Faculty Spotlight by Mike Pekarofski

Hands-On Experience & A Hand Up:
Mary Ellen Carpenter & Tom Donofrio

As Professor Mary Ellen Carpenter finishes up a radiography class meeting, she often engages students in what she calls a “what-did-we-learn PowerPoint” session. As questions appear on the screen, students work in groups and try to be the first to answer with correct responses written on flashcards, resulting in a competitive game-like lesson. This fun, but very serious, activity is designed as a “recap,” helping to assess what students did or did not understand from that day’s lesson.

It is one of many innovative strategies Carpenter uses in her courses, as she emphasizes critical thinking and employs collaborative learning strategies. For this, she credits the graduate training she received at Montclair State where she earned her M.A. in Health Education. “The teaching part has made a big difference,” she observes, “and definitely made me a more effective educator.”

When Mary Ellen is not in the classroom, she is busy coordinating the Radiography A.A.S. Degree Program. As such, she is responsible for supervising other instructors, scheduling classes, and occasionally interfacing with staff at several medical sites where ECC students are completing their clinical requirements.

Since arriving at ECC in 2009, she has committed long hours to the Radiography Program’s latest accreditation process. Thanks

In the mid to late 90s Thomas Donofrio found himself working as a financial auditor. Though the job promised a stable future and lucrative opportunities, he found himself largely unfulfilled and anxious to make a bold career change. “I knew I wanted to work with people,” Donofrio remembers.

Tom was soon enrolled in a master’s program at UMDNJ and began his professional journey as a physical therapist. Since earning his MS in the field in 2001, he has not looked back.

After practicing as a therapist for several years and teaching as an adjunct at ECC, Tom joined the full-time faculty in Nursing and Allied Health in January of 2009. Though his work as a therapist had brought him a great sense of satisfaction and the sense of purpose he was looking for, he felt an obligation to share his talents and experience with newcomers to the field. “I got very lucky,” he observes, “and I was fortunate to get great advice from some great mentors, so I wanted to pay it back and help people have the kind of success that I had.”

Although his full-time teaching commitment keeps him pretty busy these days, Donofrio manages to squeeze in some hands-on practice, doing home healthcare and providing pro bono treatment for the less fortunate in his community. This not only

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Is Teaching the New Welfare?
By Mike Pekarofski

For all the wedge issues, treacherous campaigning and government inertia of modern day partisan politics, every once in a while an issue comes along that seems to unite both Republicans and Democrats in a sort of “feel good” moment for the country.

In 2003, it was the build-up to the invasion of Iraq. Going back a little further to the mid 1990s, it was welfare reform that made unlikely bedfellows of otherwise sworn enemies. As Bill Clinton sided with the likes of Dick Armey and Newt Gingrich to take out a “contract on America,” poor people, most of them women, were easy targets and provided a common enemy few were prepared to defend.

Today, the so called Left and Right have found another slice of common ground, as political leaders, community activists and media pundits have come together in an unapologetic and unmitigated assault on our nation’s teachers. Much like playground bullying, someone initiates the attack and everyone else, afraid to look weak and be bullied themselves, piles on.

Despite the fact that he has held executive office for less than a year, Governor Christie’s attacks on public school teachers have led to national media attention and serious talk of him becoming a viable GOP candidate for President in 2012.

Proving this is not a partisan issue, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and even President Obama himself endorsed School Superintendent Frances Gallo’s plan to fire 74 teachers in the Central Falls (RI) School District last February. In July, Michelle Rhee, a Democrat (lite) who nearly voted for John McCain and who staunchly supports the Bush Administration’s No Child Left Behind, set about firing 214 teachers in the Washington D.C. district.

Whether they are discussing teaching reform or welfare reform, whether they vote Blue or Red, Americans love a scapegoat, a walking, talking (usually fictional) personification of a social problem.

We all remember the stories of the mythical welfare recipient wearing the fur coat and driving the Cadillac, the one who always seemed to be in front of someone you knew in the grocery line, the one who single-handedly seemed to be bringing down the morale and the economy of the country.

“After all, if there’s anything America likes more than a scapegoat, it’s a simple solution to a complex problem.”

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Carpenter—Continued
to a number of people involved, the pro-
gram received the maximum accreditation
from the Joint Review Committee on Edu-
cation in Radiologic Technology, a nation-
ally recognized body. While a five-year
accreditation could be considered highly
respectable, the eight-year one Professor
Carpenter helped secure is nothing short of
impressive.

Though still relatively new to the ECC
community, Carpenter is a seasoned clini-
cal practitioner and educator with more
than twenty years of hands-on experience
in the radiography field and several years
of higher ed. experience. She began her
teaching career as an adjunct faculty mem-
ber at Middlesex County College, and was
employed by the Christ Hospital Radiogra-
phy Program prior to joining ECC. As a
practitioner and teacher, Carpenter makes a
point of keeping up on all aspects of her
field, especially the latest developments in
technology.

In fact, a large part of her decision to come
to ECC was strongly influenced by the
chance to work and teach in the new Cen-
ter for Health Sciences. “I wanted an op-
opportunity to incorporate more technology
into my classes as well as computer-based
testing,” she observes. “I was dazzled by
the beauty of the new building and the
amazing technology.” She even admits to
showing off her new work environment to
her peers in the field.

At the core of Carpenter’s work as an edu-
cator and radiologic technologist is a con-
cern for people. “You have to care about
patients,” she tells current and prospective
students. She is adamant in her belief that
those entering the health professions
should do so out of a desire to serve the
public and improve peoples’ lives.

Clearly, this is something Mary Ellen Car-
penter both preaches and practices herself.
When she is not tutoring students for up-
coming exams, keeping up with paper-
work, or thinking up new ways to chal-
lenge her classes, she can be found at the
NJ Food Bank in Hillside where she regu-
larly volunteers, and is currently involved
in the “Check out Hunger Campaign”
which will begin in local supermarkets this
month.

Donofrio—Continued
allows him to hone his physical therapy
(PT) skills, but it provides him with
meaningful clinical experiences which
he often uses to enhance his teaching.
“Students can relate to these scenarios,”
he notes, “and sometimes they even
give me ideas on how to help patients.”

In the classroom, Professor Donofrio
believes in debate and emphasizes criti-
cal thinking. In fact, he loves nothing
more than a challenging question from
one of his students, one that makes him
reflect after class and consult the latest
research in his field. At the same time,
practical experience is a primary focus
of his teaching; thus, he regularly finds
unique opportunities to bring his stu-
dents on field trips where they get to sit
in on actual treatment sessions. These
include visits to the Universal Institute,
a rehab facility in Livingston specializ-
ing in traumatic brain injuries, and Ad-
vanced Physical Associates in Cran-
ford, where students get to experience
the latest techniques in aqua therapy.

In addition to his teaching duties, Professor
Donofrio spends a good deal of time con-
ducting outreach for the Physical Therapy
Assistant Program by visiting high schools
throughout Essex County and speaking with
potential students at the College’s open
house. He is also active in his hometown
where he coaches girls’ soft ball. Not will-
ning to rest on his laurels, Tom also plans on
pursuing a doctorate in PT in the near fu-
ture.

NEWS:
Congratulations to Professor Re-
becca Williams of Humanities.
On November 2, she won a deci-
sive election for City Council - 2
nd & 3rd Ward Council At-large. She
takes office this January.

2010 ECCFA Scholarship
Recipients:

Continuing Scholars:
Ashraf Amadou Gen. Sci.(3.91)
Shaka Deane Civil Enr. (3.65)
Mirlan Musiwa Acc. (3.67)
Juan Rubiera Elec. Enr.(3.66)
Koffi Trenou Enr. (3.96)

Graduating Scholars:
Michael Augustin Gen. Sci. (4.0)
Rondon Manwaring Gen. Sci. (3.78)
Guemila Sawadogo Comp. Sci. (3.96)
Johathan Villa-Gonzales Enr. (3.84)
Yang Yang Acc. (3.85)
Counselor’s Corner:

In Memoriam by Luz M. Class

(Dedicated to the memory of my brother Angel Manuel Class whom I adored and to my dear friend and colleague Professor Xiomara Torres)

Grief is a personal and emotional experience which humans undergo, usually after the loss of a loved one, a traumatic event/situation or other significant loss such as the loss of one’s pet, job, marriage or limb. During an episode, one may feel the world crumble beneath his/her feet, along with deep emotional anguish, heartache, intensely profound sorrow, numbness, misery and unhappiness. At that point it may feel like nothing matters since one is mourning the death of someone he/she treasured. During the bereavement or grieving process over the loss of someone, one may feel persecuted due to the absence of someone or something invaluable from his/her life.

Bereavement itself is a long and normal process. One’s emotions may vary from one hour to the next or from one day to the next, akin to an emotional rollercoaster. He/she may feel shock and disbelief; eventually, tears may well up in his/her eyes causing him/her to choke up. Meanwhile he/she may attempt to continue with life’s demands. However, one must learn to re-adapt quickly to his/her surroundings and to adjust his/her daily routines without said loved one. If the person were ill, there would undoubtedly be uncertainties. For instance, on the one hand, he/she may feel deep sadness. On the other hand, he/she may experience a combination of guilt and relief over the fact that his/her loved one will no longer be suffering. At times, one may feel angry. This in turn may lead him/her to displace his/her anger onto others or to avoid others altogether, akin to imposed isolation.

As such, it is fundamental that an instructor be aware of the emotions described above, which a person generally experiences while grieving, so that he/she may be better adept at assisting a student who may have lost a parent, a guardian or a best friend, or one who may have suffered some other traumatic experience.

As stated, a wide range of feelings and symptoms are common during grieving. Individuals may feel shock, numbness, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, fear, or perhaps, moments of relief, peace, or happiness. Although grieving is not simply sadness, one may become depressed or overly anxious during the grieving process.

Moreover, the stress inherent within the grieving process can take a physical toll on an individual’s body. For instance, insomnia is a common by-product of the process and eventually affects other areas of a person’s life. There is a possibility that this individual may become weak or ill. A student might be falling asleep in one’s class, may be arrogant or may appear totally aloof. Under these circumstances, it is best that instructors kindly approach the particular student to try to delve into the causes of his/her behavior. Often, students need social support in their neighborhoods and at school.

Experts tend to disagree on the timeframe for grief or its “normal process.” Some people adapt to their new lives after only a few weeks. Others may grieve for a year or a lifetime, with the holiday season evoking precious memories, sadness or both.

Only the passage of time will serve to alleviate their pain. However, if their bereavement or normal grief persists and turns into complicated grief, it will be extremely difficult for them to function. Complicated grief generally persists for a few months or longer. It will undoubtedly interfere with a student’s studies and job.

It is then that this student should be referred to an academic counselor so that we can better assist him/her. Perhaps as counselors, we may refer them to a grief counselor or to a bereavement support group within his/her home community. Intervention in a community mental health facility where there are psychologists and psychiatrists may be needed for their mental health. Lastly, counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy and other therapies, may help expedite a student’s recovery.

“What we once enjoyed and deeply loved, we can never lose; for, all that we love deeply becomes a part of us.”

Xiomara with Sonia Rios-Cardoso
Is Teaching the New Welfare? - Continued

Today, nearly fifteen years after Bill Clinton declared an end to the “era of big government,” this unpopular figure of American mythology has morphed into the incompetent and immoral school teacher. Protected by the impenetrable shield of tenure and the flexing muscle of inflexible union bosses, she alone seems responsible for state budget deficits, the steady decline in our world rankings, poor graduation rates, and virtually anything else that currently plagues our nation’s schools.

Though many may privately suspect that these issues have something to do with structural poverty, unfunded mandates, and poorly run districts, among other causes, it is just too easy and too politically expedient to blame teachers alone. After all, if there’s anything America likes more than a scapegoat, it’s a simple solution to a complex problem.

Another part of the issue may lie in the sad truth that we, as a country, place little value on teaching, and even less on learning. After all, if there’s anything America likes more than a scapegoat, it’s a simple solution to a complex problem.

I recently met a guy from Nashville, the proud father of a recent college grad. When I asked what his son planned to do, his face became doubtful and somewhat distraught as he told me of the young man’s passion for history and his desire to become a public school teacher. He painted a grim scenario in which his son would most likely need to look out of state for a teaching job, one which would pay enough to earn a respectable living.

I did not have the heart to tell him that things might not be so promising out of state either. Had I thought of it, I might have comforted him by letting him know that approximately fifty percent of teachers quit within the first five years. With the desire to disparage, punish and replace teachers growing in popularity and political value, his son might be headed back home to Tennessee sooner than later. If he is not reformed (fired), he stands a high chance of opting out on his own.

I will not argue that there are no bad teachers, nor will I indulge in the tired platitude that we need to pay teachers more (though not a bad idea). At the same time, I am suspicious of schemes such as “merit pay.” Somehow, it just sounds like corporate-speak for “Can the old, and pay the new far less.” However, I will suggest that we stop bullying hardworking and well intended teachers. Moreover, we may want to think about how we might elevate these humble public servants to a level of respectability, if not esteem, in our society. That is the way things work in Japan, South Korea and many other nations, places where even kids value education and are taught to respect their teachers, countries you may just find at or near the top of the global rankings.