Difficult Dialogues

Recently there has been a heightened debate around the country as to the importance of a liberal arts education. Our goal at Manchester is to offer students an education that is broad and exposes them to different ways of thinking and diverse tools for discovering knowledge. For some, that is fine in theory but not practical enough for the "real world". Shouldn't we after all be preparing students for a career by equipping them with specific skills? I believe Manchester is one of the few schools that take both job preparation and a liberal arts education seriously. Now, more than ever, students are benefiting from a diversified education because the future is uncertain. The same jobs and technologies that were "hot" a decade ago have been replaced by new areas with the latest know-how. For students, focusing on long-term professional goals rather than just a starting salary is essential to their continuing success. It is far more important that students learn transferable skills than to select something that seems popular now. Today's students are likely to change jobs several times in the course of their professional lives. What is most important to employers and to our students is that they have the capacity to learn.

Too often students think of classes as once and done. That is, they do the requisite assignments, write the papers, perform the labs and go forth believing that mastering the content is the only goal in the course. Understanding and displaying competency of a subject is certainly crucial, but maybe even more fundamental, is the idea that problems that look simple are really complex, that issues where students have previously only considered one alternative may have many, and that how and where one finds information is crucial. Students have been drilled that achieving certain scores on standardized tests is tantamount to success, but very few jobs and very little happiness can be tied to answering "A" or "B".

Let me provide one example of how we have tried to address this during this semester. We had a series of three convocations this fall on the issue of prescription drugs. Our first year students read a series of articles that all discussed why pharmaceuticals cost so much, why not everyone has equal access, and why there is so much uncertainty about who is to blame. They also heard three speakers at Monday convocation on this subject: a Manchester economist broached the topic of pricing, a Lilly chemist discussed how difficult it is to produce quality drugs, and Ralph Nader argued that consumers are being gouged by drug companies. After the Nader convocation, I asked one student what she thought about prescription drugs. She responded that before they began the unit, she thought she understood why prices were so steep, but after being exposed to a variety of opinions and information, it was too confusing to decide who was good and who was bad, who was right and who was wrong, and who, if anyone, should fix the problem? I thought to myself that here is a student who has just had a terrific introduction to critical thinking.
I know most Manchester students will not be working in the pharmaceutical industry, though I am sure almost everyone will use its products, but the idea of learning where to find information, assessing the value of the content, and then articulating it orally and in writing are skills that any profession demands. Our first year students are now engrossed in the balance between civil rights and security—now there is one with an easy answer!

Glenn Sharfman
Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs

VIA Programming and Convocation

What do Ralph Nader (consumer advocate and former presidential candidate), Jim Gilmore (former republican governor of Virginia), Jeff Kueter (president of the Marshall Institute) and Nadine Strossen (president of the ACLU) have in common? All four have spoken at Manchester College during Monday morning convocations. After speaking to the student body, they met with first-year students for a question and answer session. If you're asking yourself, "Why?" allow us to explain ...

Values, Ideas and the Arts (VIA) programming is designed to broaden and enhance the education of students at Manchester College. VIA includes weekly convocations, cinema events and other programming, such as lectures and theatre and music productions. Through VIA, all students—regardless of major—can view classic and significant films, theatre and dance; hear professional musicians; and be challenged by lectures on business, science, education and social issues.

VIA attendance credits are required for graduation. The VIA requirement is met by attending an average of 10 programs each semester. The primary way that students fulfill this requirement is by attending Monday morning convocations. This year, the convocation topics and speakers have been chosen to directly connect with the topics of the First Year Colloquium (FYC) classes.

The goals of this year’s FYC classes are to get students to discuss controversial issues with one another, base conclusions on evidence, be respectful of others' views, and develop critical thinking skills. All FYC classes are studying the same four topics: prescription drugs, national security and civil liberties, global warming, and hate speech. Through the exploration of these four topics, students are encouraged to examine evidence and talk with fellow students and faculty about the topic. All students benefit from hearing about these topics through convocation. More information about VIA programming and convocation can be found here.

Brad Pyrah
Associate Professor, Accounting and Business
VIA Committee Chairperson

College Union Construction Update

On Oct. 18, the last piece of steel was lifted to the top of the new construction at the
College Union, representing a milestone in the construction progress. New roofs are being installed, exterior walls are being bricked, and preparations are being made for the expansive windows that will be installed in November. Interior work is also progressing rapidly with walls being erected to create the new Oaks Snack Bar, Campus Store, post office, and kitchen area, as well as the new conference room on the second floor.

The schedule dictates that the interior finishes will be complete in the new kitchen and serving area on the first floor by the end of December, so that on Jan. 2, the new kitchen equipment can arrive, and installation can begin. The kitchen, serving area and dining room will be complete by the end of February, so that training for the kitchen staff can take place before the students return from spring break on March 26 and begin to use it for dining. At the same time, the Campus Store will be in service, as well as the post office and the new Oaks.

When the students make the switch from upstairs dining to the new facilities on the first floor, the contractors will begin remodeling the old dining room and kitchen area into Career Services, Student Activities, the Art Gallery and Conference Services. This work will be completed by mid summer and ready for students when they return for the 2007 fall semester.

Chris Garber
Associate Vice President of Finance
and Director of Operations

Staff Spotlight: Shelly Leifer

Shelly Leifer has worked as an accounts receivable specialist in the Manchester College Business Office for four years. She earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland, and has lived in five different states and in England over the course of 12 years as an Air Force wife. “I learned so much about tolerance, understanding and diversity from that experience. These skills have helped me in my work here that Manchester College,” Shelly wrote.

Shelly’s family includes husband David, daughter Chloe and son Kyler. She enjoys gardening, cooking and traveling. Shelly is active in the community as a girls’ softball and basketball coach, and in her church as a teacher for the congregation’s Wednesday evening program and treasurer for the women’s group. Shelly shared, “I am so lucky to be able to live in such a small town and still meet so many new people all the time!”

Much of Shelly’s time is spent working with students and families. When asked what she most enjoys about her work, Shelly replied, “the people that I work with and for. My co-workers keep me smiling and the students keep me laughing!”

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