

CARLOW ROUNDTABLE PROCEEDINGS



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175 Years of Mercy – The Heritage We Have Received; the Heritage We Pass On



THE EIGHTH CARLOW ROUNDTABLE

At this year's Carlow Roundtable we experienced the strong effects we had on one another. We came together in beautiful spaces with similar institutional missions. We shared our work, directed in unifying paths by the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy. Some of us got to experience, for the first time, the power of exploring the historical and geographical roots of the Sisters of Mercy through song, story, sharing, and visiting the spaces where it all started. We shared our approaches to onboarding new employees and instilling the charism of Mercy, on how the critical concerns are integrated to our course designs, disciplines, curricula, and support services on campus. We shared our experiences with teaching and practicing civil discourse, a skill so needed in this world. We were enriched, inspired, and spirited. A piece of each of us, and the spirit of our group now lives in our second home in Ireland. colleagues engaged in this work of Mercy. The following papers are examples of the rich and significant work of the Sixth Carlow University Roundtable.

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The Mercy Emissary Program: Inviting Lay Employees to Evolve the Founding Charism

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ABSTRACT

The Mercy Emissary Program is an adaptation of the Mercy Associate program uniquely tailored to the complexities of Catholic higher education and the specific history of Mercyhurst University. It is a one-year program of community building, education, and spiritual reflection designed to solidify for diverse employees their particular role in carrying forward the Mercy, Catholic foundation of the institution. The program consists of monthly trainings in topics such as the history of the Sisters of Mercy, the history of Mercyhurst University, Catholic Intellectual Tradition, Catholic Social Teaching, and Mercy Spirituality. Within the past four years, more than one hundred employees from diverse personal spiritual backgrounds and diverse departments and roles across campus have completed the program. The impact of this program both inside and outside the classroom has been palpable. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of passing forward a founding charism to increasingly diverse employees as the number of Sisters on campus diminishes. The Mercy Emissary Program has become a vital conduit for the Mercy Heritage as it evolves—with courage and creativity—from the past to the future. It represents a promising practice for extending beyond institutional identity to ensuring that a critical mass of employees holds as central their personal connection to the founding charism for their ongoing spiritual growth and its implication for daily work and priorities.

In the spring of 2012, Mercyhurst University surveyed its employees with a straightforward question: “Can the Mercy mission survive without the presence of the Sisters on campus?” At that time, about half of all employees responded, “No, we cannot sustain this mission without the Sisters.” Our VP for Mission Integration at the time, Sr. Lisa Mary McCartney, RSM, was among the many people who found this response unacceptable, and received it as a call to change attitudes and explore strategies for forming employees in mission. A team of employees gradually conceived of the Mercy Emissary Program—a university-specific version of the Mercy Associate program. It has truly transformed mission culture at Mercyhurst University. The process has also helped to clarify some contemporary opportunities and challenges for transmitting a founding charism to spiritually diverse lay employees on Catholic campuses.

In this paper, I draw together several related resources, including John Wilcox’s foundational work on forming mission communities, Susan Sanders, RSM’s work on congregational sponsors in Catholic Higher Education, and clear new emphases from the Catholic Church for Higher Education. I also draw from my experiences as mission officer to explore four broad areas of ongoing emphasis with employees: (1) building intentional community among a range of employees; (2) offering continuing education rooted in the founding charism as an entrance point to Catholic tradition; (3) supporting ongoing spiritual development for employees from diverse spiritual

commitments; and (4) moving through questions of identity to mission embodiment in service of the human person and the common good.

I will unpack my university's expanding efforts to appropriate and evolve the mission while maintaining an intimate connection with the founding charism. I do not imagine that the particular questions of our campus will resonate with every university, nor do I presume that our programmatic solutions would work well at every institution, but I do trust that my colleagues in Mercy Higher Education will benefit from the unfolding story of the Mercy Emissary program at Mercyhurst University.

COMMUNITY

The founding charism and mission of a Catholic institution can never be static. As action-oriented means of sharing unique charisms—or gifts that the world needs—these institutions must evolve. They must be porous in the sense of allowing people to come and go freely while allowing for new perspectives and approaches. John Wilcox notes that the founding congregations of many Catholic colleges and universities have served as a “living endowment” as they carry forward a strong culture of mission. One can sense and feel this tangible presence, which is sometimes difficult to put into words; Wilcox calls it a “mist in the halls” that gradually embraces both students and employees with the presence of the founding charism (Wilcox, *Higher Learning*, p. 20). Wilcox contends that it will take decisive structural changes amidst a dwindling presence of the founding congregation. He advises gathering faculty specifically as a “loosely coupled” organization of diverse people committed to the mission. This core group becomes a “mission community” which meets regularly to pray, discuss, educate, review policy and practices, and generally serve as guardians of the mission (Wilcox, “*Higher Learning*,” pp. 20-21). Through thoughtful, ongoing formation, diverse lay people can become a new piece of the “living endowment” (Wilcox, “*Future of Catholic*,” p. xi).

The Mercy Emissary program is and always will be a voluntary program of personal invitation. Employees encourage colleagues, both new and long-time employees, to consider joining the program. While Wilcox's plan is specifically for faculty, our university has benefitted greatly from a program inclusive of staff, administrators, coaches, and others. It builds understanding and resists silo mentalities. One lasting impact of the Emissary program is that it draws people into a welcoming and ever-expanding community and allows them to meet employees from outside their normal orbits on campus. As employees begin to share ideas and coalesce as a community, it becomes clear that while many people sense the “mist in the halls” and cherish the legacy of the Sisters, many employees lack a strong working knowledge of the tradition. They need and want formation in the charism of the Sisters of Mercy and the Catholic tradition.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

When our university first imagined what we might do with a casual yet intentional mission community, Sr. Lisa Mary McCartney began investigating a version of the Mercy Associate training program specifically for university employees. They would be like associates, but directed towards their work at Mercyhurst University. Regional representatives of the Sisters gladly endorsed the idea. A small group of employees began planning a year-long program of building community while learning about various topics. One long-time employee proposed that the name “Emissary,” a name

which includes the root word for mission, was a fitting title for this emerging group. An Emissary is one who is sent on a vital mission, just as the Catholic mass (from *missio*: to send) is designed to send one forward to bring Gospel love and hope to the world.

Charisms are extremely helpful for ongoing education and formation. Charisms can offer a palatable entry point to the Catholic tradition, both for those unfamiliar with Catholic tradition and for those who have become disaffected with the tradition (Sanders, 2010, p. 14). Charisms are practical, accessible, and easy to understand. They point tangibly to the “how” and “why” of living the Gospel, which offers for many people a more compelling initial conversation than the “what” of Catholic beliefs. In this sense, Sr. Susan Sanders is right when she argues that charisms “should be used for the ongoing renewal of the Church” (Sanders, p. 5). Charisms draw in people to work on behalf of others and supply a “family flavor” through deep narratives that root individuals within a community (Sanders, 2010, p. 8). The stories of the courageous, entrepreneurial women who founded the first women’s college in Erie, PA have enchanted our community. For this reason, we did an extensive video project when we began this program, gathering stories from almost every Sister in Erie and from many long-time lay employees. For our continuing education, these local stories are every bit as important as the stories of the original founders, Catherine McAuley and Frances Warde.

After engaging our Mercy history and charism, employees are better prepared to study Catholic Intellectual Tradition and Social Teaching because the living charism gives flesh and immediate purpose to these concepts. Mercy Emissaries is more than an orientation or onboarding program, though it has proven to be a wonderful way for an employee to connect to the university during their first year. It is an invitation to ongoing learning and deepening in community. A teaching and learning community geared towards inclusivity fosters the link between knowing and loving. After all, “without loving, our knowing is skewed, and without knowing, we cannot truly love” (Penzenstadler, 2010, p. 312).

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

When someone who does not identify as Catholic arrives at a place that celebrates its Catholic identity, there is often a fear that one does not share quite as fully as others in the mission. As Ronald Modras shares, some faculty wonder if teaching as a non-Catholic at a Catholic university makes them some version of a hypocrite (Modras, “Spiritual Humanism,” p. 11). An essential task of the Emissary program is inviting those who claim beliefs or worldviews other than Catholic to recognize that they are cherished and integral to carrying forward our Catholic, Mercy mission. As we teach our student Ambassadors and Emissaries, we are proud to claim our Mercy and Catholic identity, and it is because of and through that identity—and not in spite of it—that we enthusiastically welcome people from various cultural backgrounds and spiritual beliefs. From the outset, our Emissary planning team and membership have included a balance of employees from a range of spiritual backgrounds and commitments, and we have crafted the program with sensitivity to these backgrounds. In an increasingly interconnected world, the future of nearly all religiously-founded institutions will be more ecumenical than their past.

For a surprising number of employees, the Emissary program is more than a helpful support community at work. It serves many employees' spiritual needs, including for those who do not have a regular spiritual practice. At least half of our Emissaries do not identify as Catholic. As we look at spiritual formation in the Mercy charism with employees from diverse spiritual backgrounds, it becomes crucial to give people the freedom to draw their own meaningful connections between their spiritual identification and the Mercy charism. We are learning that this is not hard for most people to do. The action-oriented, hospitable, and creative spirit of the Sisters is appealing and practical.

I prefer to define spirituality at its most basic level as daily commitments and practices of individuals and the multiple communities to which they belong in light of what one claims to be ultimate. On our most spiritually awake days, we know what matters most with great clarity, and our attitudes and actions align accordingly. Often people are too busy to live from such a place of centered obedience, and the workplace commitments our universities heap upon employees do not always help. It becomes incumbent upon us, then, to ensure that being an Emissary does not mean just adding to plate of the already busy. The program must offer personalized paths for growth and reflection. It must help people to contemplate. The Mercy charism is about action, but that action grows out of and deepens in silence and deepening relationship with divine mystery and love. For employees to deeply know and integrate this truth, they need ongoing, intentional spaces for silence and reflection.

One benefit of working at a Catholic institution is that retreats and other contemplative opportunities can and should “count” as on-the-clock work time—a necessary component of employee development in terms of mission. The closing retreat for the Mercy Emissary program offers an introduction to this balance of action and contemplation. While some employees are wary of the idea of the “wasted time” of a retreat, the highlight for many Emissaries is a simple 45 minutes of intentional silent reflection.

Our Mercy Emissaries know that they are welcomed and respected as they are and as they believe. No one is unworthy or out of bounds. Mission, after all, is not about exclusive belonging. It is not about indoctrination by salespeople who have mastered a well-polished pitch about Mercy and Catholic identity. It is about drawing people together for a common good work in the world, and inviting them to deepen in their own evolving spirituality in order to sustain this good work.

FROM MISSION IDENTITY TO CREATIVE ACTION

As we draw together diverse employees, we demonstrate a legacy of common good and community within Catholic tradition that many employees find surprising and refreshing. Wilcox notes that Catholic thought pushes against American individualism, and that may be one of its greatest selling points (Wilcox, “Future of,” p. 70). The closing retreat for the Emissary program serves as a bridge from personal spirituality to the consideration of ways to continue to implement Mercy in daily life and work, and to extend it to work for social justice. We are working to create expanding opportunities beyond the first year for Emissaries to deepen in creative work in living and evolving mission – for example, as official committee members in spaces formerly set aside exclusively for Sisters; and in dreaming up and implementing new campus initiatives, like the campus food pantry we began this past spring.

The path forward for the Emissary program is one of continuing to invite people to embrace an identity informed by the Mercy charism, while also pushing through that concern for identity to look at one's daily life and habits. From there we can consider how the charism informs one's daily work environment and the university's structures and practices. While much of the conversation about mission at Catholic universities involves shoring up "identity," I contend that a mature appropriation of mission includes, while also moving beyond, concerns with Catholic or Mercy identity. Identity is an age-appropriate developmental challenge for adolescents and young adults. As James Fowler and others who theorize about spiritual development have noted, adulthood invites a person to move past the need to differentiate oneself as separate and special (identity) and moves into spaces of community, integration, selflessness, and deepening comfort with ambiguity. This is a movement that Merton calls growing beyond the false self and Richard Rohr calls moving past the ego-protecting small self.

Identity formation is a life-long process, yet there are critical moments in spiritual development when one begins to care less about who they are, especially in the view of other people, and begins to care more about embodying through action the stated values and beliefs that ground her/him. Wilcox suggests that Catholic universities move past an emphasis on identity to prioritize culture (Wilcox, "Future of," pp. 78-83). He points to Morey and Piderit's analysis, in which they argue that people form culture through present actions and inheritance, which grow from previous actions (2006).

A mission culture will endure if: (1) it is distinguishable and people find that it adds value, and (2) if it is in fact inheritable (Wilcox, "Future of," pp. 80-81). In other words, a culture chained to history or protected by an exclusive group of people does not pass in meaningful ways to the present. Current employees must genuinely welcome new people to carry forward a culture in order for it to remain alive, evolving, and fluid. These employees also must understand that they are continually contributing to the evolution of the campus culture, regardless of whether they are doing so intentionally.

The Catholic Church continues to nudge educational institutions to recognize their mission to move individuals to work in solidarity with others to claim ethical integrity in a pluralistic society ("Fraternal Humanism, 2017, no. 20). Ronald Modras, speaking from the perspective of the humanistic values of Ignatian spirituality, refers to humanism as "those attitudes and beliefs that attach central importance to the human person and values" (Modras, 2008, p. 11). In Pope Francis' vision, the university does not find its central task in preserving and perpetuating Catholic faith and identity; rather, the university unites around the central mission of upholding the dignity of the human person and serving the common good.

The annually renewed promise made by Mercy Associates states, "I will share in the mission of the Sisters by serving the poor, the sick, and the uneducated, where I live, work, pray, and have recreation." The promise then invites them to list specific ways in which they will carry this out. This covenant has little to do with what one claims to be or even believe. It is a covenant of action flowing forth from a life marked by integration and balance. A deepening spirituality helps one to claim their unique voice and to clarify their daily priorities and postures.

A surprising gift emerges when a critical mass of employees makes a daily resolve to work to uplift human dignity. The Congregation for Catholic Education recently wrote that

It is ironic that modern people have achieved important goals in knowing the forces of nature, science and technology and, at the same time, are lacking in ideas for adequate coexistence within society so as to give everyone an acceptable and dignified existence. What perhaps has been missing so far is the joint development of civic opportunities with an educational plan that promotes the reasons for cooperation in a united world. (“Fraternal Humanism,” 2017, no. 6)

So many people involved in efforts to combat injustice find themselves, with time, worn down and cynical. A deepening mission culture offers the necessary resources to keep people reflecting on what a common work—or institution—is ultimately for. It supplies unifying reasons for cooperation that may not be apparent in various movements that are secular and political in nature. A mission reminds how and why our seemingly disparate roles in the university are interdependent and united.

Our great Mercy founders established institutions to meet the world’s needs and to share the gift of Mercy. The Sisters are still here, and their presence and guidance remain vital amidst the tender transition to the mission being carried forward primarily by those who never will profess formal vows within the order. A program like Mercy Emissaries gathers people within a charism, forms and deepens people in the charism, and ultimately keeps them grounded in why that charism is and will remain critical for the world. It is a gracious spirit of freeing people to know what the world needs and how they can respond in joy and hard work.

The Sisters have left a leadership road map with their witness of how to remain present in their institutions without remaining in a spirit of control. They are pleased to share the gift of Mercy with others and watch them embrace it. Lay employees are not just “acceptable” for carrying forward this mission. They are vital, and if they take their spiritual lives seriously, they will recognize that they are called to this mission-centered work with the same fullness and holiness as the Sisters before them.

CONCLUSION

Now that more than 100 employees have been through the program, how does each person embrace their unique role in carrying forward the mission? Wilcox anticipated that some employees would remain deeply committed to mission communities while others would fade away. This certainly is true, but proactive measures will keep more employees close to the supports needed to deepen their mission identity, and more importantly, spiritual integration and action. Much of the creative work moving forward involves finding deepening ways to engage and support those who have completed the initial Emissary training. We are fine-tuning programming ranging from small groups for study and sharing to retreats and daylong conferences for continuing education and formation in the charism.

The Mercy Emissary programming is also expanding in ways we could not have anticipated. This past year several student leaders came forward asking that we develop a student version of the program. A group of Emissaries is now working with student leaders to create this program, with the clear understanding that this becomes an ongoing invitation for students to voluntarily share more fully in mission and never becomes a prerequisite for other programs or just another resume builder. Discussions are underway regarding the expansion of the Emissary program to include alumni and

trustees, perhaps through adapting the training program to a weekend retreat model. It seems that the entire campus community recognizes that our founding charism is simply too precious and too crucial to allow it to fade away.

At present, our university has five part-time Sisters working on campus; however, this past year, for the first time in our history, there were no full-time Sisters on a campus that once teemed with our beloved founders. There is some grief during this time. Nothing can or will take the place of a robust presence of Sisters; however, the founding charism is and always has been greater than the Sisters by themselves. As Sr. Lisa Mary McCartney says, the Sisters do not have a corner on the market of Mercy. It expands and becomes incarnate in new places in new ways. The charism evolves.

In large part due to the Emissary program, our university is reasonably secure in its identity and action as Mercy and Catholic. A few years ago, an employee from the first Mercy Emissary cohort expressed their concern to me, that after they finished their initial year of training, they were no longer sure about their purpose as Emissaries. I responded, “You are now part of a new generation of dedicated employees who will carry forward the mission in your own ways. Just be who you are and bring a daily mindfulness of mission to your work, priorities, and interactions. That is how we continue to build a mission culture.” That is how we keep the “mist in the halls” around. We will continue to inspire and empower employees and students to carry forward the charism, the gift of Mercy, to our campuses and to a world in great need. As this conference subtitle suggests, this program has become a vital conduit for the Mercy Heritage as we embrace it, appropriate it, and evolve it—with courage and creativity—from the past to the future.

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Bringing Institutional Mission and Values to the Curricula

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ABSTRACT

Trocaire College was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1958, representing a multi-dimensional Catholic institution operating in the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy. Through education and aligning with Mercy of Higher Education values and the Five Critical Concerns, Trocaire's mission "*strives to empower students towards personal enrichment, dignity and self-worth...in a variety of professions and ... liberal arts. Recognizing individual needs of a diverse student body...[providing] lifelong learning and development within a community-based environment. Trocaire prepares students for service in the universal community*" (Trocaire College, 2019). Our mission is demonstrated through the academic curriculum which is driven by faculty instruction using teaching methods such as inductive (indirect) strategies fostering student success. This paper will highlight how the mission was demonstrated and integrated in the classroom by faculty member Dr. Amy Breski.

INTRODUCTION

"Those that instruct others, improve themselves by the very act. That which we say to and for others cannot but regard ourselves" - Catherine McAuley (as cited in Sullivan, 2017).

Education is central to spreading the Mercy mission (Stevens, 2004). Research has shown that the curriculum is a place where the mission of an institution can be integrated (Gaff & Meacham, 2006). For many educators, integrating mission into a course or curriculum is challenging. As Trocaire faculty, we have learned through self-reflection and evaluation of our teaching strategies, course content, and syllabi that mission has been demonstrated indirectly in the classroom.

Indirect Pedagogical Strategy

Guided by Catherine McAuley's approach to educate with compassion and respect for others (Regan, 1978), indirect teaching strategies were used to develop a classroom environment designed to help students understand concepts, patterns, and ideas. This design promoted a natural discovery process using discussion questions, exploratory examples, and/or activities that focused on students interacting with the instructor and peers. This process enhanced student critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Trocaire's mission and Mercy values are interwoven into this approach; the following will highlight these strategies which were used in the Trocaire College course Developmental Psychology (PSY102):

<i>Mercy Value</i>	<i>Trocaire Mission Values</i>
Respect of Others	Dignity of the Person
	Academic Excellence

In order to model the Mercy value of Respect of Others, a non-judgmental learning environment is developed through the encouragement and practice of active listening, questioning, and building off of student ideas. To encourage active listening, the instructor provides the students lecture outlines to help guide chapter discussions. This outline delivered on PowerPoint (with options to write on slides to promote active learning) includes lecture objectives, topics, concepts, and discussion points which promote course organization, but also encourage course predictability (i.e. Chapter 1: Psychosocial Approach; Biological System (genetics, skeletal, endocrine, etc.); Psychological System (motivation, emotions, problem solving, etc.); Societal System (roles, rituals, culture, community). Discussion Questions: (1) Discuss each psychosocial system. (2) Address the change factors in each system. (3) Explain how the psychosocial systems interact in Case Study 1, etc.). As a result of this learning environment, students feel safe and confident to discuss topics and/or ask questions for clarification (Pierantoni, 2019).

As active listening includes communicating empathetically (Rogers & Farson, 1957, as cited in Nemec, Spagnolo, & Soydan, 2017), the instructor responds to student(s) in both lecture and group discussions with clarifying questions (i.e. [directed at student(s)] “Give an example of metacognition”; “How did that process work?”), summarizes or paraphrases student(s) responses (i.e. [directed to student(s)]: “You are correct; metacognition is the awareness of your own thinking process”), and replies with more clarifying questions that builds off student ideas (i.e. [directed to students]: “Now explain how metacognition is represented in toddlerhood”). This environment results in the student feeling understood, valued, and listened to, aligning with the Trocaire mission of Value of Dignity of the Person and cultivates academic excellence.

The non-judgmental learning environment also allows the instructor to guide the students while accepting them “where they are” in their academic journey. For example, if a student(s) lacks exposure to a concept like “elderhood,” but understands a grandparent role due to their own experiences, the instructor will build off the student(s) experience and relate it to the concept to deepen their understanding (i.e. [directed to student(s)]: “What can you tell me about grandparents?”; “Did you know that grandparenting is included in the stage of Elderhood as a social development process and as many grandparents raise their grandchildren, this further impacts psychological and social development?”). The classroom also encourages teachable moments that are development-based. For example, if the student discussion is off-topic, the instructor will respond “Let’s look at the problem this way,” refocusing students back to the discussion at hand,” instead of a punishment-based approach with may encourage confrontation (“You are off topic. I’m in charge of this discussion, you are not”) which can interrupt student(s) idea formation and discourage further student engagement. In response, students in this environment feel safe, valued, and actively demonstrate respect for the instructor and other students by reducing interruptions

and pausing until others have completed their thoughts and/or discussion. Academic excellence is fostered within this classroom dynamic while aligning with the Trocaire mission of Value of Dignity of the Person.

<i>Mercy Value</i>	<i>Trocaire Mission Values</i>
Integrity	Educating the Whole Person
	Academic Excellence

Demonstrating the Mercy value of Integrity in the classroom, honesty is encouraged through coursework using plagiarism education, providing directions, reviewing the syllabus together, and allowing student questions to encourage clarity. For example, on the first day of class the syllabus is reviewed, directions for assignments are given, and student questions are encouraged. Later in the course, through guided feedback, students demonstrate integrity in their writing assignments where plagiarism is reduced and critical thinking improved. For example, a student may submit an assignment with a high plagiarism score (50%); the instructor will provide written feedback directly on the student assessment, focusing on how to properly paraphrase an author, document quotes, and/or explain the process of formatting a paragraph. The instructor will allow another attempt to correct the format assignment to earn a higher score. Students in response feel valued and develop trust in the instructor to be fair. This learning environment promotes Trocaire's mission value of Educating the Whole Person and cultivates academic excellence in the classroom.

<i>Mercy Values</i>	<i>Trocaire Mission Values</i>
Justice	Dignity of the Person
Compassion	Academic Excellence

To model the Mercy values of Justice and Compassion, the non-judgmental learning environment was further enriched using guided feedback for assessments, lectures, and student led discussions. To deepen the learning experience, the adoption of case studies, in the form of videos with guided questions, were used that highlighted unjust moral and ethical situations. For example, a video documentary case study on Indian Schools of South Dakota was presented that highlighted the psychosocial experience of Native American survivors. The students were required to form small groups for an open discussion and given guided questions related to the psychosocial experience of a particular survivor ("How did this experience affect the survivor's psychological system?"; "How do you think the survivor felt being removed from his home?"; "What impact did the Indian Schools have on Native American culture?"). This results in a learning environment that allows students to demonstrate compassion and justice for other cultures by valuing and respecting their experience through open dialogues, listening attentively, and working together to develop moral

and ethical responses with care. This learning dynamic supports Trocaire's mission of Value of Dignity of the Person and cultivates academic excellence in the classroom.

<i>Mercy Values</i>	<i>Trocaire Mission Values</i>
Compassion	Dignity of the Person
Service	Educating the Whole Person
	Lifelong Learning

To model the Mercy Value of Compassion and Service, the non-judgmental learning environment included a sense of safety which was demonstrated by the instructor openly discussing challenging topics, ideas, and/or worldviews through case studies, while relating information to key course concepts to encourage student engagement. For example, a video case study documentary was presented in class that highlighted the experience of two transgender adolescents in transition, their parents, and the community response (medical and sports communities) to their decision. The students are then required to form small groups for an open discussion and given guided questions related to the psychosocial experiences from the child's, parents', and community's point of view (i.e. "How did [name of adolescent] feel before s/he transitioned? What about now?"; "What role changes are the parents experiencing?"; "How has the medical community prepared for the biomedical and psychological impact transition on patients and their caregivers?"; "How can school administrators help transitioned children adapt?"; "What services can be in place to help ease their transition in the community?").

This results in a classroom design that encourages a deeper discussion of current topics related to psychosocial development and applied to the community and medical field. Thus, students respond with compassion (empathy) and develop an understanding of direct service in the medical field (employment skills) with their peers and instructor. This promotes the development of critical thinking skills and reflection of current medical practices (service).

This learning environment aligns with Trocaire's mission values of Dignity of the Person and Educating the Whole Person. Through service, Trocaire's mission of Lifelong Learning is cultivated.

<i>Mercy Values</i>	<i>Trocaire Mission Values</i>
Service	Lifelong Learning
	Academic Excellence

The Mercy value of Service is demonstrated further in this non-judgmental learning environment through an opportunity for the student to obtain direct service in the community through a research project. The instructor requires students to actively engage in the community by interviewing adults between the ages of 60 and 75 years, investigating their psychosocial experience of coping with a challenging life event. The students are given guided questions relating to later adulthood psychosocial experience (i.e. “What do you consider was your biggest challenge?” (crisis); “How did you cope with this challenge?” (process and resources); “What did you learn from this challenge (wisdom/resilience)?”). This learning environment encourages the student to actively engage with the participant to discover how they demonstrated wisdom and resilience during their life event. To build on student discussion, the students are also required to discuss their interview in an oral presentation to the class. This allows an opportunity for students to discuss their interview with their peers encouraging active engagement. This learning environment encourages the development of written and oral presentation skills, critical thinking, and research skills which are needed in the workplace, fostering Trocaire’s mission value of Lifelong Learning, and further promotes academic excellence in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that educators who are unsure how to demonstrate mission and values in their curricula use self-reflection as a means to assess teaching strategies as was demonstrated and discussed in a Trocaire College Developmental Psychology course. Further, if the curriculum lacks a direct strategy then a self-reflection would be beneficial in discovering indirect strategies. Other recommendations include faculty collaboration as a peer-review process to further discover mission and values in the curricula. As the “success of any academic program requires both faculty leadership and administrative support” (Gaff & Meacham, 2006), opportunities for faculty to collaborate with administrators should be considered along with opportunities to visit or invite other colleges and/or institutions that have successfully integrated mission into their curricula for an open discussion. Lastly, it may benefit faculty and administrators to seek out educational trainings and/or other professional development opportunities that focus on mission-related pedagogy.

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Strengthening Student Connection to Mercy through Service Learning in the General Education Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Service learning has a long history on college and university campuses and is, by its nature, closely aligned with the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Though the practice is not new; campuses continue to search for innovative ways to infuse service learning into the life of the community. At Gwynedd Mercy University, service learning currently exists within the First Year Experience program, in major course requirements for certain degree programs, and in some capstone courses for graduating seniors. While these experiences are critical as students begin, and end, their educational careers at Mercy, there are few opportunities for students across disciplines to engage in service-learning courses during the bulk of their academic lives. The Signature Seminar series offered through the general education curriculum at Gwynedd Mercy University provides an example of how creative integration of service learning into the general education curriculum may be achieved. A review of best practices in service learning and exposition of the goals of the Signature Seminar series and connection to the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy are addressed.

In the spirit of Catherine McAuley, who not only took notice of the critical issues facing her society but also turned her awareness into action, students educated in the Mercy tradition are invited to engage in both study of, and experiences with, social justice issues facing our world today. The opportunity to more clearly define one's own values, to acknowledge one's prejudices and fears, and to discover one's strengths and gifts are all critical pieces of student growth, as well as development of their world view. This growth is especially possible when students engage in high-impact practices, such as service learning, throughout their educational careers.

For some, access to community service and service learning may present a challenge due to financial and personal commitments. As our student populations continue to present with more complex life circumstances, it is important to look creatively at the opportunities to strengthen the Mercy story in the life of the campus community. There may be new ways to engage students in this experience through the curriculum, specifically the general education curriculum, a natural platform to connection with students across all majors and regardless of status. The Signature Seminar series, offered through the general education curriculum at Gwynedd Mercy University, provides an example of how this concept may be realized. For Gwynedd Mercy, the role of service in developing students' relationship to Mercy is both clear and connected to the mission and core values of the institution. Service learning, in the context of the curriculum, seeks to deepen this relationship and support the development of what Gwynedd Mercy deems Distinctive Mercy Graduates, described as "more than just leaders in their fields. They are leaders with values—professionals who know what they stand for and who will live by their personal principles every day" (Gwynedd Mercy University, 2019).

SERVICE-LEARNING

Definition

The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Series on Service Learning in the Disciplines (adapted from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and as cited in *Campus Compact's Service-Learning Toolkit*) offers a comprehensive definition from which to begin to understand the concept of academic service-learning:

Service learning means a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organized service that: is conducted in and meets the needs of a community and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community; helps foster civic responsibility; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled; and includes structured time for students to reflect on the experience. (*Campus Compact, 2003, p.7*)

Presented another way, “Academic service-learning provides a way to unite the tripartite mission of any university: (1) teaching, (2) research, (3) public service” (Chenarani, 2017). With so many variations of the concept, perhaps the most fundamental concept shared by all definitions could be that “service-learning is a pedagogy grounded in the belief that students learn by doing” (Chenarani, 2017). In the context of the university environment, experiential learning has become increasingly recognized as instrumental in student development, both personally and professionally.

Education in the Mercy tradition is naturally aligned with the pedagogy of academic service learning. The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are, after all, expressions of faith, commitment, and relationship to others, grounded in the beliefs and values that also drive Catholic higher education. Mercy values, and those of Gwynedd Mercy University, which include a call to action regarding the Critical Concerns of: Earth, Immigration, Non-Violence, Racism, and Women, offer a framework to guide academic service learning on Mercy campuses.

Best Practices

A standard for best practices in academic service learning was identified in Jeffrey Howard's Principles of Good Practice in Community Service-Learning Pedagogy in 1993 (as cited in *Campus Compact*). Howard's ten principles include the following:

Academic credit is for learning, not for service; do not compromise academic rigor; establish criteria for the selection of community service placements; provide educationally sound mechanisms to harvest the community learning; provide supports for students to learn how to harvest the community learning; minimize the distinction between the student's community learning role and the classroom learning role; re-think the faculty instructional role; be prepared for uncertainty and variation in the student learning outcomes; maximize the community responsibility orientation of the course. (*Campus Compact, 2nd ed., 2003, p.10*)

The University of Kentucky's Office for Service and Civic Engagement has updated Howard's work and offers the following updated standards:

establish defined learning objectives; align learning objectives with community goals; academic credit: for learning, not for service; placement quality; duration matters; be mindful of the needs and limits of community partners; provide the right tools for student learning success; reflection: a critical piece of the learning process.
(University of Kentucky, 2019)

Present in Howard's original work and missing from the University of Kentucky's updated version, but no less critical to the success of the experience, is the focus on academic rigor and faculty role in the process. It is critical, then, that potential challenges for faculty in developing and sustaining academic service-learning courses must be considered. Other critical facets to consider are potential challenges for student participants and ethical obligations of all involved.

Ethical considerations for service-learning as a best practice.

An area not explicitly addressed in the aforementioned but raised in discussions at the 2019 Carlow Roundtable, is the ethical responsibilities of faculty members and the university when establishing and implementing academic service-learning courses or programs. Questions regarding the ethical obligation of a university to its community partners, populations served, student participants, and ultimately, the outcomes of such experiences, must all be subject to scrutiny. When service learning is utilized as a tool for transformational learning in and outside of the classroom, it must be tempered by real, equitable, and respectful relationship with community partners. Questions of privilege, imperialism, and voyeurism should be openly addressed with university and community partners both in faculty discernment and development processes, and, perhaps most importantly, in student preparation. Robinson and Harkins address this responsibility, stating "... universities need to prepare students to be able to work in underserved communities by promoting understanding and reflection of the socio-political, economic, and historical factors involved across privileged and oppressed groups in our society" (2018).

When done well "service-learning partnerships may reduce stereotypes and that these partnerships can increase consciousness around social justice" (as cited in Davis, Cronley, Beamon, and Madden, 2019). With appropriate planning and acknowledgement of the larger societal issues at work, student preparation can, and should, go far beyond attainment of knowledge and experience and reach for attainment of growth, awareness, and true empathetic understanding. Bosser (2102) asserts, "We must help students recognize the other in themselves, to see their mortality and vulnerability, to learn from the weakness of the other by being present—in whispers and clasped hands—with the other." These, too, are at the heart of Mercy, and education in the Mercy tradition, as evidenced by the core elements of the mission of Gwynedd Mercy University: "**Integrity** in Word and Deed, **Respect** for the Dignity of Each Person, **Service** to Society, and **Social Justice** in a Diverse World" (Gwynedd Mercy University, 2019). Academic service learning in the context of Mercy higher education calls faculty, students, and administration to think critically and engage ethically at all stages of the process.

Potential challenges and solutions for faculty.

In the literature, potential challenges for faculty involvement in service learning have been identified. These include confusion about the difference between community service and academic service learning, suspicion about the academic rigor of service-learning courses, a lack of mentoring and resources for integrating service learning into course design, crafting meaningful service experience with community partners, the time-intensive nature of the process, and institutional support (Cooper, 2014).

To offset these challenges, universities can establish institutional support for faculty which may include providing a context for service learning as it relates to institutional mission, instruction on models of implementation, and mentoring for inclusion of best practices. Additionally, senior or experienced faculty and academic officers can address concerns and misperceptions through dialogue; provide examples of successful course outcomes; and highlight faculty ownership in developing a rigorous course within their discipline supporting the idea that, “The inclusion of a service-learning component in the course curriculum has not only been shown to enhance student learning, but it has also been shown to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning for faculty” (Boyer, 1990; Ward, 2003 as cited in Arellano and Jones, 2018).

Potential challenges and solutions for students.

Some potential challenges for students as they consider academic service learning may include a lack of prior exposure, negative perceptions of service as a requirement, and a lack of awareness of relevance to personal development and career outcomes (Pedersen, Meyer, and Hargrave, 2014). Additionally, “SL challenges students to examine personal values and belief structures in relation to the external world, which can produce anxiety and discomfort” (Pedersen, et al., 2014). In light of these, faculty will need to evaluate how to best educate and prepare students for service learning as well as recognize the support students may need in processing these experiences.

Possible strategies to offset these challenges may include effective, developmentally appropriate academic advising to support discernment of readiness for the course, thoughtful and ethical student preparation for all elements of service experiences, and consideration of individual student context and life experience. Additionally, faculty can develop student awareness of the rationale and the goals of the academic service-learning pedagogy and its connection to the mission of the institution. Faculty can, and should, openly address student perceptions, provide opportunity for thoughtful processing, facilitate meaningful discussion, and invite new and diverse perspectives. Faculty and advisors can work together to help students see the value of academic service learning as well by being explicit about transferable skills students develop via service-learning experiences and making concrete connections to both personal and professional development. Indeed, as Bosser asserts, “The practice of service learning, if it is to be formative of the self, must be placed into conversation with the professional and personal ideals of the student’s life” (2012). Faculty can assist students in seeing the value of academic service learning as a mutually beneficial experience that aims to create a lasting impact for both the student and the community partner and invite students to become agents of change that extends out into the world in a meaningful way.

Curriculum Placement and General Education

In the literature, there are viewpoints shared on the most appropriate placement of service-learning courses. As explained by Phillips, Bolduc, and Gallo, “Three main purposes emerged for placement in a particular curricular location: to build and strengthen disciplinary knowledge and skills; to support student developmental stages; and to institutionalize and/or promote service-learning” (2013). An additional point regarding the need to address where students are in their personal and academic development made by Pedersen, et al. explains that choice, in participation and in types of experiences, “also lends support to the recommendation of the authors to design systemic and programmatic SL that scaffolds the course/program requirements throughout the 4-year degree program in a way that also matches student development” (2015). Furthermore, Pellegrino and Lee state their finding that “SL within foundational courses [] may develop professional level competencies that are vertically transferable to practice settings” (2017). These findings support the inclusion of academic service learning in general education courses which provide a structure and framework for major courses and, through which, students develop the necessary competencies to engage in the work of major courses.

GWYNEDD MERCY UNIVERSITY SIGNATURE SEMINAR SERIES

Background and Rationale

A reimagination of mission integration in the general education curriculum at Gwynedd Mercy was launched in 2016. The earlier model required six (6) three credit courses of all students which, considering the highly prescriptive academic plans in many majors, presented challenges for student completion. The new model, a Signature Seminar (SEM) series, requires two (2) three credit writing intensive courses of all students, first time and transfer, each of which are taught from the perspective of a specific discipline and explicitly address one of the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy. The Signature Seminar series provides a platform to engage students in critical thinking, research, and writing relative to the Critical Concerns. This new model has an added benefit to the community in that it has increased participation of faculty in supporting mission across the curriculum. It has invited the opportunity for creativity and innovation with mission integration in courses since the SEM are discipline specific, may be interdisciplinary in content, and can be flexible in method of delivery (including traditional on-ground, fully online, and hybrid).

If placed within the Signature Seminar Series as part of general education at Gwynedd Mercy University, academic service learning may serve all three purposes as described by Phillips et al. (2013) in that: because the seminar courses are discipline specific, they address disciplinary knowledge; because the SEM courses can be taken at any time during the course of the academic program (after the pre-requisite ENG course is successfully completed), academic advisors can guide students toward appropriate service-learning options based on their maturity and readiness; and to “house” these courses in the general education requirements demonstrates institutional support for academic service learning.

At the core of this paper’s recommendation is the belief that Signature Seminar courses act as threads which help to weave the story of Mercy throughout the curriculum; strengthening both ownership

and lived experience of Mercy tradition and values on campus. This new model increases access for ALL students, including transfers, which builds community through shared experience. As a “high impact practice,” service learning enriches the academic lives of students and increases retention (AACU, 2019). Placement of service-learning options within the Signature Seminar series creates a realistic engagement model for the already full lives of current students and, like other SEM courses, can be offered in an online format to reach students in all areas of the university. This also includes online-only students in the School of Graduate and Professional Studies, creating potential for deepening the connection of this particular student population, who have unique challenges to engaging in mission integration, to the mission and core values of Gwynedd Mercy.

Potential Challenges and Solutions for Implementation

In any given semester, individual SEM courses may be comprised of students who represent a variety of major programs and include students at different levels within degree programs. Additionally, students enrolled will likely represent varying levels of experience, maturity, and readiness to engage in academic service learning. Students at Gwynedd Mercy come from a wide range of backgrounds and may bring life experiences to the course which impact their sensitivity to the material presented. These realities may present challenges for faculty in how to engage students in the study of course material as well as incorporating consideration of student context for participation in service components.

Potential solutions to these challenges may include limitation of participation in SL SEM courses to those students who have completed the required First Year Experience program (for first-time students) and have had some prior experience with service learning (transfer students, for example). Faculty can also acknowledge students at different stages of development and life experience by offering a variety of options for student to engage in service, both direct and indirect, which align with the learning outcomes and requirements for the course. In their study, Pedersen, et. al. (2014) adapted four service-learning models from Marquette University, each of which has value in its potential for engagement at varying stages of student development:

1. Placement model: Students are provided a site or select to perform direct service.
2. Presentation model: Students take materials they are learning in the course and present this to the community.
3. Product model: Students provide a tangible product (e.g., brochure, video, website) for an agency.
4. Project model: Students and agency devise and implement a project that has meaningful outcomes for the community partner. (Pedersen, Woolum, & Gagne, 2007)

These models offer flexibility for faculty in conceptualizing how best to engage students and work with community partners to design appropriate and impactful academic service-learning opportunities. Faculty and academic advisors can partner in making sure students are choosing wisely both the right time to take such a course and the *right content* for them, i.e., what is developmentally

appropriate, likely to support student growth, and likely to have a positive impact for the community partner.

Future Potential at Gwynedd Mercy University

Integrating academic service learning into the general education curriculum through the Signature Seminar series may be the beginning of a broader relationship for the university to this lived expression of mission. The possibilities for future potential at Gwynedd Mercy include the creation of resources for faculty development such as an introductory training workshop and service-learning handbook, database of resources for course design, guidelines for development of community partnerships, and a mentoring program wherein experienced faculty may assist those new to this endeavor. Due to the plethora of expertise within the Conference for Mercy Higher Education member institutions, a vehicle for sharing information and supporting colleagues may be realized in an annual Institute for Service and Service Learning co-sponsored by Gwynedd Mercy University and, potentially, CMHE colleagues. Ultimately, following in the example of so many Mercy institutions, a dedicated Office of Service and Service Learning/Civic Engagement could be an initiative which institutionalizes Gwynedd's commitment to the practice and recognition of its contribution to, and hallmark of, what it means to be a *Distinctive Mercy Graduate*.

In conclusion, academic service learning may serve a critical role in student development, engagement in living Mercy values, and as part of the transformational process of becoming *Distinctive Mercy Graduates* at Gwynedd Mercy University. Despite potential challenges of implementing academic service learning in general, and within the Signature Seminar series in particular, the potential for strengthening student connection to Mercy values through these experiences may inspire faculty and administration to move forward with the initiative. With appropriate faculty support for course development, comprehensive student preparation, and guidance from, and planning with, community partners, academic service learning in the general education curriculum could be successfully implemented at Gwynedd.

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“It’s on the Syllabus”: Engaging the Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns through Inclusive Course Design and Syllabus Work

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ABSTRACT

“It’s on the syllabus!” is an answer that rings out in classrooms throughout the semester. This paper considers practical ways college instructors can design syllabi to foster a Mercy heritage (and the Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns in particular) in order to promote, across the curriculum, inclusive excellence, the education of the whole person, and life-long learning. Specifically, the essay explores how to frame, through the lens of the Critical Concerns, course content; expectations and conduct; attendance, participation, and class climate; and university and community resources. Ultimately, the paper considers how crafting one’s syllabus in a spirit of Mercy can foster heightened regard for human dignity and cultivate compassion and justice for those with less, such as immigrants, persons of color, women and children, and the impoverished.

The syllabus is a foundational document and critical piece of communication between instructor and student that warrants thoughtful design. As the syllabus is often the first form of interaction instructors have with their students, the document plays a significant role in shaping student perceptions and learning. I first began thinking about writing this paper when, in Spring 2018, Mount Mercy University in Cedar Rapids, Iowa hosted a visiting writer, James McKean. During his visit, McKean read essays from his collection, *Bound*, which pays tribute to the women in his family (2017). The reading and discussion centered around the Sisters of Mercy Critical Concern for women. During the question and answer period, an African American female student asked McKean what challenges he felt women of color faced in education today. He responded that, as a white man, he was not qualified to tell a woman of color what challenges she might face. He asked her instead to share her own experiences. The student noted that she felt her class contributions at Mount Mercy were undermined due to her race and sex. She felt that more attention was paid to white male students than to black female students (McKean, 2018). Following the question and answer session, a female professor of color thanked the student for her question and bemoaned the fact that she was only teaching texts that semester by “dead white men” (personal communication, April 4, 2018).

The exchange led me to consider how I could help colleagues diversify their syllabi around the Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns, that is, how I could help instructors (re)consider if and how they are centering in their lessons concern for the earth, immigration, non-violence, racism, and women as well as how doing so can help marginalized students feel seen, privileged students feel informed, and all students feel educated and valued. In 2018, the Conference for Mercy Higher Education encouraged all faculty at Mercy institutions to place the Critical Concerns in action through curricular development and integration (“Mission Integration Core Areas,” 2018). The ensuing question is: how?

One answer is to create inclusive class content centered around the Critical Concerns. Inclusive classrooms are defined by the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching as those in which "instructors and students create and sustain an environment in which everyone feels safe, supported, and encouraged to express diverse and divergent views" (Saunders and Kardia, 2016). In inclusive classrooms, Shari Saunders and Diana Kardia explain, content is viewed from the "multiple perspectives and varied experiences" of a range of diverse groups and is "presented in a manner that reduces ... students' experiences of marginalization" (2016). Inclusive classrooms reinforce the Critical Concerns by including in our lessons the voices of immigrants, people of color, the poor, women, and all those society does violence to because of who they are or how they are positioned ("Sisters of Mercy Critical Concerns," n.d.).

To foster an inclusive classroom centered around the Critical Concerns, instructors can consider whose voices, perspectives, and scholarship are being represented and how. If represented voices, perspectives, and scholarship exclude, for example, immigrants, women, persons of color, and those who face violence due to additional marginalized identities, instructors should consider adding to their syllabi texts by and about these subjects—without trivializing, tokenizing, or further marginalizing them. Instructors can choose, for instance, textbooks with gender-neutral terms. We can check to see if examples and photographs in assigned texts include people of all genders and of various races, ethnicities, abilities, classes, and sexualities.

By way of example, I commit each semester to teaching course material at least 40 percent of which is by and about women and people of color. Ideally, the texts I assign also include other and intersecting marginalized identity constructs, such as impoverished immigrant women of color. Most of my courses teach more than 40 percent. All assigned texts in the first-year seminar, Writing and Social Issues, are by women. All texts in African American Literature or Multicultural American Literature are by people of color, and many are by women of color. As the Conference for Mercy Higher Education reminds us, however, teaching the Critical Concerns should not be relegated exclusively to so-called "diversity courses" ("Mission Integration Core Areas," 2018). Thus, whether I teach Honors Dystopian Literature or advanced American Literature surveys, 40 percent of my course content is always by and about women and people of color. Each semester, independent of course load, I renew this personal commitment.

I do not teach texts by and about women and people of color simply to bolster my courses' diversity content or to underscore the Critical Concerns (though those are worthy goals). Instead, I emphasize these subjects in my classes because the histories of women and people of color (and other marginalized people and groups) are central to the subject matter I teach. In my courses, I do not elide canonical literature by and about white men. I still teach Mark Twain and William Faulkner. I just also teach Sandra Cisneros, Toni Morrison, and Amy Tan. In doing so, my classes offer students a diversity of identities and perspectives that connect to the Critical Concerns. (And, admittedly, if 40 percent of assigned material is by and about women of color, 60 percent, or a majority of course content, is likely by and about white men.)

To be honest, I am not always sure how effective this 40 percent commitment is. Even though I discuss openly with my students the pedagogical choices I make, such as why and how I select course material, I do not know how well my students register the diversity of our course material or how

clearly it converses with the Critical Concerns. By way of example, a student who graduated in 2018 contacted me in Spring 2019 because he was working with his former high-school English teacher who wanted to teach American literature by women but could not think of a single text to assign her students. I told my former student to review our course syllabi to discover multiple texts written by and about women, create a list of potential works to teach, and then I would help him fill in any additional blanks (personal communication, February 4, 2019). I did not want just to give him the answer. I was concerned that neither my student nor his teacher could identify a single American woman author. I wanted him to reflect on what he had learned from me (and throughout his Mercy education) to generate his own list. The student never contacted me again, so I am not sure how fruitful that lesson was. Perhaps I should have given him a list of women writers to ensure they were taught. This instance aside, however, I still maintain the importance of teaching subjects that emphasize the Critical Concerns, whether or not our students realize what we are doing.

If textbooks by and about marginalized subjects are not readily available, instructors can discuss with their students what structural “isms” inform textbook publication that marginalizes further those who are not, e.g., white, wealthy, male, able-bodied, citizens. I have the benefit of teaching an area of expertise (multicultural American literature and race, gender, and non-violence studies) that naturally intersects with the Critical Concerns (which is one reason I wanted to work at a Mercy University in the first place), but, independent of subject, all professors can center their course work around the Critical Concerns.

English instructors teaching Shakespeare and Chaucer or the literature of “dead white men,” as my colleague put it (personal communication, April 4, 2018), can (re)evaluate their syllabi to ensure that they are still discussing the Critical Concerns by leading students in an analysis of race, gender, nationhood, class, and the violence done to the earth and the marginalized. Instructors can also teach criticism (not just primary texts) by and about diverse voices.

To avoid doing violence to subjects by excluding them from discussion, we can use inclusive examples. Math professors can help students chart the path of a wheelchair versus a ball. We can avoid using masculine pronouns to stand for those of all sexes and genders and can instead use varied or gender-neutral pronouns, including the singular “they,” which has long been recognized by the Oxford English dictionary as grammatically correct (Baron, 2018). When we use American idioms, we can explain them for the benefit of non-native speakers.

And even if a course is not explicitly about the Critical Concerns, we can structure our classes in a way that integrates the Concerns through the syllabus alone. The Conference for Mercy Higher Education states that “all policies and practices should be created and assessed relative to adherence to ... core values” (“Mission Integration Core Areas,” 2018). This instruction includes course policies listed on syllabi. So, how do we do this? To start, I begin with attendance. I make an active effort to learn students’ names and pronouns. One benefit of teaching at a smaller university is the opportunity to foster personalized relationships with students. With minimal effort, I can learn names and pronouns quickly. I can get to know a bit about who my students are. When I take attendance on the first day of class, I ask students what they want to be called. I record them speaking their names and later practice saying those that feel difficult to pronounce. I tell students to alert me every time I mispronounce their name. (Many students hesitate to do this, as they resist correcting

authority, but I impress upon them the importance of owning one's name and identity and my corresponding willingness to address them properly.) I also ask students to say their name every time they speak in class for the first two weeks of the semester. (This practice is also easier to maintain in smaller, discussion-based courses.) Learning students' names and pronouns helps address the Critical Concerns of immigration (learning foreign-sounding names), racism (learning non-Anglo names that many do not bother to work to pronounce correctly), women (statistically not heard and recognized at the same level as men), and non-violence (not doing violence to people by refusing to recognize who they are).

I do not feel that it is my place to say, e.g., "The roster says you're Sandra, not Sam, so I'm going to call you Sandra." I simply call folks what they want to be called. Here, I follow what cultural critics call the "Platinum Rule" (to treat others as *they* wish to be treated) versus the "Golden Rule" (to treat others as *we* wish to be treated) (Alessandra, 2019). I do not always treat others as *I* want to be treated, because everyone may not want to be treated as I do. Instead, I treat them as *they* want to be treated. In the attendance section of my syllabus, I print: "Class rosters are provided to me with a student's legal name. Some of you, however, may identify by names and pronouns that do not appear on the roster. Please share with me any and all unlisted names and pronouns, so I may address you properly" (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p. 3). Some students will correct me in class. Others email me privately. However they contact me, I respect what students want to be called.

Instructors can also integrate the Critical Concerns through syllabi content warnings and guidelines for class discussion. We can let students know, from day one, that we are going to address the Critical Concerns in class discussion and that we expect them to treat such challenging topics (in my case, literary representations of racism, sexism, and other modes of violence) in a spirit of Mercy. These discussions are rarely easy. Placing course material in conversation with the Critical Concerns can distress, for example, those who do not believe that racism persists in America, let alone represents a Critical Concern. Others may have experienced racial violence so pointedly they do not feel comfortable discussing the subject with a group of students they do not (yet) trust. Discussions can become heated. Disparate viewpoints can dissolve into base arguments and attacks.

As instructors, we can foster a space in which students can voice diverging experiences and viewpoints intellectually and compassionately. To help, on each syllabus, I warn students of discomforting subject matter and encourage them to approach such subjects with empathy and respect. I write:

Several of the texts on our syllabus address a range of conflicts and traumas that you and your classmates may have already experienced: e.g., death, depression, abandonment, and violence. We will also discuss various modes of oppression that surface in both literature and society (e.g., xenophobia, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc.) and how these forms of subjugation affect both individuals and society as a whole. In your written and oral contributions, please treat these subjects with respect. (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p. 2)

I also offer content warnings in class or via email as to what is to come (e.g., "The next section contains graphic depictions of sexual violence"). I do not offer content warnings to excuse students from doing the work (and, in sixteen years of teaching, no one has ever requested not to read

material due to triggering content) but to prepare students so they do not feel blindsided and to remind them to discuss all topics with respect, as we are not just talking about fiction: Literature depicts real situations that affect real people, including those in our classroom. Every semester, I assume I will have students who have faced racism, xenophobia, classism, and other forms of violence. If, for instance, 23 percent of women in college have already experienced some form of sexual assault (“Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics,” 2019), I should have two to three women per course who are survivors. I am aware of these realities as I teach the Critical Concerns. I want my students to be aware of them too so that we may discuss such matters intellectually and compassionately in a spirit of Mercy.

To help students discuss critical content in class, I print guidelines for discussions on each syllabus. Establishing guidelines early in the semester can help advance class discussion. I can refer to the syllabus as a way to frame our discussion if and when it begins to derail. I thus print on every syllabus (and promote throughout the semester) “guidelines for promoting a non-discriminatory, intellectually vital class climate,” i.e., ways to talk about Critical Concerns in a spirit of Mercy (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3).

To start, I acknowledge that discussion can “provoke strong feelings” (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3). I encourage students to “explore assigned material, risk making mistakes in writing about and discussing issues, and ask for help in understanding course material, including others’ points of view” (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3). I also incite students to consider material critically and prompt them to communicate honestly, whether or not they think their peers or professor will agree with them. This kind of discussion, I recognize, can be “uncomfortable at times, but risking discomfort” can also lead to greater insight (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3). If discussions “get heated,” I promise to “slow down conversation to ensure everyone has time to work out and express ideas” (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3). I ask students to follow these guidelines so we can hold one another accountable. I ask them to “speak from their own experience and reading;” “engage thoughtfully with the content of the class;” “listen to others’ thoughts and feelings, even when they differ from one’s own;” and “not to expect oneself or others to speak as representatives of a social or cultural group” (to avoid tokenism) (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p. 3). Should students feel “uncomfortable at any point during discussion,” I ask them to share their discomfort with me and one another (Mount Mercy University, 2019, p.3). I assure them that I value their opinions and want to make sure our class remains an open space for sharing challenging views.

Perhaps as a result of printing these guidelines on the syllabus, my students acknowledge that, even when course material feels “depressing,” the way we discuss it is “insightful” (Mount Mercy University, 2018). One student on an end-of-semester anonymous course evaluation recognized that discussions centered around the Critical Concerns made them feel “uncomfortable” but qualified that they “think that’s a good thing,” as “these topics need to be talked about,” and the class offered them the “environment and opportunity to do so” (Mount Mercy University, 2018).

Discussions about the Critical Concerns do not always go perfectly. By way of example, in Fall 2016, I asked students in a Writing and Social Issues course to share selected topics for their analytical papers. Two students volunteered “immigration,” which, as a Critical Concern, was one of the central themes of the course. They then high-fived one another, shouted “President Trump,” and

began chanting, “Build that wall” (Wales Freedman, 2016). Another student, an immigrant from Venezuela, fought back tears to ask: “Do you want me deported? My parents are dead. I have no family left in my country. I thought America could be my home. Now I am not so sure” (Wales Freedman, 2016). The students apologized to their classmate for “hurting his feelings” (Wales Freedman, 2016). They maintained, however, that they were “entitled to their opinion,” that their parents risked losing their jobs to immigrants, and a “wall was the only way to keep immigrants out” (Wales Freedman, 2016). How could I handle this discussion in line with the Critical Concerns and charism of Mercy?

Because I had already printed guidelines for class discussion on the syllabus, I could remind students how we are expected to engage one another across difference, identity, and perspective. I affirmed that everyone is entitled to their opinion, but I also reminded students of the importance of treating everyone with respect while expressing divergent views. We may differ over what policies we believe the United States should enact, but, as we disagree, we should remain mindful that our divergent views can wound one another. We should thus express views in a manner both critical and compassionate. Chanting, I suggested, is not appropriate for class discussion, as it shuts down quieter voices and risks hurting those with whom we disagree. Instead, we should examine carefully all sides of a debate and support our views with researched support (Wales Freedman, 2016).

This intervention did not shut down discussion but required all students to express views intellectually and empathically in a spirit of Mercy. We were thus able to shift from an emotional outburst to an inclusive intellectual discussion. Students told me that they left the classroom feeling both educated and uplifted. They knew they could maintain their own perspectives, but they also knew they had to present opinions in a manner both reasoned and empathic (Wales Freedman, 2016). I also checked in after class with the Venezuelan student to ensure he was okay. He indicated that he was upset with some of his classmates but still felt supported by the course itself (personal communication, November 12, 2016).

To restore community following a heated discussion, instructors can also ask students to step back and analyze what happened and what they learned. If an incident like this one happens at the end of class, do not simply let it go. Instead, tell students they have raised an important issue that you plan to take up at the start of next class. Use the time between classes to strategize how best to treat the subject. Make sure you return to the issue as promised. You can also ask students to write a reflection or analysis in response to the critical dialogue. This assignment empowers students to think about and come to terms with the issue. Ultimately, printing discussion guidelines on the syllabus helps. As an instructor, you can frame discussion from the start. Students know what your expectations are, and you can return to them when you get off track.

To integrate the Critical Concerns further, I print a list of resources on every syllabus, including upcoming University sponsored and community cultural events, writing tutoring services, disability services, the COS foundation (a non-profit that helps students pay for books), Mustang Market (which addresses food insecurity), childcare options for students who are parents, and ways to address sexual and physical violence (information about Title IX, police, hospital, and counseling services) (Mount Mercy University, 2019, pp. 12-13).

How can listing information, e.g., about the University writing center, advance the Critical Concerns? Consider the following example: In 2017-18, I helped a student seek assistance from the writing center when they struggled to write formal papers for English courses. The student is bright but wrestled at the mechanics level, because they wrote in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a foreign grammar to many white academic readers. To help, I suggested the student take their work to the writing center for review. I also shared the situation with our University's writing specialist who had offered a "Lunch N' Learn" on teaching students who communicate in diverse Englishes (Thiel, March 16, 2017). The specialist's talk underscored how multilingual and multidialectal our University is. The session inspired me to speak to my student about the grammar in which they write.

When I met with the student, I affirmed that the grammar they use is correct for speakers and writers of AAVE. It does not, however, adhere to the conventions of standard English, which the field requires. The student was frustrated to learn that they write in a grammar that is recognized by linguists and cultural theorists but is not accepted by the academy. On a practical level, they also had difficulty determining what was "wrong" with their writing, since they had not been formally taught standard English and did not always realize when they were writing in AAVE. I acknowledged that labeling one form of grammar as "correct" and another as "incorrect" is problematic, especially when race, ethnicity, and culture inform which grammar is considered standard and which is not. I assured them that I shared their frustration. I also explained that, while I appreciate diverse grammars, academic discourse requires standard English, and that, if the student wants to advance in the field, they will be expected to use standard English. (The student plans eventually to pursue a PhD in English and to teach at the college level.) I offered to tutor the student in standard English and to review their papers for my class before they submitted them to help them learn how to code-switch between AAVE and standard English. I also reminded the student about the resources printed on the syllabus and suggested they take papers for all courses to the writing center, where tutors could help them write in a way that communicates clearly, while still maintaining an authentic voice. Finally, I suggested that the student take creative writing courses, which may afford the opportunity to write in AAVE, since diverse grammars are more acceptable in creative versus academic writing.

The student was amenable to these suggestions. In 2019, they graduated at the top of their class. They were selected as graduation commencement speaker. In 2019, they will begin service as a Mercy Corps volunteer. Examples such as these highlight the value of helping students utilize University resources in conversation with the Critical Concerns and Mercy values.

I also use the syllabus and Critical Concerns to support students with documented disabilities. I list disability resources on every syllabus and encourage students to avail themselves of appropriate accommodations. Some students hesitate to do so, because they fear that e.g., seeking extended time on exams will stigmatize them or grant them an unfair advantage. Cognizant of these concerns, when I introduce the syllabus, I assure students that I will not think less of them if they seek accommodations for documented disabilities. Nor do I think using Disability Services gives students with learning differences an advantage over those without. When I review the syllabus, I compare learning disabilities to impaired vision. I would not tell a student not to wear glasses because doing so may stigmatize them or provide an advantage over those who do not need glasses. I would tell them to use the tools a doctor has prescribed to help them see. Similarly, I would never discourage a

student from seeking accommodations for documented learning differences. I want them to use the tools available to them to demonstrate their knowledge and ability. In advocating for students with disabilities, I emphasize the Critical Concern of non-violence. I will not do violence to someone by penalizing them for how they think or learn. I will encourage them to use available resources to succeed in individualized ways.

As my University's Deputy Title IX Coordinator, I have helped students working with the Title IX office secure extensions, incompletes, and other accommodations from their professors to help balance academic requirements and personal challenges. Listing Title IX and other resources on every syllabus helps. Students do not report sexual violence for manifold reasons, but one is that they simply do not know how. If every instructor printed sexual assault resources on their syllabi, we could help advance such Critical Concerns as women and non-violence.

Teaching the Critical Concerns through inclusive course content and syllabus preparation helps teach the whole person, upholding the Catholic commitment to human dignity ("Catholic Social Teaching," n.d.). The strategies discussed in this paper work most obviously in courses such as mine that, due to their subject matter, already teach the Critical Concerns. The described guidelines, however, are accessible for all instructors, independent of field. In teaching the Critical Concerns through inclusive course content and syllabus work, instructors enact Mercy at every university, graduating students who direct their critical care and concern toward their own communities. In this way, the charism of Mercy seeps into and fertilizes society's arid soil. Through fostering the Critical Concerns from day one, through structuring our courses around Mercy values, we don't merely educate our students. We make the world a more Mercy-full place.

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The Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust: Reflecting on the Past to Protect the Future

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ABSTRACT

Remember the Past; Protect the Future. This simple phrase is the inspiration and the guiding force behind the burgeoning field of bioethics and the Holocaust. It also provides an answer to the central question posed at this year's Carlow Roundtable: "How does your work serve as the conduit for our Mercy heritage as it passes from the past to the future?" Using the Holocaust as the historical lens through which we examine contemporary issues in society provides a reminder of the absolute necessity of understanding our history as members of humankind and learning from the mistakes of our past. For without that memory, we are at risk of repeating the same mistakes in the future. As George Santayana famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Flamm, n.d.). The challenge is not finding a connection between the past and the future; it is finding the right way to make that connection relevant to a new generation of students who view history as something that should be relegated to textbooks and museums. Creating new and innovative programs that emphasize the importance of remembering the past as the key to protecting the future is essential. This is the reason why Misericordia University established The Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust, the first and only academic center of its kind.

The concept of remembering the past is particularly relevant in Holocaust education, as the number of Holocaust survivors continues to lessen and Holocaust distortion, denial, and anti-Semitism are on the rise. However, to focus solely on the past is to do a disservice to the memory of those who perished. The Holocaust differs from other instances of genocide in that it was medically sanctioned. Science and medicine were used as the justification for the labeling, persecution, and eventual mass murder of millions of people, grounded in a hierarchical system of classification of human beings based on their perceived worth to society. The moral duties to do no harm and to care for the individual person were replaced with a perceived professional responsibility based on the promise of creating a better society, free of those deemed to be unfit. This was humanity in its darkest hour—with no regard for the dignity of the individual, only a blind desire to use medical technology to create a better race, a brighter future.

Are we any better off today? Throughout the world we are fighting battles over access to basic health care, the rights of the patient to make autonomous decisions, mental health care, structural and institutional racism, unethical medical experimentation, equity of care, and the regulation of rapidly advancing medical technologies in medical genetics. Respect for human dignity is getting lost once again. While we have an excess of programs dedicated to advancing medicine and science,

we lack the appropriate resources for investigating the ethical implications of current issues in health care policy and human rights. The existence of programs such as the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust is the key to ensuring a better future by learning from our past.

HUMAN DIGNITY, HEALTH CARE, AND THE HOLOCAUST: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Before discussing the role and importance of the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust at a Mercy institution, one must first understand the topic of bioethics and the Holocaust and its relevance for modern society. The Holocaust is unique in that it is the only instance of medically sanctioned genocide in history. Physicians who pledged to “first, do no harm” abandoned their Hippocratic Oath and duty to the patient in favor of a perceived responsibility to the National Socialist Party and the well-being of the nation of Germany. The systematic leadership and participation of the medical and scientific communities in the labeling, persecution, and eventual mass murder of millions of people deemed “unfit” is unprecedented. As a result, the field of modern bioethics is often said to have arisen directly from the events that transpired during the Holocaust (Caplan, 2010). Thus, exploring the genesis of the Holocaust as medically sanctioned genocide and its ramifications for contemporary issues in health care, public policy, ethics, health law, and human rights endeavors is essential.

The policies and practices of Nazi medicine stemmed from eugenics, one of the most popular scientific theories of the early twentieth century. Coined by Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, eugenics was defined as “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” (Galton, 1904, p.1). In its most simplistic form, eugenics maintained that genetics was the basis for all actions and behaviors, both good and bad. Thus, if one could control the genetic evolution of a species, theoretically one could create a better society. Eugenics was introduced and rapidly popularized internationally as a method of social reform after World War I, with the United States recognized as a leader in the field. Nazi eugenics expanded on this idea by arguing that the nation of Germany itself was a living, breathing organism with its own health and hygiene that needed to be cared for. A decline in the birthrate among the more “fit” and “productive” class in Germany after World War I, coupled with an increase in the birthrate among the physically and/or mentally “unfit,” had led to the country’s degeneration. The only way to reverse the crisis facing Germany and restore the country to its former glory was to rid the nation of its inferior elements and replace them with a better, stronger breed of citizens (Lifton, 2000).

The theory of eugenics was introduced and popularized by the scientific community, but the definition of who should be classified as fit or unfit was decided by the medical community based on objective “evidence.” Ultimately, the rationale behind one’s fitness was based on their value to the nation of Germany. Individuals were viewed as parts of a whole – productive members of society – only if they could benefit Germany. Individual rights were subverted in favor of societal progress, and social issues became medical issues.

A very important paradigm shift took place in the medical profession during this time. Rather than caring for the individual, as physicians had been taught to do since the dawn of the profession, Nazi doctors were taught that their role was to care for society. The sanctity of the physician-patient relationship was no longer of any value, as physicians were tasked with sitting on Hereditary Health Courts and reporting on instances of mental or physical “unfitness.” The willingness of physicians to offer medical care to the sick and disabled allowed inferior elements to survive; thus, counterselective measures were enforced in which physicians were encouraged to avoid medical care that would prolong the life of the unfit. Medicine was practiced in service of the State, with a politicization of science and medicine that promoted a health care community that ministered to the strong as opposed to the sick, weak, and vulnerable (Lifton, 2000). The idea that all human life had inherent dignity was replaced with the view that some lives were worth more than others, and some were not worthy of living at all. Science determined who was worthy of living and who should die, and medicine ultimately carried out those death sentences. The concepts of medical ethics and human dignity as they are understood today were unrecognizable. Instead, Nazi medicine operated under a different code of ethics, best described by Prof. Dr. Fritz Lenz, Holder of the First Chair of Racial Hygiene in Germany, when he stated, “The individual personality cannot be the final goal of ethics.... The people (Volk) as an organism is the goal of our ethics...” (Bruns, 2014, p. 215). Nazi Deputy Party Leader Rudolf Hess asserted, “National Socialism is nothing but applied biology” (as cited in Lifton, 2000, p. 31), a phrase which quickly became popular, and Nazi Germany was described as a “biologically evolved state” (Lifton, 2000, p. 438). The Holocaust stands alone as the singular example of medically sanctioned genocide, a natural extension of the politicization of science and medicine and the abandonment of traditional ethical codes focusing on human dignity and the importance of the doctor-patient relationship.

Changes in international law and health care policy and increased human rights efforts were direct reactions to this blatant neglect of human dignity and the worth of the individual. At the end of World War II, the Doctors’ Trial at Nuremberg was held. The international community was outraged to hear of the abrogation of ethics and the atrocities committed in the name of medical science. This led to the development of the Nuremberg Code, a document consisting of ten guidelines for ethical human subject research that is largely considered to be the “constitution” of modern bioethics (Caplan, 2010). The first point of the Nuremberg Code, “the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential” (Nuremberg Military Tribunal, 1947), was drafted as a direct response to the brazen disregard for the care or concern of the individual during the Holocaust. However, the lack of practically applicable definitions of this point proved problematic for subsequent codes of ethics, such as the Declaration of Helsinki, the Belmont Report, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, and the International Ethics Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects (Gallin and Bedzow, 2019).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published in 1948, asserts in Article 1 that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, 2015, p. 4). The stated purpose of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine is the protection of “the dignity and identity of all human beings and guarantees everyone, without discrimination, respect for their integrity and other rights and fundamental freedoms with regard to the application of biology and medicine” (Council of Europe, 1997, p. 2). These documents were intended to serve as a response to the crimes of humanity that took place during the Holocaust by prioritizing the

importance of human dignity and the equality and inherent worth of all people. The implication is that human dignity – though broadly defined – is the basis for the assertion of certain basic human rights. However, while the vague definition of the term can make it useful for the purpose of an international public document in that it doesn't depend on religious, cultural, or moral traditions, the pragmatic feasibility of guidelines based on ambiguous terminology has been called into question.

These issues raise some important questions: As the only example of medically sanctioned genocide, what lessons can we learn from the Holocaust? What is the contemporary relevance for students? How can human dignity be defined as a useful concept? Why is the study of the Holocaust, human dignity, and health care a good fit for a Mercy institution?

MERCY AND DIGNITY: CONCEPTUAL SIMILARITIES AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

One of the key lessons we can learn from the Holocaust is that we need some type of ethical standard for the treatment of human beings that can be agreed and acted upon internationally. To do this requires an understanding of what human beings are and what they are entitled to merely as a result of being human. From a concrete perspective, we need a practical definition of human rights that is grounded in a theoretical definition of human dignity. There are many philosophical schools of thought regarding the origins of human dignity – including those that incorporate religious traditions and imagery – that are beyond the scope of this paper. The contemporary international humanitarian law approach to defining human dignity is used most often because of its widespread applicability in connecting theory with action. In this way the vague concept of human dignity is defined and understood in relation to its purpose, which is to confer certain inalienable rights upon individuals merely because they are human and to then protect these rights.

The concept of mercy is like that of human dignity in that it is well-intentioned but not always well understood or easy to apply. Much like human dignity, there are a multitude of ways one can define the term, yet the most useful modern definitions of mercy are purpose-driven as opposed to theory-driven. It has been written that Catherine McAuley “transformed her gratitude into acts of mercy performed for others” (Burns & Carney, 1996, p. 34). Catherine’s “ministry to people in need – whether taking care of poor children, nursing sick people, or sheltering women – was doing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy” (Burns & Carney, 1996, p. 34). These quotes indicate that Catherine believed that the charism of mercy was best expressed through action. Pope Francis (as cited in NCR Staff, 2017) also argued that mercy should be considered to be action-driven and constantly evolving: “That mercy is dynamic, not so much a noun with a fixed and definite meaning, or a descriptive adjective, but rather a verb – ‘to show mercy’ and ‘to receive mercy’ that spurs us to action in this world.” The transformation of these concepts, human dignity and mercy, from theory into practice, is an essential component of a student’s journey through Mercy higher education.

THE CREATION OF THE CENTER FOR HUMAN DIGNITY IN BIOETHICS, HEALTH, AND THE HOLOCAUST

In September 2017, Misericordia University launched the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Medicine and Health with a goal of promoting a deeper understanding of medical practices and their ethical ramifications by fostering the study of medical ethics and the boundaries of medical research practices. As the Center approached its one-year anniversary, it became apparent that a name change was necessary in order to reflect the true nature of the work being done. At an event held to commemorate World Bioethics Day, Dr. David Rehm, Vice President of Academic Affairs, announced a name change to the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust. In his remarks he stated:

If a significant aspiration of human societies around the world is to treat all human beings with dignity, then we need to be reminded of a time and a place when human dignity was cast aside – and more importantly, when medicine and science were utilized to fundamentally undermine human dignity. The most significant case of this work in human history is the Holocaust...The Holocaust reveals an extraordinarily low point in human history in its denial of dignity to human beings and its medically sanctioned genocide. This approach to medicine can never happen again. The revised name will help keep us in mind of what we as humans are capable. It will remind us of the great benefits and the challenges associated with medical practices. We must keep this historical moment in our minds as we reflect upon and pursue greater dignity for all humans. (Rehm, 2018)

The creation of this Center is significant, as Misericordia University became the first academic institution in the world to house a center specifically dedicated to bioethics and the Holocaust. Perhaps even more noteworthy, however, is the fact that this Center is housed at a Catholic university. The Holocaust is a historical event traditionally connected with Judaism, but as this paper has shown, the Holocaust is not just Jewish history. It is medical history, scientific history, political history, and, most importantly, human history. The goal of the Center is to traverse the traditional boundaries associated with Holocaust education by creating a space that is interfaith, intergenerational, international, and interprofessional. Our goal is to make Holocaust education, like Mercy education, transcendent. Catherine McAuley used the concept of mercy as a lens through which to view the world and help vulnerable populations. The Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust aims to use the Holocaust as the lens through which to explore other examples of human rights abuses in vulnerable populations.

The mission of the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust is to:

foster a deepened understanding of medical practices and their ethical ramifications. The Center promulgates knowledge about domestic and international practices, both past and present. Because of the active participation of the medical community in shaping the policies and practices that led to genocide, the Holocaust can provide a unique framework for exploring modern issues in bioethics, health care practice and policy, and human rights. The Center serves as a natural extension of Misericordia University's mission and expertise in the

humanities and health sciences and its dedication to promoting equality, health, and well-being for humankind. (“The Center for Human Dignity,” 2018)

The Center has three primary goals:

- (1) examine the ongoing, systematic involvement of the medical community in the ethical violations that took place during the Holocaust and the ramifications for current issues in bioethics, health care practice and policy, and human rights issues;
- (2) Provide educational resources and programming to explore the ethical issues currently impacting society;
- (3) Mobilize the community to become active agents of change by advocating for human dignity in bioethics, medicine, and health care. (“The Center for Human Dignity,” 2018)

Issues addressed by the Center include, but are not limited to,

bioethics and the Holocaust, social justice, patient/personal autonomy, medical research and experimentation, death and dying, environment and human health, the ethics of mental health care, disability studies, beginning of life care/reproductive technology, end of life care/physician-assisted suicide, human subject research, HIPAA/right to privacy, compassion within health care organizations, structural racism, patient advocacy, disparities within health care, vulnerable populations, and perspectives on addiction, treatment, and recovery (“The Center for Human Dignity,” 2018)

The Center encourages discussion about difficult topics such as what it means to be human and what our responsibilities are to others in society in an environment that personifies Misericordia’s motto, “all are welcome.”

The unique combination of action and education provides a place for students, community members and scholars from different backgrounds to come together as members of humankind and explore our shared experiences rather than focusing on our differences. The Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust offers varied programming intended to give students practical ways to integrate the lessons they are learning in the classroom and Misericordia’s core values of mercy, service, justice, and hospitality into their everyday life. By partnering with other like-minded organizations, such as the Maimonides Institute for Medicine, Ethics and the Holocaust (MIMEH), and the Department of Bioethics and the Holocaust of the UNESCO Chair of Bioethics, we are able to expand both the communities of Mercy and Holocaust education, ensuring a better future by learning from our collective past. Our goal is to use the Holocaust as the historical framework for integrating the theoretical concepts of mercy and human dignity into the practical aspects of everyday life, both personally and professionally, thus creating future generations of active agents of social change who recognize that they can and must stand up and speak out when they see injustice in the world.

Our flagship program, The Pledge to Preserve Human Dignity in Health Care, was created with the intention of providing students with an opportunity to take the first step towards becoming agents of change. Held in January 2018 to coincide with International Holocaust Remembrance Day, our inaugural program featured internationally renowned speakers on bioethics and the Holocaust interacting with students and the general community in a day-long program, culminating in the launch of the Pledge to Preserve Human Dignity in Health Care. The text of the Pledge can be found and signed on our website www.misericordia.edu/humandignitypledge and reads:

As global citizens dedicated to creating a better future by reflecting on the past, we pledge to:

Recognize the great power and responsibility associated with the field of health care;

Remember the victims of unethical medical practice, including those who perished during the Holocaust and those who continue to suffer injustices throughout the world;

Uphold the values of dignity, equality, and justice within health care;

Adhere to an internal and professional moral ethos that places respect for human life ahead of the promise of scientific or societal progress;

Reconcile necessary advances in scientific technology and medical practice with the need to respect the autonomy of those we serve;

Protect the most vulnerable members of society and give voices to the voiceless.

We are committed to a world in which every person is treated with respect and dignity (“Pledge to Preserve Human Dignity,” 2018)

In January 2019, the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust hosted our second annual Pledge to Preserve Human Dignity in Health Care program which featured a speaker from Harvard University Medical School discussing his personal experience with asylum seekers. The Pledge has been presented around the world and has been signed by approximately 1,100 people from over 50 different countries.

The Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health and the Holocaust has an interdisciplinary advisory board to ensure that our programs meet the needs of the entire community. The Center offers internships, so that students can be actively involved in the process, and selects student representatives to be part of the Advisory Board. The Center has offered a variety of programs in its first two years, including an ecumenical vigil that brought together members of the community and the general public to pray for peace after the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre in Pittsburgh; a series of events commemorating World Bioethics Day that included a student-led Advanced Directive Drive and a discussion on the role of religion in medical ethics; a Holocaust Cantata musical performance and pre-concert lecture on the influence of eugenics on musical theory and literature; a panel discussion on incorporating a human dignity approach to addiction, treatment, and recovery; and a reading of the names of the victims of the Holocaust held on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. The Yom Hashoah program offered students, faculty, staff, and

community members the opportunity to read the names of children who perished during the Holocaust in five-minute increments over a 2 ½ hour time period. This program, in particular, proved to be transformative for those involved, with one student emotionally telling a local reporter, “I can’t picture six million of anything. What I can picture is that reading of five minutes of names and the one-year-old who was murdered. I can picture that, and that hurts (Hallikaar, 2019).” By utilizing unique teaching methods, creative programming, and immersive experiences, the Center for Human Dignity in Bioethics, Health, and the Holocaust is instilling the importance of mercy and human dignity on a practical level.

REMEMBER THE PAST; PROTECT THE FUTURE; ACT NOW

In conclusion, we return to the central question posed at the year’s Carlow Roundtable: “How does your work serve as the conduit for our Mercy heritage as it passes from the past to the future?” The structure of Mercy higher education is founded on the practical application of the concept of mercy and the way in which it has transformed over the years. Studying the Holocaust can provide a similar structure for exploring and understanding the relevance of human dignity, bioethics, and human rights. Reflecting on our shared heritage is essential for ensuring that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Translating definitions from theory to practice by actively standing up and advocating for mercy and human dignity is the best way to remember the past and protect the future.

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The Carlow Closet – A Catalyst for Social Change

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ABSTRACT

Faith-based higher education institutions often have missions interconnected with service and community engagement. An institution's mission is potentially most significant in influencing public good, and it is suggested that faith-based colleges and universities are "distinctively positioned to address social issues, engage in service to the local and global community, and to involve students, faculty, and administrators in this shared purpose" (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). At Carlow University, the importance of our Mercy values is paramount in driving the Carlow Closet efforts. The Carlow Closet is a mission-driven effort that embraces Hospitality and welcomes the wholeness of each student. The Closet celebrates the diversity of our community's life experiences and is an inclusive space to offer gently used clothing and nonperishable food items to current students in need. The Closet acknowledges it is not an immediate solution for many of the societal ills experienced by our students; however, it serves as a catalyst from which to raise awareness and advocate for Mercy values. The Closet asks students, faculty, and staff: *"Have you ever missed a meal and had to go through your day hungry?" "Do you know what you are having for dinner tonight?" "How many days have you eaten chips and ramen, thinking that was ok for your own meals?"* These are the questions posed to our campus community in near-daily announcements in our online Learning Management System (LMS) because for some, basic needs struggles are a real issue that consumes one's day. It is a basic human need that must resonate with the community in such a way as to dignify and humanize those around us who may be experiencing invisible inequities. The following paper describes efforts spanning two years on projects implemented to increase awareness on the Carlow University campus and its efforts to promote Mercy values.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Carlow University, rooted in its Catholic identity and embodying the heritage and values of the Sisters of Mercy, offers educational opportunities for their community of learners in their efforts to create a just and merciful world (Carlow University, 2019a). Carlow University embraces its identifying value of Mercy and implements it across the University community in a way that:

"...urges us to open our hearts to our students, our colleagues, and our world. In the tradition of action and contemplation, we seek practical ways of addressing need and we engage in reflection in order to understand and integrate our experiences. Education offers us the tools to address unjust structures and dehumanizing situations. Each discipline provides a lens through which we can envision our place in our own personal transformation and that of the global community. The values of Service, Discovery, Hospitality, and the Sacredness of Creation further expand our understanding of the power of Mercy to change our world." (para. 3)

As noted on the University's main web page, Carlow's vision statement addresses four values that are integrated across the campus:

- **HOSPITALITY:** "In Hospitality we welcome the wholeness of each person, creating a space in our campus community for all individuals with their varied beliefs, cultures, orientations and abilities. Openness to the gifts and perspectives of all creates a community rich in diversity and committed to inclusion." (para. 4)
- **SERVICE:** "The value of Service calls us beyond ourselves to prioritize the needs of others over our own self-interest. Our efforts to identify and respond to the needs we see around us lead us to interact with persons and institutions in ways which are transformational. Our spirit of compassion leads us to practical action on behalf of those in need." (para. 5)
- **DISCOVERY:** "Through Discovery we open ourselves to the totality of our human experience, to the educational enterprise, to our relationship with the Divine, and to the wonders of the world in which we find ourselves. Discovery energizes our intellectual curiosity and desire for learning. It leads us ever deeper in the engagement with our chosen discipline and engenders a spirit of awe at the complexity and variety of creation." (para. 6)
- **SACREDNESS OF CREATION:** "This value leads us to a respect for each person and for all of creation. In gratitude for the beauty and variety of our world and its inhabitants, we commit to a culture of sustainability and to the preservation of a world where all are revered and all may thrive." (para. 7)

Furthermore, Carlow University, as one of the Mercy Institutes in the Conference of Mercy Higher Education (CMHE), also shares in the tradition of these four characteristics (CMHE, 2004):

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

INTRODUCTION

It is recognized that faith-based higher education institutions often have missions interconnected with service and community engagement. An institution's mission is potentially most significant in influencing public good, and it is suggested that faith-based colleges and universities are "distinctively positioned to address social issues, engage in service to the local and global community, and to involve students, faculty, and administrators in this shared purpose" (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Carlow University belongs to the Conference of Mercy Higher Education (CMHE), a conference which seeks to preserve and develop the core Catholic identity and mission of Mercy higher education in accord with the spirit, mission, and heritage of the Sisters of Mercy (CMHE,

2018). As noted on the CMHE home webpage, the heritage of the Sisters of Mercy “endeavor[s] to model mercy and justice and to promote systemic change.”

This white paper reports on the past two-years’ effort of the Carlow Closet, a student support service sited at Carlow University. The Closet was borne from the convergence of a pre-existing campus effort to upcycle used clothing, two service projects from a Social Work Service Learning undergraduate course, and the call to action in our local region in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Together, these efforts signified a call to social action and thus emerged as a change agent to alert the university community of collegiate basic needs. This paper seeks to document these efforts and to further encourage similar efforts across the CMHE in the hope that our campuses can mobilize and help our students in their basic needs and accommodations across their higher education journey.

THE CARLOW CLOSET: HOME BASE FOR CHANGE EFFORTS

The Carlow Closet is a campus-wide, mission-driven effort that, in that spirit of social justice and mercy, seeks to reduce food insecurity and bring awareness to collegiate basic needs. The Closet embraces the Carlow value of Hospitality, welcomes the wholeness of each student, and celebrates the diversity of our community’s life experiences. The Carlow Closet is an inclusive space to offer gently-used clothing and non-perishable food items for current students in need, and also participates in needs-based advocacy and awareness projects across campus.

Historically, the Closet has roots from a project of The BLUE (Benevolent Living Upon Earth) group—our campus environmental justice and green initiatives student club (Carlow University, 2019c). The Carlow Closet was originally conceived as a space where students, faculty, and staff could donate and recycle gently used clothing as well as being welcome to take items from the Closet. However, as expressed by some students participating in a convenience survey during the Fall 2017 semester of my Social Work Service-Learning course, it was determined that the honor-system clothing closet had not maximized its visibility or use; some students admitted to us that they were not aware of its existence. Additional efforts stemming from this course brought a team of nine undergraduate students to embark on a service project to learn from local community food pantries and to listen to our own students’ experiences with food insecurity.

As a result of efforts in this course, external funding was sought to expand the Closet’s on-campus space and to create a working Group on campus comprised of key stakeholders. This group consisted of voluntary members from throughout the University including Mercy Heritage, Campus Ministry, the College of Leadership and Social Change, Student Affairs, Marketing and Communications, Information Technology, and representation from the colleges and departments across the campus. The deliberate embeddedness of this group is rooted in its sustainability, likened to language of CMHE culture as it is also assumed that the Closet would have “a better chance of sustaining [its] Mercy legacy,” particularly if other like-minded CMHE institutions operated similar student supports (CMHE, 2004).

Presently, the Carlow Closet offers students gently used clothing and non-perishable food items through an honor-based system that is rooted in our Mercy value of Hospitality. This effort serves to bring attention to Hospitality while also increasing awareness of the relationships between student

success, basic needs, and the social responsibility of being a Mercy Institution. Through increased awareness and service across the campus, the Carlow Closet seeks to embed itself as a campus resource for our students.

OPPORTUNITY 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FREE FEMININE HYGIENE CARE PRODUCTS

The menstrual hygiene industry is a \$15 billion market, which for many women around the world presents an economic burden to cover the cost of menstrual hygiene care products (Zraick, 2018). In fact, in the United States, 40 states treat feminine hygiene care items, such as tampons, as “luxury items” instead of a medical necessity and subject these products to the “tampon tax” – a sales tax added to many feminine hygiene care products (Free the Tampons, 2016). This undue burden on women, and particularly for the context of the CMHE, is in opposition to our commitment to the promotion of and justice toward women. Furthermore, the lifelong purchase of feminine hygiene care products is disproportionately burdensome when one factors in socioeconomic disparities of our student population.

Carlow University educates a majority of women students. In fact, over 80% of their students identify as women (Carlow University, 2019b). *What is the socioeconomic burden placed on our female students who are pursuing their education and may be facing socioeconomic hardship? Moreover, where do students go to obtain feminine hygiene care products in our local communities where a number of nearby locales are documented food deserts?* (Dubowitz et al., 2015). Through my Fall 2017 Service Learning (SL) course (Social Work 226 SL), half of the class (comprising a team of nine undergraduates) engaged in a project that challenged us to assess how students access feminine hygiene care products on Carlow’s campus. Students reviewed the literature to establish the crucial relationship between menstruation and access to feminine hygiene care products to women’s educational attainment, and this course allowed students (both men and women) to engage in conversations with a medical product distributor in Pittsburgh to more deeply investigate what service and social justice action could be accomplished.

Through this effort, it was discovered that students on campus: lacked access to supplies on campus sometimes due to financial hardship, experienced a gap of knowledge regarding where women may acquire products in the instance of an unplanned menstrual day or emergency need, and reported that the lack of access to feminine hygiene products negatively affected the dignity of the women on campus who might resort to using toilet paper or rags when menstruating. These findings are important because women comprise 82% of students on Carlow’s campus, and overall, nearly half of our students receive Pell Grants. The student team and I firmly believed that our findings aligned with the Critical Concerns of Women and The Dignity of Persons. During the course of this term, we found that Carlow students seek help with accessing feminine hygiene products through Student Health Services, Residential Assistants, or Campus Ministry. It was also notable that students’ reluctance to ask for help was rooted in embarrassment due to the physicality of menstruation, but also the financial burden. Our class was shocked to find the concomitant loss of dignity experienced by the women on this campus due to a natural body occurrence, research tied to unsafe and unsanitary alternatives that may be practiced by women and girls, and evidence reporting that many women may also experience a negative impact on their educational outcomes due to missed classes.

As a result of these findings, a small group of students continued in their advocacy efforts by writing an article in the student newspaper and applying to an on-campus small grant opportunity in an effort to better inform students of existing resources on campus for emergency products, increase the communication of information to the student body of Health Services and Campus Ministries, and to distribute free feminine hygiene products.

RESULTS

After our team was awarded a \$500 grant, which went directly to the student support effort, we designed and produced 17 posters to hang around campus in main walkways and restroom areas; we filled and maintained seven baskets of free products located throughout the student lobby and commons areas, and purchased over 2,000 pads. Information labels were designed and affixed to the pads that informed students of locations on campus where they may acquire free pads moving forward. The advocacy effort of these pads were embraced across campus and distribution efforts included faculty from the Departments of Social Work, Psychology, Sociology, Criminology, Math, English/Creative Writing, and Nursing; and representation from Campus Ministry and Student Health. Social Work, Nursing, and English/Creative Writing students assisted in distribution.

A minimum of 300 individual students were engaged in face-to-face conversations about where he/she/they may be able to access emergency feminine hygiene care resources on campus. Students anonymously expressed interest in future efforts on campus.

OPPORTUNITY 2: EXPANDED ACCESS TO FREE NONPERISHABLE FOOD

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire such foods in a socially acceptable manner” (Anderson, 1990, as cited in U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019). Food insecurity has been tied to reports of poorer health, poorer academic performance, and mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety. In the 2018 research report issued by the team in the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, a preeminent resource on collegiate basic needs, it was reported that over one third of university students were food insecure in the last month, over one third of students experienced housing insecurity in the last year, and nearly 10% of university students report being homeless in the last year (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, Schneider, Hernandez, & Cady, 2018). In addition to these efforts, National Public Radio (Simmons-Duffin & Dalrymple, 2018) and the Washington Post (Dewey, 2018) have also assisted in bringing much needed attention to the experiences of college students who are faced with the challenges of meeting basic needs. In Cross’s 2018 needs assessment, student-reported hunger on campuses in Southwest Pennsylvania was pervasive. Twenty-nine percent of the 6,222 student respondents from 11 colleges or universities reported moderate or high levels of food insecurity. This finding is consistent with existing studies that report nearly one third of college students experience food insecurity. As reported by the Wisconsin HOPE lab, food insecurity has been reported upwards of 50% to 60% of the student population, and food insecurity is associated with low family income, high tuition, and cost of living (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016).

During the Fall 2017 service-learning course, the second half of the class (comprising the remaining students) engaged in a class project rooted in assessing food insecurity on our campus. Efforts through that semester-long project helped inform that indeed pockets of students at Carlow reported experiencing food insecurity. For example, it was reported back to the class that “students find themselves picking between utilities and groceries and between textbooks and meal plans,” and another noted “it would be hard to live without a meal plan since there is no grocery store in Oakland.” In addition, students also reported that faculty “host days where they provide food for their students, knowing that at least one or two students did not eat that morning and/or the evening before.” Additionally, students enrolled in my course both canvassed the campus with some key questions such as “*What do you think is the perception on campus about food insecurity?*”, “*Could you describe what you think a student would do if he/she couldn’t find adequate food?*”, and “*Where on campus do you think students seek help for hunger?*” and completed an annotated bibliography to review important studies in the research to establish what is currently known about this phenomenon. Some of the key findings included:

- Not many students were aware of the definition or impact of food insecurity. Those that were aware were unsure of who/where to go to on campus for help.
- Students perceived the existing clothing effort on campus to be an ill-equipped space in disuse.
- Effective interventions as reported in the literature do not require heavy funding expectations; there are pragmatic and affordable strategies.

As a result of this initial assessment, the project members proposed to enhance the existing Closet space on our campus to seek to reduce some of the food insecurities experienced by our student colleagues. The student group and I sought the assistance of a local mini-grant opportunity to spark this expansion of student support on campus. Through this effort, we were able to purchase tangible food products for our students and engage campus leadership stakeholders in a longer-term effort to integrate a basic needs dialogue across our campus. This project provided emergency food, initially tracked use over time, invited student patrons of the Closet to participate in an anonymous survey, and set the groundwork for a campus working group.

RESULTS

The Carlow Closet, is a mission-based program, borne from a commitment to hospitality and service. It is a volunteer-staffed effort that maintains a physical space on the Carlow University campus in Pittsburgh, PA to offer free clothing and non-perishable food items to students in the campus community. Current students are able to access the online ordering form through the LMS. Users are welcome to anonymously complete an ordering form which does not ask students to provide any identifiers such as their name, student ID, or email address. Instead, the online form automatically generates an order number which the student will be able to reference when picking up their packaged items at a convenient location on campus (of which we have two: the University Commons Help Desk and a tutoring center office in a different building).

Grant dollars allowed for the purchase of the initial nonperishable food supply. The Closet adhered to the United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service guidelines which was also shared with student volunteers, and we followed recommendations for non-perishable food labeling, storage, and disposal recommendations. During this initial period, all food was inventoried, and storage space was donated on campus in close proximity to the loading dock. All online food orders were and continue to be fulfilled with respect to the ordering student's selection of a pick-up day/time. Volunteers and I were "on-call" to receive order details for food to be packaged for pick up. Presently, the food is stored in the ground-level Commuter lounge in the University Commons – a more central and temperature-controlled space that is regularly frequented by students and staff.

The Closet in its present form has been in operation since March 2017. During the 2017-2018 academic year, 27 orders were received by 16 new users and 11 returning users. During the 2018-2019 academic year, 106 orders were received by 30 new users and 76 returning users. The average age of our users is around 24 years old. Through the initial efforts of the Closet, we also established a representative body of stakeholders on campus that presently serve as an advisory and dissemination body. Online food orders through the Carlow Closet continue today.

OPPORTUNITY 3: UNIVERSITY HOUR

The inaugural opening of the expanded Carlow Closet experienced a heightened student awareness on campus as evidenced by multiple interview requests by students who sought to learn more about basic needs. Since the Fall semester 2017, I have represented Carlow on visits to the Pitt Pantry (University of Pittsburgh), the Pioneer Pantry (Point Park University), and joined in collaborations with the Pennsylvania Commission on Higher Education (PCHE) representing Carlow. Soon thereafter, I received an invitation to provide a university-wide talk about "Hunger as a University Concern" during one of the University Hours in the Fall 2018 term. The University Hour welcomes students, staff, and faculty to come together and attend a presentation and engage in collaborative dialogue.

My talk afforded the opportunity to share information about collegiate food insecurity and also to build campus awareness about the Carlow Closet's services. The University Hour allowed me to contextualize collegiate basic needs to the Carlow campus and integrate Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, efforts within the Retention Committee, and the importance of engaging in the known knowledge base regarding food insecurity. Following my presentation, the shared time also permitted space for a robust collaborative discussion and knowledge- building of strategies to tackle food insecurity. During this collaborative discussion, I separated participants into four groups to engage in a Round-Robin style activity that encouraged brainstorming and active participation in tackling food insecurity on campus. Our University President, Dr. Mellon, was also in attendance and contributed to the group activity to identify strategies to help our students. Overall, it was a successful dialogue that resulted in heightened conversation about how to combat food insecurity on campus.

OPPORTUNITY 4: PILOT MEAL VOUCHERS FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL STUDENTS

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 51% of Carlow students are receiving Pell Grants, a U.S. subsidy program to provide a stable monetary source for low-income students to attend postsecondary schooling. Carlow also reports over 100 students are receiving work-study as part of their financial aid. Closet utilization data currently reveal that 86% of non-duplicated users are working students. In addition, among Carlow University's three colleges, known differences in financial status and parental contribution exist with distinct concentrations of \$0 parental financial contribution. These evidences of socioeconomic hardship support the need to elevate basic needs awareness on campus, and to better serve the working student population in their pursuit of higher education.

The call to action for piloting a meal voucher program stemmed from the finding that employed students were also utilizers of the nonperishable food of the Carlow Closet student support service. The questions arose, "*How can the Closet use its utilization data to better serve the community of Carlow students?*" and "*Knowing that some of the Closet users are working students, how can we better understand their circumstance?*" Thus, in the Spring 2019 semester, a grant was acquired to explore this need; through it, the Closet implemented a pilot of a free meal voucher program to provide free meals at the on-campus dining hall.

RESULTS

Our target audience for the meal vouchers are: existing Carlow Closet online users, self-identifying students who approach Campus Ministry for free vouchers, referrals from student health services for students who self-report being hungry, and referrals through the work-study office on our campus. This initiative welcomed a special population of students who self-reported being working students, who were commuters or off-campus students, and who also did not have a meal plan. This pilot sought to advocate for improved access for students facing financial challenges and those who may be employed and facing basic needs issues.

This project took place in the months of April and May 2019, and a total of 20 lunch tickets and 11 dinner tickets were used. Some of the comments received by these users regarding "*What would you usually do if you didn't have a meal ticket?*" resulted in the following comments:

- "Ask for a block from someone else."
- "Use a guest swipe."
- "Not eat until late at night."
- "Bring food from home."
- "Not eat."

This project is slated to continue in the Fall 2019 semester until grant funds are depleted. This project is rooted in the shared value of Hospitality and welcoming each student, and seeks to increase awareness of the Carlow Closet as a student support. It is anticipated that all the vouchers will be used.

OPPORTUNITY 5: CMHE HUNGER SURVEY COLLABORATION BETWEEN CARLOW UNIVERSITY, GWYNEDD MERCY UNIVERSITY, AND MERCYHURST UNIVERSITY

In Spring 2018, the help of Sister Sheila Carney, RSM, allowed for the inquiry into the type, manner, or level of effort used across the CMHE to confront food insecurity. We learned that pockets of effort were being conducted across our conference, and this realization, paired with the timeliness of Goldrick-Rab's research, instilled a deep curiosity and motivation to bring heightened awareness to the basic needs plight of our students. Student hunger, student safety, and student shelter are at the foundation of Maslow's hierarchy of need (McLeod, 2018). This opportunity also drew from the work of researchers at the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, University of Wisconsin (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018), the University of California's Office of the President Global Food Initiative (2016, 2017), and the University of Pittsburgh's Southwest Pennsylvania Needs Assessment (Cross, 2018). Studies have indicated that Institutions can provide monetary support in the form of Pell grants or on-campus resources. In fact, among Carlow students, over half are receiving Pell grants (51%), and at Gwynedd Mercy and Mercyhurst, 36% and 30%, respectively, are also receiving Pell grants (Carlow University, 2018b; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). However, while Pell Grants and on-campus pantry and closet supports are one way to assist hungry students, other efforts are encouraged to combat these basic needs challenges facing students.

Therefore, with these tools and knowledge, we remained curious about the current state of food insecurity among our students at Carlow but also the students in the CMHE, particularly those students who may not be living on campus, were non-traditional students, or were transfer students. Thus, I reached out to seek a collaboration among Carlow University, Mercyhurst University, and Gwynedd Mercy University to tackle these questions. In Fall 2019, these Universities will gather baseline data on students' food insecurities through the distribution of an online survey aimed at students aged 20 years or more. Funded by Carlow University's Social Justice Institutes (Carlow University, 2019d), this project seeks to better understand and to bring awareness to the issue of food insecurity in the CMHE conference.

The potential of any collaboration between Carlow, Mercyhurst, and Gwynedd Mercy is ideal as we are all in the nascent stages of on-campus efforts to recognize student hunger. Furthermore, as the CMHE represents similarly-situated institutions, this project seeks to promote those characteristics of need across institutions in order to work toward pragmatic mission-driven solutions. Findings from this study can help inform Carlow and other institutions within the CMHE of the experiences of students concerning food insecurity. Findings from this study can inform future endeavors that examine improvements in the reduction of food insecurity and to identify whether Mercy Institutions are unique in their approach compared to non-Mercy Institutions.

OPPORTUNITY 6: INCREASING AWARENESS ABOUT ELIGIBILITY FOR THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

This last opportunity describes an effort that is funded by the President's Excellence Fund at Carlow University. This project is designed to foster student collaboration, intellectual engagement, and hospitality as it strives to become more informed about the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) to identify a strategy to increase awareness of this federal entitlement program

among students. Efforts in this project seek to demystify and better facilitate screening for this entitlement program, particularly for those students who may be eligible for its support and are unaware of the program requirements.

For this SNAP project, the team consists of 2–3 undergraduate students who were recommended by faculty for their recognized leadership and service to the Carlow community. This team will use their perspectives as students to investigate the SNAP program and recommend a series of awareness-building strategies to help facilitate access to the SNAP public assistance program. This project began in the Summer 2019 and will conclude in the Fall 2019 term.

CONCLUSION

In addition to Hospitality, the Carlow University value of Service calls upon prioritizing the needs of others over self-interests. The Carlow Closet in its current form was born out of a service-learning course project, and its success is intimately tied to the ongoing engagement with our Carlow community but also the collaboration among the known people and resources in our region. For example, Carlow University was one of four sponsors of the Poverty Simulation and Hunger Banquet offered by the University of Pittsburgh. Through the value of Discovery, the Closet has sought to foster the desire for learning and energize intellectual curiosity. The Closet serves as a site for students to fulfill service hours, and the undergraduate Student Government Association and undergraduate Social Work Association have both approached the Closet for service opportunities for this year. On our campus, the Carlow Closet has prompted cross-campus discussions and new interdisciplinary relationships. These efforts are committed to educating and informing our students, faculty, and staff about the importance of meeting basic needs for students. It was in this spirit that an abstract to present at the Carlow Roundtable was submitted.

Through the efforts documented in this paper, I hope to have demonstrated the possibility to promote and continue to spread the spirit of Mercy across the CMHE. For these efforts, and the important stakeholders within, are evidence of the call to action which is embodied by the spirit of Mercy and the values of Carlow University. The future of the Carlow Closet remains bright as it continues to work to better integrate across the network of campus student groups who may be able to take more ownership and service time for the upkeep and protection of this space in the campus community. The Carlow Closet is a part of a longer-term effort to deliberately engage CMHE campuses and heighten awareness of the importance of meeting collegiate basic needs for student success. While the Closet is small-scale in its clothing and food distribution efforts, its presence is a vehicle for advocacy and system change on our campus and can enable the promotion of Mercy shared values. *What will your campus be doing to tackle the issue of collegiate basic needs?*

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Addressing the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy through International and Macro Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Mercy institutions have the opportunity to provide a unique perspective in social work education through the inclusion of the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) into the social work curriculum. This paper will explore the design of a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) curriculum that includes integrative learning and service immersion experiences that infuse the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, and the core competencies required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) into each student’s academic experience. Particular emphasis is placed on international and macro level social work, as these are two under-represented areas in the social work profession.

BACKGROUND

The BSW program at GMercyU initiated accreditation with CSWE in 2017, engaging in a three year formative process to design and assess curriculum. Our key priorities during this process were to ensure alignment with our mission and to address trends in social work education. It was easy to see the strong correlation between the principles of CST and the competencies required by CSWE (Table 1). In addition, we identified two trends related to macro and international social work. The CSWE graduate survey of 2017 indicated that only 10.7% of social work graduates reported having a practice focus in community organizing and a mere 0.3% reported having a focus on international social work practice. It was clearly within our mission as a Mercy institution to address these trends.

TABLE 1	
Principles of Catholic Social Teaching	Council on Social Work Education Competency
Sacredness and Dignity of the Human Person	Advance Human Rights
Rights and Responsibilities	Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Practice
Option for the Poor	Advance Economic Justice
Stewardship	Advance Environmental Justice
Common Good	Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, and Organizations

RATIONALE

It is the birthright of social work and the Sisters of Mercy to engage in community organizing and to share in concern for global issues of injustice. Macro social work can be defined as organizing a community to advocate for social justice and to address social problems at a systemic level. Global injustices include concern for the rights of women and children, immigration policies that support human dignity, and the prevention of poverty and racism. Jane Addams, the foundress of the social work profession, exhibited these concerns when she founded Hull House in Chicago. Similar to Catherine McAuley's establishment of the first house of Mercy on Baggot Street, Addams organized the residents of Chicago to care for women, children, and the poor with particular emphasis on immigrants. Both Addams and McAuley believed in vocational training and the development of the whole person, offering education and exposure to the arts in addition to a safe home, food, and clothing. McAuley considered the acts of Mercy to include visiting the sick, careful instruction of women, instruction of poor girls, protection of distressed women, and happiness of the poor (Sullivan, 2017).

Addams and McAuley did not work in isolation from the people they served. They lived with and worked amongst the poor, and they invited the community to aid in their cause. Addams describes "living in kindly neighborhood fashion" with those she served, and commented on the role of women who "from the beginning of tribal life... have been held responsible for the health of the community" (Addams, 1912). McAuley shared these same values of living among the poor and emphasis on the role of women in communities. Bethke-Elshstein could as easily be describing Catherine McAuley when she states that Jane Addams saw the needy as "citizens or citizens in the making, not clients or recipients of services" (2003).

Today, however, the social work profession has become encumbered by legislation, bureaucracy, and policy. Most macro social work practitioners spend their days at a computer, drafting legislation, re-writing policy, and analyzing data. Human service organizations are often distracted from mission by billable units, the bottom line, and one-shoe-fits-all policy and legislation. As the role of social workers has grown in behavioral health and medical settings, we have seen positive trends in the number of social work graduates who are seeking a career in healthcare, mental health, and addictions. However, fewer social work students are expressing a desire to pursue a career in macro or international social work at a time when it is most needed.

Macro social work practice seeks to prevent, rather than to eliminate, social problems by analyzing the systems that are contributing to the problem and addressing them at a systems level (Reisch, 2017). Reed-Bouley suggests that Mercy institutions can play a critical role in promoting "social analysis" in classroom reflections by suggesting a model whereby students "dissect" a social problem and the systems that impact it. The work of the Sisters of Mercy provides concrete examples of this type of social analysis, as seen through advocacy efforts such as "*Sisters of Mercy Grieve Violence and Loss of Life – When Will this Stop*" (February 15, 2018), "*Sisters of Mercy Condemn President Trump's Racist Remarks*" (January 12, 2018), or the Mercy Investment Services' goal "*Eradicating human trafficking is a top priority for the Sisters of Mercy in the 40+ countries where we live and serve.*" These are just a few examples of how the Sisters of Mercy show macro and international engagement surrounding today's social problems. Therefore, as a Mercy institution we possess a unique advantage in our

ability to instruct students in the critical thinking skills necessary to enter a career in macro or international social work.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

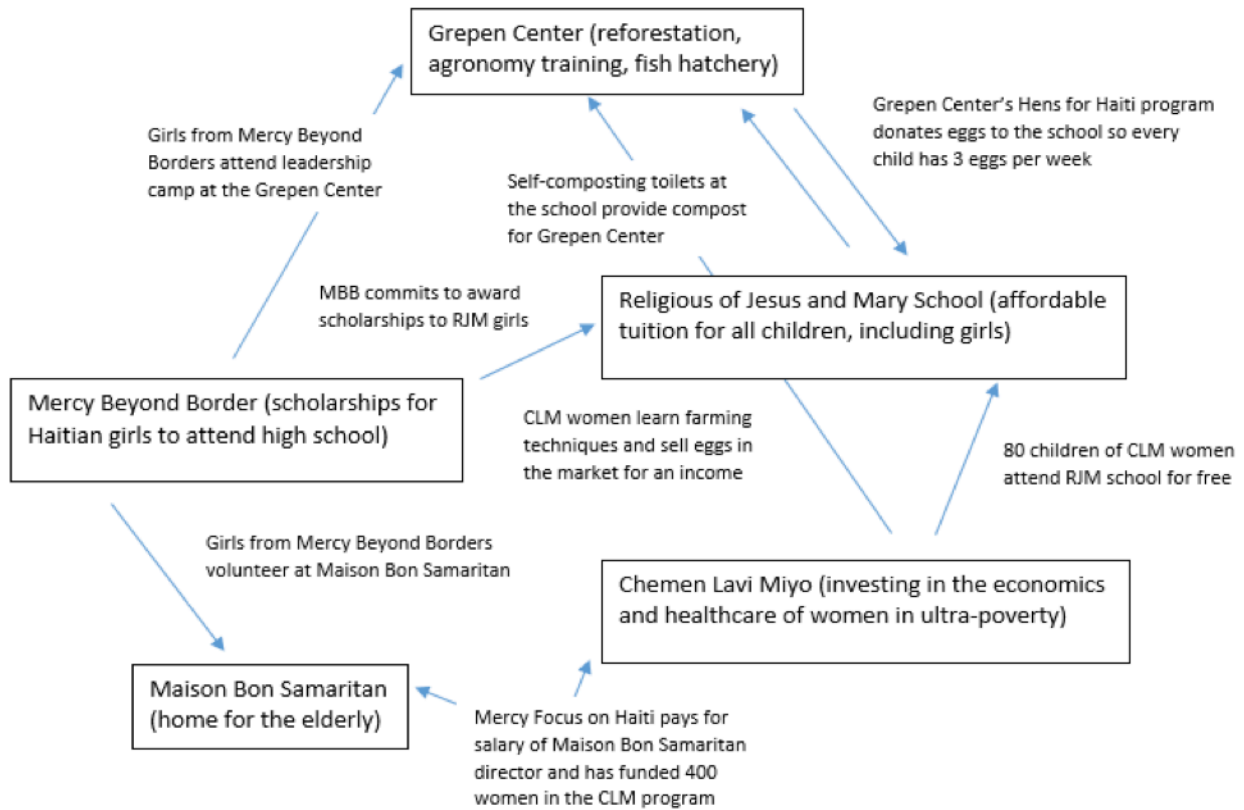
The BSW program at GMercyU has been designed to incorporate foundational learning about CST and social work theories related to macro and international practice early on during the student's sophomore year. This takes place in the form of course-embedded lectures and discussion. Videos are shown from Catholic Relief Services as examples of community organizing, and lectures regularly include updates about international Mercy programs such as Mercy Focus on Haiti and Mercy Beyond Borders. These examples parallel students' theoretical foundation in social work frameworks such as Critical Race Theory, Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Cultural Humility, and Bridges out of Poverty. Social work theory is further complemented by the writings of Sister Marilyn Lacey about refugee camps and the experience of immigration, and Steve Werlin's book about the ultra-poverty experienced by the women in the Chemen Lavi Miyo program in Gros Morne, Haiti.

The curriculum complements course-embedded lectures with experiential learning activities to promote macro social work such as voter registration, student participation in the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Legislative Advocacy and Education Day at the Pennsylvania State Capital building in Harrisburg, a poverty simulation, a food stamp challenge activity, a dignity of work and worker's rights activity, and a community needs assessment assignment.

In addition to course-embedded lecture and experiential learning, the role of service learning is particularly helpful in promoting awareness of issues of social justice and social change models. Essential components of service learning include a "deep interaction" with people with diverse backgrounds and intentional peer reflection (Bowman, et al. 2010). Service learning goes beyond immersion and promotes an introspective pedagogy. We must ask ourselves, "how do our intellectual activities make our students more merciful?" (Muldoon, 2018). To this end, students are required to provide 30 hours of service learning prior to entering the advanced level of the BSW program in their Junior year. Reflection is a critical component in this process; students are asked to reflect on their experiences in an essay and through classroom discussion.

International service immersion opportunities are available through Alternative Spring Break trips, such as travel to Gros Morne, Haiti. The Mercy Focus on Haiti project was selected because the community organizing that is taking place in Gros Morne aligns with the type of grassroots organizing implemented by Jane Addams, the pioneer of Social Work, and Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. An interactive graphic of the connectivity between community members in Gros Morne (Table 2) reflects a community that is engaged in addressing social issues at a systemic level, and provides a stark contrast to the silos in which we frequently provide services in the American human service system.

Table 2



All of these experiences culminate during the student's senior year when they participate in a Capstone project, develop an e-portfolio to reflect on their learning, and hone their professional skills during a 400-hour BSW internship.

A final, yet essential, aspect of curricular design is the assessment of learning outcomes. A proposed CST rubric (Reed-Bouley, et al., 2018) has been distributed to Mercy mission officers and provides a promising template for assessing student foundational learning (CST foundations, principles, and history); critical thinking (social analysis, lens for judgment); and application (response to injustice, vocational implications). A preliminary pilot, using the CST rubric, was conducted to survey ten sophomore BSW students regarding their understanding of the relevance of CST to their careers. The student's self-ratings on the rubric increased from an average of 1.4 to an average of 4.5 on a scale of 1-5 across all domains. It is our hope that this rubric can be further developed to assist our BSW program in conducting an initial assessment of awareness, growth throughout the curriculum, and may also serve to monitor student engagement in Mercy and the principles of CST beyond graduation as graduates enter into their careers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our distinct Mercy values set CSWE accredited social work programs at Mercy institutions apart from non-Mercy universities. In engaging in a Mercy collaboration, social work programs at Mercy institutions can move beyond the training of skilled clinicians and case workers for the high demand fields of behavioral health, substance abuse, and the medical professions. A Mercy social work collaboration can serve to reinforce the commitment to the roots set forth by Jane Addams and Catherine McAuley by promoting student interest in community organizing and global justice. Our unique Mercy graduates will not only possess the skills needed to address a need, but will be trained to see the need, inspire others to see the need, and organize communities at a systemic level to empower the disempowered.

Several potential options exist for a Conference on Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) collaboration that can serve to promote the under-represented areas of macro and international social work. One identified barrier to international service learning programs is the difficulty of a small private university to sustain an international service learning program. To that end, GMercyU and several other Mercy universities have collaborated to sponsor Alternative Spring Break service immersion experiences. A recent trip to Gros Morne, Haiti had to be canceled due to a travel advisory, however this collaboration shows promise and mutual interest in the exploration of how our college campuses can support the efforts of an international Mercy program such as Mercy Focus on Haiti while educating our students in the Mercy values. Another potential collaboration exists in an online course that is being piloted by GMercyU about the economics of women in developing nations, with an emphasis on Haiti. This course could potentially be made available to other Mercy universities. These preliminary curricular and co-curricular initiatives provide several promising options for ongoing Mercy collaborations amongst BSW and MSW programs at Mercy institutions to promote macro and international social work through CST and the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy.

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Supporting Mercy Values by Teaching Civil Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Productive civil discourse has become rare in the current social climate. Expressions of disagreement are interpreted as personal attacks, and the typical reply, if there is a reply at all, is to attack back. People who choose to eschew name-calling escape the discomfort of disagreement by “agreeing to disagree.” Once this suggestion is made, further attempts at discussion are seen as pushy and rude, thus cutting off any chance of civil discourse before it even begins. A well-functioning and compassionate society, however, demands debate and dissent, which can be encouraged through civil discourse. Effective civil discourse leads to a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, which enhances compassion and strengthens communities. Effective civil discourse also leads to stronger, more informed, and more convincing voices to advocate for social justice. So, to be true to Mercy heritage, it is imperative that we teach our students how to engage in civil discourse. In this paper I will discuss the philosophical background and practical strategies for teaching civil discourse in class.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS

The philosophical method is based on the idea of civil discourse. The primary tool of philosophers is reasoning, and reasoning requires an understanding of the justifications for competing viewpoints. The best way to learn those justifications is by engaging in discourse with, or reading the arguments of, those who hold the views. Enlightenment comes from the careful consideration of the reasons for one’s own views and an understanding of why those reasons are better than the reasons for alternative positions. As Mill argues in *On Liberty* (1979), “However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that, however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as dead dogma, not a living truth” (p. 34). Furthermore, he says, “If the cultivation of the understanding consists in one thing more than another, it is surely in learning the grounds of one’s own opinions” (p. 34). And finally, “He who knows only his side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion” (p. 35).

The discipline of philosophy lends itself to civil discourse because the subject matter of philosophy consists in questions for which there are no established answers. When a student knows from the start that the facts are in dispute, she is more open to exploring alternative positions and arguments. As Russell pointed out in his essay “The Value of Philosophy” (1990), “Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be....” The process of philosophical discourse opens the mind to new ideas and a

deeper understanding of the world. However, the methods of discourse practiced in philosophy can be just as valuable in other settings. Even when the questions being considered seem to have clear-cut answers, the process of understanding the evidence in support of those answers and understanding why that evidence is better than the evidence in support of competing positions is crucial to learning.

BACKGROUND AT CSM

The Sisters of Mercy were founded on the idea that the education of women can be a positive force for change in society. At CSM we have embraced this philosophy, and it guides our principles and practice. One area of emphasis is the encouragement of the free and open exchange of ideas. To this end, the University adopted the Declaration of Open Discourse in 2004. The development of the Declaration began when feedback from students indicated that some were not comfortable expressing their views in class, especially if their views were contrary to the Catholic position. These students did not yet appreciate the importance of exploring and understanding diverse perspectives, nor did they realize that far from being contrary to it, the full exploration of ideas is a fundamental part of Catholic higher education. Additionally, while faculty were more likely to understand the value of allowing dissenting opinions to be discussed, some needed an occasional reminder. There was a clear need for articulated guidelines for discourse. A task force was convened, the guidelines were developed, and the Declaration of Open Discourse was born. The Declaration is a reminder that respectful discussion and the exposure to diverse perspectives is essential to intellectual inquiry. Furthermore, by fostering a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others, civil discourse encourages compassion. At CSM, the Declaration is included in course syllabi, posted in classrooms, and the language of the Declaration has become woven into the fabric of the institution. The CSM Declaration of Open Discourse reads as follows:

In the spirit of intellectual inquiry, College of Saint Mary is committed to the exchange of diverse ideas and viewpoints. In this environment, honest discourse is valued; demeaning remarks are not tolerated. Each member of the campus community is encouraged to:

- Recognize the basis of her or his own assumptions and perspectives,
- Acknowledge the assumptions and perspectives of others,
- Promote understanding and respectful dissent. (2018–2019 Academic Catalog, 17)

PRACTICAL GUIDE

The Declaration helps set the stage, but there is more work to be done. To prepare students to be active and compassionate members of society, we have to not only show them the importance of civil discourse, but also help them develop the skills and confidence to participate beyond the university setting. Philosophy courses provide a perfect setting to teach and practice essential skills for civil discourse, but these skills can be practiced in other disciplines as well. The more students practice civil discourse, the more comfortable they will become in applying those skills outside of class, which will then allow them to participate in advocacy and bring about positive social change.

It is difficult, however, to get students to engage in productive discussions. Whether it's discomfort

with uncertainty, an aversion to disagreement, or lack of skill in clearly articulating an idea, instructors are faced with many roadblocks to good discussions. These roadblocks, however, can be overcome. For example, when a student raises a point that makes others uncomfortable or even angry, the instructor's first impulse may be to diffuse the situation by quickly changing the subject. Circumstances like this, however, actually provide the perfect opportunity to model civil discourse. Instead of running away from the discomfort, the instructor can face it head on, by first acknowledging the discomfort, and then guiding a discussion regarding the issue that led to it. By facing the discomfort and guiding students through an exploration of the perspective represented by the offending claim and the considerations that can be raised in response, the instructor is teaching students to engage in difficult discussions, which is an essential skill for productive civil discourse.

Because most students are not comfortable expressing or even hearing dissenting opinions, work must be done early in the semester to set the stage and break the ice. Setting the stage requires that the expectations and ground rules for discussion be clearly expressed and explained. At CSM, this starts with a discussion of the Declaration of Open Discourse, but setting the stage should also include discussion of any other course-specific expectations. Couching these expectations in ethical terms further helps to enhance the importance of the expectations. For example, in an online course in which students participate in discussion boards on a variety of contentious ethical issues, I post the following reminder:

A note on open discourse and privacy in an online environment:

The focus of this class is ethical dilemmas in educational settings. Dilemmas are identified as such because there are competing ethical justifications for opposing positions. (If one position or action was clearly right, there would be no dilemma.) Our goal is to learn to identify the competing ethical considerations and analyze these dilemmas to determine which is the best (i.e., right) course of action. It is expected that there will be disagreement.

The best way to learn about an opposing viewpoint is to hear it from someone who believes it. The respectful expression of dissenting opinions (and the reasons for them) is critical for understanding the nature of the dilemma and working towards the best solution. This requires an openness to disagreement, and a willingness to state and defend opposing or even unpopular views. The more strongly held a belief is, the harder this is to do, but also the more important.

While open and respectful discourse is an essential part of the philosophical process, it requires both courage and restraint. Actions or beliefs, some of which are deeply held, will be questioned, and sometimes details from personal or professional experiences will be shared. These details can add significant depth to the discussion. Courage, therefore, is needed to openly express views and welcome dissenting opinions; and restraint is needed to respect the privacy of those who have contributed to the discussion by keeping these details within the scope of this course.

Even when emphasis is placed on the importance of open discourse and the expectations are clearly spelled out, students will often need encouragement to express their views, especially when

they seem to disagree with the majority in the class. Starting with easy discussions about non-controversial issues can help break the ice. Once students start talking, even about silly or trivial things, they will be more likely to speak up later when the content gets more serious. On the other hand, if students are told of the importance of discourse, but then not encouraged to use their voices early in the semester, when students are asked to participate, many will be hesitant to speak up. Ice breaker discussions can easily be incorporated into the introductory material in the first week of class. For example, instead of just telling the students to stay off their phones in class, have the students brainstorm ways using their phones helps or hinders the learning environment; or stave off that most annoying of questions “did I miss anything important” by having them review the syllabus and asking them what they expect to gain from class attendance; or help them make connections between your subject and the “real world” by asking them how they hope the class will enhance their lives or careers. The important thing is to engage them and get them talking early in the semester, so they will be ready to speak up when the discussions get more serious.

Once the stage is set, the focus shifts to the five “Rs” for teaching civil discourse – Reasons, Repeat, Review, Respond, and Reflect.

R number 1: Reasons – Once the discussion has begun, students will need to be encouraged to focus on stating the reasons for their beliefs. It is easy for a student to say, “I just think it’s wrong,” but far more productive to be able to say why she or he believes it is wrong. When reasons are not given, try to draw them out and ask others to help. You can say, “Okay, your position is clear, what are your reasons for it?” or “How would you support that if you were trying to convince a friend?” Focus first on drawing out reasons and only later on weighing the evidence to determine which reasons are strongest.

R number 2: Repeat – The process of teaching civil discourse is difficult because students often have deeply ingrained habits that need to be overcome. One of these is the defensive and often negative response to dissent fostered by lack of experience in discourse and really bad examples modeled online. Closely related, on the flip-side, is the desire to suppress dissenting views to avoid offense or retaliatory “attacks.” Habits don’t change after one reminder; they change gradually over time, so the value of understanding dissenting opinions and being able to express them needs to be reiterated throughout the semester. This can be done with reminders of the philosophical basis, i.e., why they are important for fostering understanding, but also through specific guidance. If students are reluctant to express dissenting views, let them off the hook by encouraging them to “play devil’s advocate” – try to imagine what someone who disagrees might say – or require them to develop reasons supporting the opposing position. (This can be done in small groups to avoid putting individual students on the spot.)

R number 3: Review – Don’t assume that because it is on the syllabus and you talked about it the first week, that the students will remember the expectations and ground rules. Review them often so students will know they really matter. If you are about to tackle a contentious topic, review the ground rules before the discussion starts. If the discussion starts to spiral off topic, take a break and remind the students of the point of discourse and the expectations for civility.

R number 4: Respond – When the discussion gets tense, which will happen when students with diverse perspectives are engaging in discourse, DO NOT shut it down. This is one of the most important lessons to be taught about civil discourse. Often the most productive discussions occur when the participants are made uncomfortable by what has been said. Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized the value of bringing the underlying causes of tension to light in his defense of nonviolent direct action in “Letter From Birmingham Jail” (1963). He pointed out, “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue” (para. 10). Furthermore, he says, “I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth” (para. 10). Similarly, the tensions that arise from the views expressed in discussions can be constructive and necessary for growth. By responding to the cause of the tension, but not abruptly ending the discussion, instructors help students learn the value of discourse in fostering compassion and understanding.

R number 5: Reflect – Make sure students have time to reflect on the points raised during the discussion. Conscientious reflection leads to deeper understanding, compassion, and the ability to be like Socrates and lead a fully examined life. This can be done in a variety of ways. Students can continue discussions on online. They can be asked to write reflective essays explaining the process of discourse or the source of a disagreement that came up during a discussion. Students can be asked to look for real world examples of the perspectives or issues raised in class; or they can be encouraged to seek out alternative perspectives to those raised in class. Encouraging reflection on both the process and the content of the discussion can help cement the value of discourse, further disrupting discourse-avoiding habits.

Steps for teaching civil discourse (review)

1. Establish ground rules;
2. Create the environment – start safe;
3. Continuously re-focus on REASONS;
4. Repeat the need for and importance of dissent;
5. Review the ground rules and expectations throughout the semester;
6. Respond to tensions when they occur, but don’t stop the discussion;
7. Build in reflection and application.

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