The Importance of Questions

Gadamer’s perspective that “the question is the path to knowledge” is at the essence of higher education. Our program at Mason seeks to provide opportunities to “know what one does not know” and realize “what questions press upon us” so that the unknown can be “placed in the open” and not be avoided. Gadamer, H. (1992/1960). Truth and method (rev.2nd ed.) (J.Weinsheimer & D. Marshall, Trans.). New York: Crossroad. (Original work published 1960). (pp. 365-367)

It is our hope that this newsletter offers insight into what questions have been placed in the open, how they are placed, and some of the people who place them in the open for others to discover, contemplate, and use to improve educational practice. In this newsletter, we honor one such person and her long-time service to Mason as a faculty member and vice provost with a JD and PhD in Economics - Dr. Linda Schwartzstein. May her future be filled with invigorating questions and many endurance events during which to contemplate them.

Important Dates

March 27—Registration for Summer begins
April 4—Registration for Fall begins
May 5—Spring dissertation/thesis deadline
May 6—Last day of Spring classes
May 22—First day of Summer Session 1 & A classes
May 22—First day of Summer Session D classes
June 5—First day of Summer Session B classes
June 26—First day of Summer Session C classes
July 1—Fall 2017 graduation intent available
July 1—Fall internship/practicum proposals due
Aug 4—Summer dissertation/thesis deadline

Summer Courses

CTCH 792:A01
Current Trends in Higher Education
This course is designed to explore and discuss current trends in higher education with a focus on three overarching themes – higher education as a public good, human capital in higher education, and democratic education. Attention is centered on current issues such as the rise of for-profit education, academic capitalism, the erosion of faculty governance, access and equity, and developmental education among others. Students will be expected to attend class, be current with the issues facing higher education, and actively engage in course discussions.

Session A, Weds 5:55-9:55pm with an online component

CTCH 792:C02
Policy and Retention
This course will focus on salient theories, research, and practices influencing student retention efforts in postsecondary education. Students in the course will explore cultural, institutional, and individual factors that contribute to college student persistence. The course will also explore the ways in which educational policy at the state and national level shapes student retention programs and policies.

Session C, Thurs 6:00-10:00 pm with an online component

Faculty News

Jan Arminio received the ACPA-College Student Educators International Esther Lloyd-Jones Professional Service Award. She presented two sessions at the annual meeting of the National Association of Campus Activities. Along with her research team, she will present at the American College Personnel Association meeting on a manuscript they have been working on entitled “Working with Diverse Populations: Cultural Stress, Shedding, and Learning.”

Jaime Lester co-authored the chapter “Troubling Gender Norms and the Ideal Worker in Academic Life” which appeared in Critical Approaches to Women and Gender in Higher Education. She wrote the chapter “Complexity of Work-Life Identities and Policy Development: Implications for Work-Life in Higher Education” which appeared in New Directions for Higher Education. At the upcoming American Educational Research Association annual meeting she will present in four sessions including two presentations entitled "Learning Dashboards: How Data Accuracy, Context and Trust Impact Student Sensemaking and Learning Behavior” and "Revisiting the Impact of Gender Equity Beliefs on Organizational Change Movements.”

Kelly Schrum has given multiple talks on digital storytelling to college faculty. She presented a workshop to faculty in Ireland and will speak at Wellesley College and UC Berkeley. She co-authored the article “Assessing the Effect of Historic Site-Based Professional Development on History Teaching and Learning” which appeared in a volume of The History Teacher.


Student News

Adrienne Thompson and HEP alumna Emilie Dubert had an article accepted to the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition’s E-Source for College Transitions titled “Intervention Strategies for At-Risk Off-Campus Students.”

Carrie Klein will present a research paper on student uses, perceptions, and reactions to learning dashboards and predictive data at the AERA Annual Meeting.

Destiny Spencer has been awarded the 2017 David W. Rossell Scholarship.

Aoi Yamanaka has been awarded a 2017 Summer Research Fellowship from the Provost’s office.
Dr. Linda Schwartzstein is retiring this semester after over 30 years of service to George Mason University. In her time with Mason, Dr. Schwartzstein has served as Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Vice President for Enrollment Services as well as the Vice Provost of Strategic Planning. She also was a member of the Law faculty and currently is a member of the Higher Education faculty. We would like to take a moment to acknowledge Dr. Schwartzstein and thank her for her invaluable contributions to our program and to the university. Here she discusses her time in Higher Education and her plans after retirement.

What made you decide to pursue a career in Higher Education? Is there anything that has surprised you about working in Higher Education?

I have always loved learning and being in an academic environment. I believe that education provides the best path to achieve a person’s hopes and dreams. The opportunity to contribute to others’ education and facilitate reaching their goals personally and professionally is truly an honor.

Perhaps what surprised me the most over my career was how much I enjoyed my time as Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Being able to play a role in moving the university forward in positive ways was very fulfilling. I worked with a group of talented, intelligent colleagues who were dedicated to the best interests of the university. I even enjoyed running the two SACS re-accreditation efforts—probably the statement that would surprise the most people—partly because it allowed me to learn about all parts of the university and because it was a defined project, with a clear goal, beginning and end and I was fortunate to be given a great deal of autonomy regarding how to get it done.

I have been at the university since 1979 and I am so grateful for the wide range of opportunities I have had during my career here.

What has been your favorite part of working at Mason?

Definitely the faculty, staff, and students. It is a gift to work with and around an overall wonderful group of individuals. I love being in the classroom and I love working with small groups of colleagues.

Any advice for young Higher Education professionals?

Understand the environment you are in, which includes understanding the legal and financial environment. Otherwise you are prone to misinterpretations and misunderstandings and you have less opportunity to influence the direction of the university or the development of policies at the university. And always remain curious and willing to challenge yourself.

What’s a fun fact about you that not many people know?

I enjoy raising money for charities by participating in endurance events. I have done four marathons, about twenty half marathons, two century rides, two metric centuries and two triathlons. Usually I have done this with Team in Training for Leukemia and Lymphoma. I consider myself an adult onset athlete, having not done anything athletic in my younger life, and these events provide both a challenge and a learning opportunity.

Do you have any plans to celebrate your retirement?

My family has a lot to celebrate in June, including my retirement, my husband’s and my 40th anniversary, and several milestone birthdays, so we’re hoping to take our entire family on a cruise. I also expect to celebrate with close friends and colleagues at every opportunity!
U.S.-Pakistan Collaboration for Faculty Excellence in Teaching & Research

Karen Wrightsman and Mary Beth Marklein, both Ph.D. candidates in the Higher Education Program, are graduate research assistants for the U.S.-Pakistan Collaboration for Faculty Excellence in Teaching and Research (CFETR). Launched in Fall 2015, the two-year collaboration is funded by the U.S.-Pakistan University Partnerships Program of the U.S.-Pakistan Academic Linkages Program of the US State Department. Here, Mary Beth shares some of their experiences.

Shortly after this newsletter goes to press, Karen and I will be reunited with 40 faculty members at the University of Management and Technology (UMT) in Lahore, Pakistan. We met them last year when they came to Mason—one group in Spring, the other in Fall—for two weeks of professional development focused on teaching, learning, and research. In late March, they will share their progress with us at a conference we are helping to organize in Lahore. Some of them have also invited us to speak in their classes.

Led by Dr. Rebecca Fox, the principal investigator and a professor in the College of Education and Human Development, the CFETR activities at Mason included classroom visits, meetings with researchers, and a series of seminars covering topics such as technology in the classroom, assessment strategies, and student-centered instruction. Dr. Jan Arminio, HEP's director, led a session on student engagement.

Much of what Karen and I do takes place behind the scenes. As master organizer, Karen keeps us on schedule and organized. I maintain a website and file our quarterly reports. We also have learned the finer points of reserving classroom space on campus, driving Mason vans, and keeping our guests healthy.

Dr. Fox, whose creative energy drives our work, took both Karen and I fully under her wing with this grant. She is amazing. She has seen to it that our experience has been rewarding academically, professionally and personally. I consider her both a mentor and a role model.

At its heart, CFETR is about people-to-people connections. Karen and I each have a secondary concentration in international education, and it has been such a pleasure and honor to learn from our Pakistani friends. I don't know how they managed to pull it off using only their hotel kitchens, but both groups prepared for us delicious Pakistani dinners when they were here. It tasted like home cooking, though maybe not as spicy. I think we'll find out what spicy is when we get to Lahore.

Karen Wrightsman and Mary Beth Marklein, HEP Ph.D. students, are pictured above with Pakistani faculty members who visited Mason through the U.S.-Pakistan Collaboration for Faculty Excellence in Teaching and Research (CFETR).