked with many students in the sciences and in Western civilization, but her main teaching area was in mathematics, where she always offered students — especially those with a fear of numbers — great clarity, abiding patience, a perfect sense of humor, and incredible encouragement.

From David Gechlik, mentor

Marilyn was always a joy to work with. I'd known her since 1997 when we first worked together in the Verizon Corporate College Program. Our friendship continued when we were together at the Metropolitan Center. Marilyn taught math, a subject that some of our students dreaded learning, but she had the enviable ability to assuage their fear. She was gifted with a gentle manner and a caring demeanor; her warm smile added to her likeableness.

Marilyn and I remained in contact after she retired. She loved her family dearly, taking great pleasure in sharing stories about her children and grandchildren. Marilyn was loved by all who met and knew her. She will be sorely missed by her students, friends, and family.

From Peggy Tally, mentor

Marilyn was one of the most beloved of colleagues and a mentor who was incredibly attuned and compassionate

when it came to her students. She grew up in a working-class Jewish household, the child of Polish immigrants in the Bronx, and was both a precocious math student and the twin of an equally gifted sister, Arlene. True to her time, Marilyn married young and had three children, being a full-time housewife and parenting her three kids, and taking care of a busy household. Marilyn went back to school for her master's when they got a little older and was able to get her doctorate from New York University and teach in a variety of places until coming to SUNY Empire State College. There are so many Marilyn stories I could tell, but I think people will remember her as having a wonderful, acerbic sense of humor; the capacity to "tell it like it is," and the ability to make everyone feel welcome and attended to. She would specialize in walking the halls, going in, and saying hello to everyone, and was able to break the awkwardness that sometimes accompanied being an academic in favor of a homespun warmth and friendliness that was infectious. Marilyn specialized in helping students, particularly women, face their math phobias and was able to make it possible for them to see math in a real-world context. She was also thrilled to be able to teach Science and Western Civilization, where she would introduce students to the real-world applications of science and technology in different periods of Western history. In a time where science is being questioned as just so much "fake news," this delight in sharing with students how science and math could be used to understand and solve real-world problems is one of Marilyn's most lasting and enduring legacies for those who had the privilege of working with her.

Ellen Hawkes

Beginning in 1975, Ellen Hawkes served as a mentor at SUNY Empire for more than 25 years. At the Genesee Valley Center in Rochester, she worked with students in Human Services and in Educational Studies, with a special interest in children. A caring and attentive mentor, Hawkes gave unstintingly to her students. In so many faculty discussions over so many years, it was Ellen Hawkes who would provide details of her students' lives and of their studies, ever proud of their accomplishments. Ellen Hawkes died on January 30, 2019, at the age of 93.

From Barb Pollack, mentor

I had a wonderful learning experience as I was mentored by Ellen Hawkes, not as a student but as a new adjunct, then as a mentor here at SUNY Empire. What a role model to have and to learn from in my early days as college faculty! Not only did Ellen show me the importance of a well-developed learning contract and narrative evaluation, but also how to guide students in their learning. I remember many meetings over lunch at the Rochester Science Museum discussing courses that I would offer, how to find textbooks, and how to write the contracts for each study.

Ever the educator, Ellen was a passionate advocate for the field of "early childhood" to be part of our academic offerings. She felt that it was important to educate those adults working in the early childhood profession to have the knowledge of what is appropriate for young children. She often told stories of her experiences and learning in raising her own three young daughters while advancing her own education as a graduate and then-doctoral student, which gave her the ability to understand, connect with, and support her students. I was often warned not to ride with Ellen to meetings. Perhaps that was due to her background in driving a large truck over rough terrain as a camp counselor. She would laugh and explain that everything is a learning experience.

During her retirement, Ellen continued to learn and educate as she participated in clown ministry with her church group. Her life was an example to me and many students of how to enjoy the present day with a generosity of spirit and excitement for life.

Ed Todd

Ed Todd came to SUNY Empire State College in 1985 after an already long career as a faculty member and administrator in higher education, including serving as vice president at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and provost-executive vice president and acting president at SUNY College at Old Westbury. He worked with both undergraduate and graduate students at SUNY Empire as a mentor in Business, Management and Economics, the area in which he earned his Ph.D. from The University of Chicago. For 35 years, Ed offered us at SUNY Empire great generosity, humor, and insights from an incredibly rich background, from night school to journeyman patternmaker, to the U.S. Air Force, to the Pentagon, to the academy.

From Frances Boyce, mentor

I had the privilege of working with Ed Todd at SUNY Empire State College's Long Island Center for 26 years. When I came to the college, he was a wonderful mentor to me. He helped me navigate and negotiate the vagaries of SUNY Empire. Over the years, Ed became a dear friend. When I first started at the college and we introduced ourselves at meetings, he would introduce himself in one of two ways: either as my secretary or as the junior member of the business faculty. This amused him to no end. His humor and kindness are what colleagues remember most fondly. Through the years when I faced challenges, I went to Ed. He always offered direct advice wrapped in humor. Ed wrote so many letters to the administration of this college, but never on his own behalf. He wrote to correct something that he thought wasn't right; he wrote in defense or support of a colleague. Ed would not be silent in the face of injustice; he recognized his ability to bring light to darkness. He did it for me and many others and never wanted thanks or recognition. Ed will always have a place in my heart and the hearts of many other people on Long Island. I only wish that after all he gave to us, he could have had much more time after his retirement this year.

Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of SUNY Empire State College reflect the commitments of a dynamic, participatory, and experimenting institution accessible and dedicated to the needs of a richly diverse adult student body. These values are woven into the decisions we make about what we choose to do, how we carry out our work in all parts of the institution, and how we judge the outcome of our individual and collective efforts. More than a claim about what we have already attained, the core values support our continuing inquiry about what learning means and how it occurs.

We value learning-mentoring goals that:

- Respond to the academic, professional, and personal needs of each student
- Identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills
- Sustain lifelong curiosity and critical inquiry
- Provide students with skills, insights, and competencies that support successful college study.

We value learning-mentoring processes that:

- Emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study
- Support critical exploration of knowledge and experience
- Provide opportunities for active, reflective, and creative academic engagement.

We value learning-mentoring modes that:

- Respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests, and circumstances
- Foster self-direction, independence, and reflective inquiry
- Provide opportunities for ongoing questioning and revising
- Reflect innovation and research.

We value a learning-mentoring community that:

- Defines each member as a learner, encouraging and appreciating their distinctive contributions
- Recognizes that learning occurs in multiple communities, environments, and relationships, as well as in formal academic settings
- Attracts, respects, and is enriched by a wide range of people, ideas, perspectives, and experiences.

We value a learning-mentoring organization and culture that:

- Invites collaboration in the multiple contexts of our work
- Fosters innovation and experimentation
- Develops structures and policies that encourage active participation of all constituents in decision-making processes
- Advocates for the interests of adult learners in a variety of academic and civic forums.

SUBMISSIONS TO *ALL ABOUT MENTORING*

If you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you have presented, *All About Mentoring* would welcome it. If you developed materials for your students that may be of good use to others, or have a comment on any part of this issue, or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please send them along.

If you have a short story, poem, drawings or photographs, or have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, *All About Mentoring* would like to include them in an upcoming issue.

Email submissions to Alan.Mandell@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are no longer than 7,500 words.) It is easiest if materials are emailed to Mandell as Microsoft Word attachments. In terms of style and referencing, *All About Mentoring* follows the Associated Press Stylebook and uses APA rules (please see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association,* 6th ed. [Washington, DC: APA, 2010] or http://image.mail.bfwpub.com/lib/feed1c737d6c03/m/1/BSM_APA_update_2010.pdf).

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