STAR: Social Transformation through Awareness and Resolve

by Maureen Vissat

Delivered February 28, 2015
at the Fourteenth Annual Conversation on the Liberal Arts
Westmont College, Santa Barbara, CA
I Introduction

Increasingly, questions and criticisms of higher education in popular culture are begging close exploration of how we have delivered content and liberal arts learning in the past. Perhaps one of the things that have most impacted this delivery has been the changes and the wide availability of technology in the world, and specifically, on college campuses. The introduction of smart podiums, Internet access, the increased use of laptops, smart phones, and tablets by both students and faculty have changed the landscape of education. An important challenge for educators is how to thoughtfully blend content and technology without losing important human connections and community. One idea for connecting content and community is the grounded curriculum.

According to Professor James Lang, the grounded curriculum is, “a radical reimagining of the campus and the town as a laboratory for more and more experiments in teaching and learning” (Lang, 2012). At Seton Hill University (SHU) our commitment to the liberal arts, women, mobile technologies, and pedagogical approaches that obliterate the traditional classroom are delivering quality 21st century undergraduate education. The Social Transformation Through Awareness and Resolve, (STAR) initiatives and activities along with student products such as visual art, video, and dance, will be highlighted.

Using the idea of grounded curriculum this presentation will describe and explore a current curricular model for collaboration between Seton Hill University and the Blackburn Center Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. The STAR program immerses students in analysis, discovery, problem solving, communication, and community building. Included in the initiatives and activities are student projects that include taking photos and sharing stories, plus an annual “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes” event, which galvanizes the entire community for a popular town and gown event.
The Blackburn Center and Seton Hill University

The Blackburn’s original mission, over thirty years ago, was to address the embedded causes of gender violence to educate and change the cultural constructs of the causes. However, the immediate need to provide service for women who were victims of domestic and sexual violence superseded the initial mission. Seton Hill University and the Blackburn Center enjoy a close collaboration, but in the last decade it has become more purposeful and direct as the center decided to revisit its original mission and partner with Seton Hill University.

The Blackburn Center’s project with Seton Hill University is to develop and evaluate primary prevention strategies related to domestic and sexual violence, in a broader context of understanding the impact of gender norms on violence against women. The project is designed to engage students in the Blackburn Center’s social transformation goals and to test the effectiveness of messaging with young adults. SHU has made an institution-wide commitment to undertake activities and projects to support the Blackburn Center’s mission. This is a long-term commitment: the two organizations developed strategies that will change attitudes and beliefs about domestic and sexual violence and gender norms. These attitudes will be tested for at least a decade. Both organizations articulated their goals to end violence against women by focusing attention on theory and practice across disciplines.

Goals of the Project for Blackburn Center:
- Develop and evaluate primary prevention strategies
- Engage students in Blackburn Center’s social transformation goals
- Test effectiveness of Blackburn’s messaging with young adults
- Long-term commitment (a span of at least ten years)

Goals of the Project for Seton Hill University:
- Students will learn how a human service organization operates and is organized
- Students will have an opportunity to apply their skills through service learning activities with Blackburn Center
- Students will give of their time and talents to help transform the world (especially around issues of domestic and sexual violence and gender)
- Students will take new sensitivity to gender violence and gender norms with them into the workplace and world at large

SHU is committed to providing to every student a liberal arts education that, in the words of our patroness Elizabeth Ann Seton, will “prepare them for the world in which they live”; the University’s intention is that graduates will be equipped with the potential to impact the climate, processes, and policies related to gender violence in our culture.
III STAR Campus Initiatives

Initially, Seton Hill created a faculty project team, and then developed an assessment team. During the academic year 2009/10 a survey instrument was developed to test the effectiveness of strategies intended to change attitudes and beliefs about gender violence. A long-term goal of this project is to enhance students’ understanding of the root causes of domestic and sexual violence, and what role they may contribute in ending this violence. This goal is being accomplished through a range of activities across campus. For example, the campus launched the Red Flag Campaign, a public awareness campaign designed to address dating violence and promote the prevention of dating violence on college campuses. (Sellars and Bombay 1996)

The survey that measures the impact of these activities is given to incoming freshmen, and then again at the end of their four years at SHU, for further accuracy and to gain a fresh perspective after lifestyle changes. The survey is then sent again five years or more after graduation to measure attitudes after more maturity. The purpose of the survey is to determine where the students are in their understanding of sexual and domestic violence issues, what they see as root causes, what their beliefs are about the broader social context of gender norms, what their resistance is to recognizing or acknowledging root causes, what their attitudes and beliefs are about these issues, what their commitment is to being part of the solution, and what their likelihood is to blame the victim. By looking at pre/post data, we are able to determine the success of the messaging and campus activities.

This survey was administered to the incoming freshmen class in September 2010 (300 students completed the survey). Based on the analysis of the data in this first year, the survey team updated the content of the survey before it was administered to the freshman class in Fall 2011 (with 158 students completing). The survey was again administered to the freshman class in Fall 2012 (with 295 students completing). The assessment team continues to manage the freshmen/senior/graduate survey that has been designed to evaluate changes. The driving question for the team is “Are we able to measure change overall?” In addition, the assessment team has conducted focus groups with students to gather more detailed data about the students’ perceptions of the survey items. We are indeed seeing changes as a result of the collaboration and are encouraged by the educational initiatives taking place. Students are indicating both awareness and understanding of violence against women. The campus culture, coupled with the common major in the liberal arts, fosters a context to place sanctioned violence towards women within a larger context of the western cultural tradition where rape is a recurring theme in the arts.
IV Visual and Performing Arts Student Products

Seton Hill University’s commitment to the arts, women, and to collaboration with the Blackburn Center has led to several successful student projects. The role of the visual and performing arts extends beyond the consumption of things, the arts instruct, uplift, and define us as a culture. Art has the ability to transform, to educate, and to inspire entire communities to action. Each of the student initiatives that are detailed resulted in a heightened sense of individual awareness by the public along with a call to social responsibility. These community arts projects enable students to apply the skills and ideas discussed in class to real-world challenges. Our students are indeed educated for the world in which they are destined to live and will be agents of positive change.

In an art therapy class titled, Arts For Community Change, students explore using the arts and art-making experiences in community-based settings, with a focus on exploring how the arts engage people in meaningful experiences that link personal change and self-expression with the advancement of community and social change. Community arts emphasize the potential participation of all citizens in art making experiences to promote the arts as integral to everyday life, to build a sense of the unique character of an area or group of people and to promote valued ideas and social change. There is often a strong commitment to neglected and underrepresented groups in the community as well as to issues impacting the physical and mental health and welfare of community members.

The course objectives include:

• Identify the history and theory of community arts experiences
• Describe and understand the relationship of the citizen artist and art to personal, community and social change
• Describe how creative processes can be used as a tool in service to the community
• Execute a collaborative arts experience that engages interaction with the Seton Hill community or Greensburg community
• Conceptualize service project development within the ability for civic learning, communications, managing diversity, critical analysis, team collaboration and project management.
• Articulate engagement with course themes through written self-reflection and creation of responsive art (Elmendorf 2014)

An extraordinary class project utilizes an approach to participatory action, known as Photovoice, for an exhibit to be displayed at the annual Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event to benefit the Blackburn Center. Through the theory and research methods of Photovoice, students learn how to work with community groups to carry out Photovoice projects in practice. (Palibroda, Kreig, Murdock, Havelock 2009) Students have learned that, through Photovoice, marginalized
community members are empowered to share their words and photographs as a way to reach decision-makers and implement positive change in their home communities. Our larger community has learned that marginalized individuals, community workers and advocates, community groups and researchers alike are interested and eager to learn more about Photovoice as a creative tool for health promotion and social change.

(Art Therapy Photo Journals images appear in Appendix)

Another creative example, in which faculty provide the context for students to use their talents to create a work of art, is done in the Introduction to Dance class. Faculty created an assignment that is akin to real life tasks for a final project that could be presented live or via video. The performance assignment follows:

You are a member of an up and coming marketing firm who has been approached by a potential client wanting to incorporate dance/movement into their next great ad campaign. Larger firms have rejected the idea, but the clients present a portfolio of materials that they feel supports this decision. The clients want a full-length video, beyond a: 30 second spot, that will run about 2:30-3:00 minute. As the only member of the team with any dance experience, the Introduction to Dance class taken at Seton Hill University, you have been chosen to head the campaign.

You revisit videos from the class as they feature different styles of dance (ballet, jazz/hip-hop, tap and modern) to build a movement phrase to center the campaign around. Unfortunately the movement phrases in the videos range: 30 -: 45 seconds, so you will have to be creative and build some movement phrases of your own to fill out the 2:30-3:00 minutes demanded by the clients. It might be wise to consider enlisting the help of your fellow marketing firm members to dance with you. (Zubal 2012)

Students are given freedom to identify a topic to promote and advertise. Here is one that was created on behalf of the Blackburn Center for Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Dance Video http://youtu.be/D_mKpc7VfEk

Social media is a vibrant part of campus culture and was harnessed by students to provide a venue to provide for another creative response to domestic and sexual violence. Our community of learners hosts a Facebook page for the SHU Feminist Collective as a forum for exchange of ideas and articles. A faculty member posted the link to One Billion Rising.org and simply asked “Does Anyone Care to Dance?” www.onebillionrising.org On this site students learned about worldwide events being planned for February 14th:
“We are inviting ONE BILLION women and those who love them to WALK OUT, DANCE, RISE UP, and DEMAND an end to this violence. ONE BILLION RISING will move the earth, activating women and men across every country. The world will see our collective strength, our numbers, our solidarity across the borders.”

Seton Hill student response was immediate. They asked if they might stage the University’s first Flash Mob on Valentine’s Day. The bureaucratic hoops were jumped through and this was the result:

Flash Mob http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Krs9sMRJhgs

At the conclusion of the flash mob individuals stood holding signage with statistics and facts about sexual and domestic violence. These signs remained in the main dining hall for weeks to continue the conversations.

The larger community discussions initiated by these events paved the way for men on campus to don red high heels and Walk a Mile in Her Shoes. Frank Baird created Walk a Mile in Her Shoes in 2001 with a small group of men teetering on high heels walking around a park. It is currently a worldwide movement that brings together tens of thousands of individuals to raise consciousness and monies for local women’s shelters. According to their website, these walks are political and performance art with a public message to raise awareness about the serious causes, effects and remediation’s to men’s sexualized violence towards women. (http://www.walkamileinhershoes.org/)

To use the vernacular, “first you walk the walk, then you talk the talk” and we do just that at Seton Hill. Walk a Mile in Her Shoes provides a wonderful town and gown event to open the dialogue about sexualized violence. The Walk sends two clear messages: most men do not condone violence, and sexual and domestic violence are not just “women’s issues” but rather impact everyone. Participants in the Walk have grown significantly. The first year, 2011 we had 150 participants, the next year we doubled that number. In 2013 we had over 500 in number and last April close to 1000 walkers paraded through the town the participants included sports teams, the university marching band, government leaders, and community groups. Seton Hill’s STAR program, evidences faculty commitment to integrating student learning with real life applications while adapting to trends in educational delivery.

Inspired by the Walk a Mile in Her Shoes turnout, the “Standing in Stilettos” calendar was created by art faculty and art students to serve as a platform for the STAR committee to encourage the men of Seton Hill University to pledge their support in eliminating violence against women. Monthly photos include images of student athletes as well as faculty and administrators wearing red high heels. The themed, humorous photos provide opportunity for discussion about domestic and sexual violence. Those who purchased the calendars are asked to sign a pledge card to take a stand against violence. All proceeds from the calendar sale
go to the Blackburn Center. In 2012 we raised $400.00 and in 2013 $1100.00. To create the calendar, students donate their time and talents to a real life situation in addition to getting some very nice portfolio pieces. One of the student photographers has transferred her talents and experience into creating a photography business, “Brittany Lee Photography”.  (http://www.brittany-lee.com)

(Images of student product calendar appear in Appendix)

V Future Programs of real life applications

In liberal art courses, students consider Immanuel Kant’s statement; “The motto of the Enlightenment is *Dare to Know*…have the courage to use your own intelligence”. They are asked to explain this statement then provide and discuss examples of individuals who courageously used their intelligence. Lastly, and more significantly, they are to respond personally to how they “dare to know” in their liberal arts studies at Seton Hill University. Students are able to articulate where and how they have been challenged intellectually, took creative risks, advanced their critical thinking skills, and participated in academic discourse. Understanding the liberal arts informs excellent teaching; if we are to know ourselves, we must know our own. The study of the ideas of great thinkers, writers, and artists of the past makes students see how the past has shaped our politics, literature, and visual art and informs our culture today. A liberal education is the essence of not only knowing ourselves by knowing our past, but also knowing how to formulate new questions and knowing how to transfer ‘academic’ skills to an ever-changing world.

Liberal education extends well beyond the study of history, in fact, the Latin meaning for *historia* is knowledge obtained through inquiry, a written account of one’s inquiry. This definition embodies the skills often applied in liberal arts courses with the goal of producing what the Greek word *histor* means, a learned human. Liberal education provides individuals with an opportunity to become proficient in higher order thinking and communication skills, problem solving, reasoning, and information fluency. These skill sets are precisely the tools necessary to succeed in a quickly evolving world. The STAR program at Seton Hill is successfully grounding curricular as well as extra curricular activities for undergraduate students across the entire curriculum.

To date, individual activities that occur in classes have only been assessed academically to achieve learning goals. The STAR assessment team will be working with faculty to develop goals and assessments particularly related to the stated project goals. The team will also be working with faculty to focus on the learning goals of their courses related to the STAR Project. The visual and performing arts student products are public works that impact, educate, and advertise the goals of the STAR program.
Next steps for the STAR task force include development of topics such as domestic violence, sexual assault, gender norms into targeted curriculum. Faculty will build the content, based on student level, with guidelines provided on how to incorporate objectives and standards into each discipline/department. These educational options will embrace both classroom learning and experiential opportunities. Seton Hill remains committed to delivery of active learning.

VI Conclusion

Adapting to, as well as embracing, change is part of our intellectual inheritance. The traditional classroom model, teacher ensconced in the front, the font of knowledge comes to us from medieval cathedral schools and early universities. However, the real estate of a contemporary classroom is being altered by technology, as is the entire landscape of education. Mobile technologies are enabling education to be as fluid and dynamic as the Greek philosophers who discoursed on stoae or Renaissance humanists strolling in carefully constructed gardens as they recited texts. The liberal arts are more often than not experienced in multiple delivery formats. The language of apps along with social media is a new forum for exchange; they are as revolutionary as Guttenberg’s printing press and Diderot’s Encyclopedia. The physical confines of the classroom and campus are spilling over into the larger community and takes on a vibrancy and immediacy as ideas become animated in the real world.

Liberal education coupled with mobile technology initiatives, places information, documents, artifacts, films and music in the palms of our hands. Thus, the tradition of a liberal education is something living, not dead. Students and faculty alike at Seton Hill University are stars, and utilize their resources, and talents to give voice, image and physical presence to name, understand and ultimately end violence towards women. We are grounded as well as committed to women’s issues—they are everyone’s issues. Liberal arts education provides the skills to locate, critically examine, and move from academic theory to application. Socrates questions about human excellence remain ours today. As modeled in Seton Hill’s STAR program, liberal education provides the intrinsic understanding necessary to live a rich, multi-dimensional life.
VII Bibliography

Elmendorf, Dana. “Syllabus for Art in Community”. Seton Hill University 2014


Walk a Mile in He Shoes. http://www.walkamileinhershoes.org/


Appendix – Visual Student Products

Photovoice, Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, Standing In Stilettos Calendar
“Who’s our hero?”
Jessica Higo 2013

To me, this picture of toys I came across in a toy store makes me ask......
“What are we teaching our children?”

Why are boys taught to be emotionless, strong, working men and girls taught to be quiet homemakers? Where do these thoughts come from? Why are these ideas woven into the toys of our children?
“What is underneath?”

When you see someone with a Victoria’s Secret bag, what is your initial thought?

Is it negative or positive..............if negative why?

I feel as though Victoria’s Secret has a bad connotation for all the wrong reasons.
Why should women not be able to celebrate their bodies and dress themselves in lace or flashy undergarments, without others getting the idea of someone being ’easy’

..........and getting the idea that they can be taken advantage of.

Tiffany Schmoyer      2014
In this photo, my boyfriend and I form two different halves of the same heart. To me, one of the most difficult things to work out when challenging the power that keeps women oppressed is how to stay emotionally connected to the people, especially the men, when I disagree with their attitudes and perspectives. How do I navigate being both a "man-lover" and a feminist?
“The Flame”

This is a picture of a burning candle. I thought about the idea of the flame being free to burn until a lid is placed on top. This made me think of control in a relationship. How much freedom is there? How much control is too much?

On the jar of the candle you can also see the how many times the candle has been lit from the wax residue. This made me think of the amount of times it takes a person to leave an abusive relationship. They might keep trying until finally they can safely leave for good.

Sarah Cindric 2014
"HER"

Why do you need feminism?

I need feminism because I would like the power to change things like this. This photo reminds me of the idea that women are treated like objects. A lot of times, we are taught that things like this are okay. Men can touch a woman and women are expected to remain silent...... or else they will be punished. I will not remain silent.

Sarah Tady    2014
Fact or fiction: 1 in 4 women (25%) has experienced gender violence in her lifetime.

Answer: This is a fact

I took this picture while my friends and I were waiting for a bus.
My friend crushed her diet soda can,
It made me think about how society pressures women
to try to be small,

Which made me think about how men become dominant in size,
stronger, and more powerful.
And about how in a split second of rage, a partner
can overcome a woman and crush their relationship.

It's not surprising how a man can overpower his partner,
.............when he wants her to be small.

Anonymous 2014
Pledge Signing
Walk a Mile in Her Shoes®
Talk the Walk ... and TALK THE TALK