Getting Real
The academic commitment to service learning at Emory

Nine out of ten Emory undergraduates say they participate in volunteer activities. Through organizations such as Volunteer Emory, fraternities, sororities, and faith groups they serve hot meals at homeless shelters, tutor elementary school kids, clean up urban streams, and build houses, among other things. It’s admirable, necessary work that innumerable community service organizations rely on to fulfill their missions and stretch shoestring budgets. The impact of such pure volunteerism, though, is like taking aspirin for pain: quick but fleeting relief that leaves intact the underlying insult, be that poverty, discrimination, access to health care—take your pick.

“By no means is there anything wrong with this type of work,” says Michael Rich, an associate professor of political science and director of the Office of University-Community Partnerships (OUCP). “But I think we can do more—universities can do more—than just provide volunteer service exposure for students.”
One option Rich has in mind is service learning, a combination of conventional coursework and community engagement. In fall 2006, approximately 187 courses at Emory University incorporated service learning or other forms of community engagement. In a service learning course, students are required to participate in organized community work, while coursework, discussion, and assignments are geared to reflect and amplify students’ immediate experiences of civic responsibility and their understanding of a flesh-and-blood community.

The combination worked to surprising effect for Matthew Archibald, assistant professor of sociology, who launched his first service learning course several years ago with mild expectations. “I thought I’d let them volunteer and they could come back, tell their story, connect it to the class, and that would be that,” he says about his Organizations and Society class. What he hadn’t foreseen was the high degree of enthusiasm, scholastic rigor, and eye-catching presentations from his students. The sharpest among them proffered detailed analyses of the organization they worked for, its primary actors, and how it was embedded in the community. Archibald doubts they could have reached such a level of critical insight had they not ventured beyond Emory’s walls.

He even began to approach his own research a little differently. Because he’d asked his students to volunteer, he decided to volunteer himself, a kind of empathetic gesture intended to increase his own understanding of the inner workings of community groups. “Just as I’d wanted my students to experience community work firsthand, I wanted to experience it, too,” he says. “I used to sit in my office and use computers to map trajectories of [community service] organizations, which was necessary because there’s so much quantitative work to be done. But it was totally abstract. I was not asking questions about how they were really serving their communities. The service learning component of the course pushed me into asking those questions because I realized there was a piece that I was missing.”

By stepping out and working with the Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition, he established new personal connections within Atlanta’s community service network that wouldn’t have been possible from behind a desk at Emory. Those contacts enabled Archibald, a relative newcomer to the area, to expand the horizons of his research on social movements and organizations.

In Spanish 317 (Writing, Context, and Community), all writing assignments relate to volunteer work that students perform in Atlanta’s Hispanic community. The combination worked to surprising effect for Matthew Archibald, assistant professor of sociology, who launched his first service learning course several years ago with mild expectations. “I thought I’d let them volunteer and they could come back, tell their story, connect it to the class, and that would be that,” he says about his Organizations and Society class. What he hadn’t foreseen was the high degree of enthusiasm, scholastic rigor, and eye-catching presentations from his students. The sharpest among them proffered detailed analyses of the organization they worked for, its primary actors, and how it was embedded in the community. Archibald doubts they could have reached such a level of critical insight had they not ventured beyond Emory’s walls.

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Further Reading


National Service Learning Clearinghouse. www.servicelearning.org/


community, whether it’s helping children improve language skills or smoothing the naturalization process for Latin American immigrants. “I could have students write all day in different styles and they’d learn how to write, but it wouldn’t be real for them,” says Vialla Hartfield-Mendez, a senior lecturer in Spanish who teaches the course. “Here, everything becomes a lot more alive, more real. I put them in situations where they can learn about themselves, the world around them, and about the ‘other’ in an effective way.”

At first, students’ papers invariably describe their service work looking outward from their own, very personal position. “The people they describe is obscured by the intervention of their own voice and perspective,” Hartfield-Mendez wrote in a recent journal article in progress. Gradually, they move toward a realization that the views of people they interact with are equally valid, and they “begin to observe in new ways, and with a new awareness of their own perspective as relative.” In every semester since she first began teaching the class, Hartfield-Mendez has observed that students have “telescoped their sense of being related to the people in their service sites.” They progress from the limited, “self”-centered engagement toward more meaningful, cooperative relationships with members of the community they assist. They might even reconsider their relationships with the varied and various communities in which they themselves live and work.

The authenticity that service learning engenders can exert appreciable influence on students’ educational and professional aspirations. “I’ve had students who were pre-professional and not planning to become teachers tell me that because of their service learning experience in my course, they were going to take a couple years and work for Teach for America or change their career paths to become educators, because they understood the importance of public education in the community,” says Karen Falkenberg, a lecturer in educational studies who teaches several service learning courses. Archibald reports similar re-examinations, as does Rich, who ascribes to service learning the capacity not just to clarify career choices, but to illuminate ethical corridors and serve as a bridge connecting students’ passions with meaningful action.

Service learning gained traction at Emory in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the advent of the Theory Practice Learning initiative (TPL) at Emory College. TPL was Emory’s version of the wave of experience-based pedagogy sweeping the country at the time. In essence, the program was designed to help faculty integrate classroom instruction with hands-on experience and community action. “It’s rooted in the theories of John Dewey and pragmatism and that part of the liberal arts tradition to educate a participatory, ethically engaged citizenry,” explains Bobbi Patterson, a senior lecturer in religion and the driving force behind TPL’s emergence. “For many years I harped on the idea that a student can gain educational capital by taking theoretical notions and working with them in real-world contexts.”

Dewey, an educational reformer and leader of the progressive movement during the first half of the twentieth century, believed that higher education was most effective when it included experiential elements in which students shared their learning with the community beyond their institutions. He wrote, “I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs.”

Service learning has become a common practice in higher education, but it is not universally praised. Criticism ranges from the practical (it robs time from established curricula with no proven benefit) to the political (it imposes a particular, biased viewpoint on students). The shots come from both sides of the political spectrum. The phrase “participatory democracy” Patterson mentions, for example, has its roots in the liberal political movement of the 1960s, which raises concern among conservatives. Conversely, some liberals consider some of the volunteerism promoted by service learning as an excuse for government to cut back on social programs. There’s also the assertion that many students volunteer primarily to build their résumés and increase marketability, and that for most the practice doesn’t become a habit after graduation.

“IN OUR BLOOD LINE”

It’s a tricky path from good deeds to good citizenship, and it takes time. At first, says Patterson, students don’t know how to link the theories in the classroom with what they see in the field. “That interchange, even in the best pedagogical situations, is tough to grasp and then actualize or move through. Our students are usually very good at ideas and they’re very good at being nice. They’re not so strong at bringing those two together, and that’s what a truly academic commitment to this would be.”

One thing students figure out quickly is that community service is a collaborative and rather complex affair—not, as many imagined, a one-way dispensing of goodwill to “fix” people with good intentions for a few hours each week. During regular reflection periods in class, Falkenberg frequently hears students admit that

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I would love to see a day when students, staff, and faculty choose Emory because they want to pursue the finest liberal education in order to civically make a difference.

—BOBBI PATTERSON, SENIOR LECTURER IN RELIGION

Academic Exchange: In 1989, you began the Theory Practice Learning initiative at Emory. Can you sum up its ideas?

Bobbi Patterson: Theory Practice Learning was Emory’s version of a wave of experienced-based pedagogy sweeping the country at that time. It was tied to notions of civic participatory democracy, and it’s rooted in the theories of John Dewey and pragmatism and that part of the liberal arts tradition to educate a participatory, ethically engaged citizenry. For nine years I headed TPL, which is basically teaching faculty how they can teach theory while respectfully engaging communities as partners in learning. TPL is now a program within the Center for Teaching and Curriculum in the College strongly allied with the Office of University Community Partnerships. It has become a regularly practiced pedagogy across the university. Now it’s in our bloodstream. People seem to be doing all kinds of courses that have experiential components.

AE: Would you like to see community outreach and service efforts coordinated through some more centralized mechanism?

BP: I would love to see something more centralized and more integrative of the various offices and programs engaged in similar work. Volunteer Emory has been a fantastic partner, but it remains outside the general academic curriculum. I’d like to see Emory create a hub, quite typical in universities across the country. Stanford, Penn, Michigan, and Michigan State all have centers for community-based or service learning. I could see the OUCP becoming that kind of hub initiating and coordinating the varieties of pedagogies and research projects engaged with communities across our campus. It could help train faculty and graduate students to do this work in scholarly, serious ways—the scholarship of teaching. We need some centralized mechanism, or sites end up overrun with students from four or five different courses, all of which converge to want to “help.” That’s a problem. Another problem is that there is a lot of theory behind the pedagogy.

The setting for testing our theories of neighborhood transformation and social change is outside the classroom and in the community.

MICHAEL RICH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Academic Exchange: What are the major elements of the OUCP?

Michael Rich: We were created about seven years ago to do three things: increase awareness and collaboration among Emory faculty, staff, and students regarding their work in the community; to become a more accessible point of entry for community groups, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to partner with Emory; and to help students at Emory connect their passions and interests with curricular, service, and research opportunities. The first line of entry for most faculty is our minigrants program, which provides $2,500 for teaching projects and $5,000 for research projects. Faculty can either take a new or existing course and add a community learning component to it, or develop a pilot research project. That does two things: it produces a tangible benefit for the community, and it provides a meaningful opportunity for students to engage in experiential learning outside of the classroom or some type of community-based research project, where the community is an active participant in the project design.

AE: Is there a relationship between the OUCP and your own research?

MR: Most of my research is on federal urban policy, how that plays out in local communities, and how we foster collaborative cross-sector partnerships to deal with issues related to urban revitalization and poverty. The OUCP and many of the programs and initiatives we’ve created, particularly the Community Building Fellowship Program, has been an opportunity for me to integrate my teaching and research around these issues and lift up the work in Atlanta so that it’s part of the national conversation of how public policy has an impact on urban neighborhoods.

AE: What’s some of the theory that backs up the practice at OUCP?

MR: As an educator I want students to leave here with an understanding of how the world works. The
of experienced-based learning, and if you’re not aware of that you’re not going to make maximum use of this kind of experience. You have to be able to frame it.

**AE:** Clearly, it’s not nearly enough for teachers to simply send students out into the community and then come back and report about it.

**BP:** I call that niceness. I’m not a big fan of niceness. I’m a big fan of justice and ethical engagement in partnerships among communities and scholars. I’m for rational, analytical, critical-thinking partnerships. It takes carefully planned, sequenced pedagogical modules.

Students don’t know how to bridge the theories in the classroom with what they see in the street, or center, or neighborhood. That inter-change, theory and practice, even in the best pedagogical situations, is tough to grasp. Our students are very good at ideas and they’re very good at being nice. They’re less strong in bringing those two together.

**AE:** How can service learning be applied in the sciences?

**BP:** One of the innovators at Emory was Preetha Ram, now dean of science initiatives. She taught analytical chemistry by testing the streams that ran through Lullwater Park. She also had her class take Fernbank Elementary School kids to a stream to teach them the basics of analyzing the water quality. That’s the type of thing that can generate interest in science with urban kids. Pat Marsteller has done major work with science education involving Emory graduate students and undergrads. Their work along with the science education approaches of Bob DeHaan are excellent models of how science unfolds in experience-based models.

**AE:** What, in a larger sense, is the importance of service learning?

**BP:** The major purpose is rooted in the founding notions of higher education in the United States, which started in the mother schools of the country whose dreams were to create democratic citizens, liberally educated and committed to activating the common good. This is our founding legacy, and it differs significantly from the German model of the research university, which now holds sway. If democracy is going to survive in its most participatory thriving forms, this is crucial. That’s what it’s about. There’s a lot at stake as far as I’m concerned.

**AE:** Would you favor an Emory-wide requirement for students to take service learning classes?

**BP:** I would love to see a day when students, staff, and faculty choose Emory because they want to pursue the finest liberal education in order to civically make a difference. It’s one of our core legacies of heart and mind, and there are others. If the place carried that message by what we did in classes and partnered with communities and through research, you wouldn’t have to require it.

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**Subject matter I teach, predominantly urban politics and urban policy, lends itself to actually putting students in the community to experience the real world and talk to people who live through these issues and try to solve these kinds of problems. The setting for testing our theories of neighborhood transformation and social change is outside the classroom and in the community. I think it adds power to the educational experience for students to see what a transitional neighborhood looks like, or to take them a step further, so that they’re actual participants in the transformation process. That elevates service to a higher level. I would like to see students who are concerned about issues such as affordable housing work with community partners to help design strategies to prevent homelessness in the first place. I want students to think about the determinants of the problem. That kind of engaged scholarship that gets down to actual problem solving is what we expect our graduates to be able to do in the real world. If we are the training ground for the next generation of leaders, as every institution of higher learning claims to be, then we have an obligation to provide educational experiences to prepare students to exercise that kind of leadership, rather than let them figure that out on their own after they get their diplomas.

**AE:** How have you coordinated the work of the OUCP with Volunteer Emory?

**MR:** We’re very happy to be working with Volunteer Emory on several projects to strengthen the ties between volunteer service and the curriculum. I see Volunteer Emory as a point of entry to community service for students. We’re looking at ways to take them to the next step and trying to build a continuum of opportunities for them to connect the passions they have about issues, which typically find outlets for service through Volunteer Emory, fraternities, sororities, or other groups. I’d like to connect those students with courses that help them increase their understanding of a particular issue and give them new skills they can apply in the community to become more effective change agents. If they’re interested in homelessness and participated with Volunteer Emory in something to do with homeless shelters, next they might take a service learning course about affordable housing policy that allows them to look at why we have homelessness in America. Their exposure to the issue is not just a couple hours a week spent at a shelter.

Now, there’s a broader context that allows students to understand the parameters of a particular issue. At each step they build upon their previous experience and ratchet up the intensity of their intellectual engagement with the community. Their first experience may well be one of exposure to an issue; hopefully their capstone experience will be one where they have used their knowledge and experience to solve real-world problems.
In the Dangerous Hands of Undergraduates
The teaching mission of Emory’s Manuscripts and Rare Books Library
RONALD SCHUCHARD, GOODRICH C WHITE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

ONE LIBERATING EFFECT of the digital revolution has been the democratization of scholarship—making once-remote and grant-dependent scholarly materials increasingly accessible to all researchers, regardless of prestigious credentials and fellowships. The time has come, many of us believe, to democratize access to manuscripts within institutions of higher education, especially in research universities with archival resources and materials that could and should be used in the education of undergraduates. In this new age, many of the undergraduates we aim to attract have religious credentials and fellowships. In my case, as a longtime practitioner of placing manuscripts in the hands of undergraduates, I blame a frustrated English librarian whose supervisor was on holiday. In the late 1970s I took a group of twenty-five Emory undergraduates to England for a six-week course titled “Literature and a Sense of Place.” Our travels took us to D.H. Lawrence country in Eastwood, to the birthplace, where one still sees the sharp division between the beautiful countryside and the disfiguring coal mines. I had written in advance to the archivist at the nearby University of Nottingham that if possible we would like to visit and see Lawrence materials of whatever kind, especially related to Sons and Lovers. When we arrived we were taken to glass cases with printed materials but into a room with long double tables, neatly covered with manuscripts, letters, notebooks, and photographs, ready for personal examination. For two hours those students, including the lager-louts among them, were like discovers of an Egyptian tomb, O-my-godding and yelping over the manuscripts, calling to each other from across the room to see this and that letter or manuscript change, spontaneously reading out lines.

None of us will ever forget that morning. The students talked about it as the highlight of the program and gently criticized me for not having arranged more close encounters of a manuscript kind. I profusely thanked the Saturday librarian, who had let us play while the archivist was away, and who had been delighted to show the manuscripts. That morning had a lasting impact on those students and changed my teaching life.

What is it about the archival experience that can have such a dramatic and lasting impact on the intellectual life of an undergraduate? Students come up to MARBL for the first time, timidly, carrying in backpacks their thick, thin-papered, impersonal anthologies in which they have discovered poems or stories that have brought them varying degrees of excitement in class. And then they surround the table in the Woodruff or Harris room laden with the manuscripts, drafts, typescripts, and proofs of a work they have loved or written about, together with related letters, diaries, notebooks, and photographs—and suddenly the material initiates for them an
Egyptian tomb experience, only better. The first awe of seeing the material, let alone touching it, of moving from piece to piece; the privilege they feel of having a first-hand look at an author’s first raw attempts to transform thought and emotion into art; the excitement of discovering the story that the succession of drafts tell; the false starts, the cancellations, the half-torn, once-crumpled page, the mourning paper, the different colored inks, the different weights of pencil, the doodles, the coffee cup rings, the grocery list in the margin, all the earthy matter and afterburn of transcendence. It is a great educational moment; it is often a class-action moment, coming at just the right time in their individual and collective intellectual lives. And sometimes the O-my-godding moment can hardly be contained. A freshman in my Introduction to Poetry class was so exhilarated that he came and asked if he could leave the room. Why? I asked, to which he replied, “I’ve got to call my Mom about this!” It momentarily lifts them out of themselves—one of the primary goals of undergraduate education and the essential beginning of intellectual maturity; it is one of the unique educational experiences that MARBL can provide and that we cannot afford to withhold.

Each year more and more faculty members at Emory make the archival collections part of their syllabi with innovative projects and assignments. Here are some jaw-dropping statistics in MARBL’s Annual Report for 2006-07, statistics that show the extraordinary momentum of the teaching mission. With the continuous expansion of archival and print collections, and the widespread publicity in the New York Times, theing and preservation nightmare, lack of space and staff, and often strong prejudice: “Undergraduates should be reading books, not manuscripts,” one professor scowled at me. But I have never seen an undergraduate mishandle a manuscript: even before training they approach them with greater reverence and fear of damage.

Some educators and librarians are astonished, some even appalled, to know that those manuscripts may soon be not in glass cases, acid-free folders, and safe grey boxes, but in the dangerous hands of undergraduates.

false starts, the cancellations, the half-torn, once-crumpled page, the mourning paper, the different colored inks, the different weights of pencil, the doodles, the coffee cup rings, the grocery list in the margin, all the earthy matter and afterburn of transcendence. It is a great educational moment; it is often a class-action moment, coming at just the right time in their individual and collective intellectual lives. And sometimes the O-my-godding moment can hardly be contained. A freshman in my Introduction to Poetry class was so exhilarated that he came and asked if he could leave the room. Why? I asked, to which he replied, “I’ve got to call my Mom about this!” It momentarily lifts them out of themselves—one of the primary goals of undergraduate education and the essential beginning of intellectual maturity; it is one of the unique educational experiences that MARBL can provide and that we cannot afford to withhold.

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London Times, and other national and international newspapers, one might expect, as in most universities, that the largest increase in use would be, excepting the influx of visiting researchers, from our own faculty and graduate students. Not a bit of it! Last year, while faculty use increased 10 percent and graduate student use 15 percent over the previous five-year period, undergraduate use increased 40 percent. While there were 350 visiting researchers from nine nations last year, constituting 47 percent of the total use, there were 236 undergraduate researchers, constituting 31 percent of the total use, followed by graduate researchers (12 percent) and faculty (10 percent).

Why, one might ask, are most of our research institutions in America not allowing their special collections to play such a central daily role in the intellectual and research development of their undergraduates? We know the widespread responses and assumptions: intellectual immaturity and carelessness, training and preservation nightmare, lack of space and staff, and often strong prejudice: “Undergraduates should be reading books, not manuscripts,” one professor scowled at me. But I have never seen an undergraduate mishandle a manuscript: even before training they approach them with greater reverence and fear of damage.

MARBL has outgrown its once empty, now full home on the tenth floor, not only for its collections but for its place and mission in the university. So urgent is the need that trustees and administrators have begun plans to have in place in five years a state-of-the-art, free-standing MARBL on the central campus, near the Woodruff Library—a MARBL that has the opportunity to lead the world in changing the old culture of special collections. We envision a MARBL where manuscript and print materials are married to sophisticated digital technology in a new
environment for teaching and research, with rare materials on the table and their digital forms on screens and desktops, with immediate links to complementary materials in partner libraries. We expect that it will contain seminar rooms integrated into the heart of the collections, so that classes can be scheduled there on a daily basis, moving beyond the occasional “field trips” from distant classrooms. Our IT visionaries have begun to describe how they foresee digital technologies for MARBL that will enhance our ability to analyze both traditional materials and new types of collection objects—still and moving images, 3D representations, immersive environments. They foresee innovations in digital displays and note taking, with study desks that have nothing but a display as their desktop, providing a way of interacting with digitized representations of physical collections, allowing the student to manipulate and resize a manuscript by dragging fingers across the desktop, to make notations and annotations that are linked to the place where the observation is made in the digital text. As such display surfaces and touch-and-shared-screen technologies become more sophisticated and interactive, our students can digitally review an archival collection with no threat to preservation.

We envision, in short, a high-flow, high-use building of teaching and research that serves the intellectual life in all its private and public forms. When MARBL is seen not as the mausoleum but as the heartbeat of Emory, then we can say that it has not only changed and “changed utterly” the old culture of special collections, but that it has created again, and with a higher bar, that ethereal “next level.”

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The Keeping of Records
Alice Walker’s archive as an act of self-authentication

RUDOLPH P. BYRD, PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES, GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

PEOPLE ARE known for the records they keep,” observes the writer Alice Walker. “If it isn’t in the records, it will be said it didn’t happen. That is what history is: a keeping of records.”

Walker’s pithy observation was written, like a note to herself, on a scrap of paper and then carefully stored away. This fragment, along with letters, drafts of novels, poems and essays, photographs, and memorabilia, is part of the Eatonton, Georgia, writer’s archive for which Emory University is now privileged to serve as the custodian, for this generation and the generations to come. Walker’s observation about records and history raises important questions about the nature of an archive and the special importance an archive would possess for a black Southern woman writer.

Certainly an archive is, for a writer, a record of the effort to achieve conscious eloquence. This effort for Walker began at an early age, and in her sixteenth year it culminated in the self-publication of “Poems of a Childhood Poetess,” a remarkable volume of her earliest poems, many written in her own hand. She dedicated the volume, again most remarkably, to herself and then to others. Since many women writers often chose to publish under a male pseudonym—or worse, as anonymous—this self-dedication is intriguing. It reveals, I believe, that Walker recognized her own value and potential as a writer very early in her life. The self-dedication is neither vanity nor egocentrism, but rather a prescient and self-conscious affirmation of her potentiality, which, as the historical record shows, has been richly realized.

Among other things, an archive is also a lieux de mémoire, or site of memory, to invoke the twentieth-century French historian Pierre Nora. Seen through the lens of Nora’s theorizing, an archive is, in one sense, a recognition on the part of the writer of the nation’s tendency towards amnesia and of her efforts to ward off the disastrous effects of this national trait. “If it isn’t in the records,” Walker warns us, “it will be said it didn’t happen.”

An archive also chronicles the effort on the part of the writer to negotiate the complex relationship between history and memory, between region and its impact upon an artistic imagination. One could select almost any work by Walker to illustrate this claim, but of course none more than her celebrated novel The Color Purple (1982).

And what is the value of an archive for a black Southern woman writer? Walker’s clear-eyed assertion bears repeating:
“If it isn’t in the records, it will be said it didn’t happen.” In a nation whose founding documents of state reduced African Americans to three-fifths of a person and where African American women possessed even less constitutional significance, for Walker an archive is a means of anticipating and refuting the warping effects of racism and sexism. Certainly, the trials of Phillis Wheatley, the black Southern woman writer, not only survived, but also prevailed against a system that meant to destroy her.

Walker chose Emory as the custodian of her very substantial archive “because I myself feel at ease and comfortable at Emory. That being so I can imagine in years to come that my papers and memorabilia, my journals and letters, will find themselves always in the company of people who care about many of the things I do: culture, community, spirituality, scholarship, and the blessings of ancestors who want each of us to find joy and happiness in this life, by doing the very best we can to be worthy of it.”

Far more than just a record of a public and successful career, Walker’s archive is the record of a courageously lived life devoted to the highest artistic standards and to civil and human rights. A life, as it is distilled in her archive, that educates the heart and mind and nurtures the spirit. A life, thankfully, that is still in process.

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Letter to the Editor

Lottery: Rationality or Politics?

I very much enjoyed reading Abrams and Garibaldi’s take on playing the lottery (February/March 2008), particularly timely since my 401K is suffering from our almost-recession. The reason, however, that I won’t be buying a lottery ticket is less about rationality and more about politics. I believe the need for our public school systems to use lottery monies essentially amounts to a tax on the poor; the working poor are paying for the HOPE scholarship and other important education initiatives that the wealthiest members of our country support the least.

Maeve Howett
Clinical Assistant Professor
Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing
Have you ever felt overwhelmed at work? Faculty respond to this question with alternating laughter and anxiety. No one wants to be seen as a complainer, and yet as the question hangs in the air, the tension rises. As Emory experiences new growth and transition, faculty often find themselves caught between the excitement of change and the conflict associated with competing new priorities and responsibilities. They often cite this ambiguity as a factor in increasing stress levels.

It’s unclear how much of this stress is attributable to work and how much to living in a culture of multitasking and overscheduled lives beyond the university. “If you have more going on at work, and then your kids have more responsibilities, you’re feeling it in a lot of places,” says Nadine Kaslow, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, chief psychologist at Grady Hospital, president of the University Senate, and chair of the Faculty Council.

Age and gender are also contributing factors. “Different people are at different stages in their life. For me, if I have to leave a half an hour later or I have to come in on a Sunday afternoon that’s not a big deal, but for younger faculty that may be a big deal,” says Ron Calabrese, professor of biology. “I imagine if I were younger and my kids needed more of my attention, I would be really stressed out. I would be running around like a chicken with its head cut off!” He sobered, adding, “If you’re a woman on the faculty, you get it all the time. The women faculty in my department are rare, and they get asked to do every committee known to man.”

Some suggest that Emory’s transitions and growth around the strategic plan complicate the situation. “As Emory becomes more alive as an institution, and more energetic and more intellectually stimulating,” says Kaslow, “then there’s more to do, and you want to be part of making this process happen. In order to get some of the positive transformation—if I can use that word—that we want, it takes work, and it takes effort, and [there are] more activities to engage in, more talks to go to, more meetings to attend.”

Lynne Huffer, professor and chair of the Department of Women’s Studies, thinks the challenge might be more fundamental. “In most cases, there’s a real tension between the life of somebody who’s building an institution, whether it’s programs or departments or institutes or centers, and the life of somebody who’s a scholar. I think it’s actually difficult to do both.”

This combination of enthusiasm and tension often leaves those most confident in their multi-tasking abilities finding themselves stretched thin. Dana White, professor in the Graduate Institute of Liberal Arts, remembers, “When I first started teaching [more than forty years ago], I was on four or five different committees university-wide, and I began to realize that it’s all the same people. If there were eight people on the committee, I knew six of them from another committee.”

Huffer agrees: “You look at all the different projects that various people are taking on, and you often see multiple projects, and then you look at who’s involved in the projects and it’s the same people involved in multiple projects. You can only sustain that for so long before people start feeling depleted.”

“If we got more people engaged, then people who are feeling
burned out might not be feeling quite so burned out,” Kaslow proposes. But how to do that?
Many express confidence in the administration’s investment in addressing these issues through infrastructural changes, but those changes may be harder to implement than at first seems.

For example, though proposed technologies such as a centralized calendar system are often cited as a potential boon, just as often newly implemented technologies seem to be an added stressor. Such concerns suggest that a thoroughly tested, user-friendly calendar system will be a welcome helpmeet, while premature implementation of such a system, with all associated glitches, might kill faculty enthusiasm for the project before it ever got off the ground.

The calendar system, however, will do little to solve the central problem of overextended faculty. The most promising solution to that issue may be to eliminate some of the ambiguity surrounding faculty responsibilities. “I do feel that we really need to make things easier on the administrative level, so that we can see easily what our roles are in various forms of faculty governance and administration,” says Calabrese.

The University Senate has already begun discussing these issues, on Kaslow’s initiative, and the immediate challenge there may be to ensure the effort is sustained after her tenure as president is over.

The college is also making strides in this area. “One of the things we’ve been working on at the last few chairs meetings within Emory College has been a faculty job description,” Huffer explains, “actually listing the different responsibilities that faculty members have and making those clear, so that there can be a more uniform understanding of what it is that’s expected of us, and hopefully a more equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the faculty within departments and across the college.”

Another proposal for easing the strain of overextension is aimed at off-campus faculty, who experience added logistical stresses. Kaslow notes, “As somebody at Grady, every time I have to go to a meeting, I have to drive over to Emory. It takes me a half-hour to get there and a half-hour to get back. If they would let me use technology to be present at that meeting—conference calls or video screens or whatever, and we had more of those available to us—that would make a huge difference. Certainly people at Oxford could benefit from being able to connect with people at Emory through various forms of media technology. Coming from Oxford to Emory for meetings requires a huge time commitment and a lot of driving.”

In the meantime, there’s always White’s more low-tech technique for managing commitments. “What I essentially do now is I might have my name on several other programs than my home department, but what I do is I concentrate on one at a time. So if I’m on the associated faculty of Department A, I will spend time with that for two or three years, but I will not give equal time to departments B or C because I just don’t have the time to do it. I try to keep commitments, not to a minimum, but concentrated.”—S.P.

Getting Real
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they didn’t know nearly as much as they’d thought about what it took to truly help a community. “By the end of the course, a lot of them say, I had no idea how much I was going to learn from this experience. It’s a big eye-opener for them,” she says.

As more of the types of activities that TPL had promoted were funded and carried out through other avenues at Emory, TPL, now part of the Center for Teaching and Curriculum, came to play a less prominent role than it once did, explains Hartfield-Mendez, but its philosophy has permeated Emory’s culture. As Patterson puts it, it’s “in our blood line,” and its core values extend well beyond the college. With the exception of the medical school, every academic unit at Emory offers service learning classes. The Vision Statement and Strategic Plan pay homage to the ethically engaged university and the importance of strong community interactions, while funding for programs that promote community engagement are on the rise.

This is as it should be, says Rich: “If we are the training ground for the next generation of leaders, as every institution of higher learning claims to be, then we have an obligation to provide educational experiences to prepare students to exercise that kind of leadership rather than let them figure it out on their own after they get their diploma.”—S.F.

Strategic Planning Updates and Highlights
Are now regularly featured on the Academic Exchange website: www.emory.edu/ACAD.Exchange/strategicplan/
Studying power and dominance
I personally think that power and dominance are the two most understudied topics in the social sciences. I don’t know who is here from the social sciences—anthropology, psychology, sociology—but as a psychology professor I get all these social psychology textbooks on my desk, and I always look up at the end what they say about power and dominance. Dominance they don’t talk about, and power, they usually only mention power abuse. I think that’s missing in the social sciences—that power is taboo, dominance is taboo. They all want to be politically correct, even though in the psychology department and the sociology department and so on, there are lots of power games going on I’m sure, so it’s not that these people are total egalitarians but they believe in egalitarianism. And I think dominance and power are such important components in human society if you walk into a room and you study people who know each other you’ll probably know within a minute what approximately the power relationships are. That’s how sensitive we are to it.

Always vulnerable
Human beings are all always vulnerable. This is due to the ever-constant possibility of dependency presented by disease, disaster, or other catastrophe beyond our immediate control. We might become physically or otherwise dependent for care on others, including society and institutions, most likely the state or family. We experience this specter of imminent reliance as frightening not least because we know that societal institutions themselves are vulnerable, potentially unstable and susceptible to challenges from both internal and external forces. For many Americans in particular, the state seems a particularly precarious entity with which to trust our dependency.

. . . The ultimate point is, or should be, our current constitutional and statutory equality regimes analyze this equality through the lens of discrimination, independent of and seemingly oblivious to the existing inequalities of distribution. Our equality regime assumes the existing allocation of resources and power in various systems, such as those governing, economic, and employment relationships.
—Martha Fineman, Robert W. Woodruff Professor of Law, from her Life of the Mind lecture “Reconciling Equality with the Inevitable Vulnerabilities of the Human Condition,” February 6, 2008, sponsored by the Office of the Provost and the Faculty Council