

## PREFACE

During the early 1990s, in my psychiatric practice, I worked with young prisoners, many of whom were of color. As an African-American raised during the Civil Rights Movement, I was struck by the inability of these young men and women to think and deliberate about the choices life brought to them. Seeing young people, often younger than 18, learning for the first time behind bars, wrenched my heart. I became desperate to save the children, even my own, who were not in prison but in the public schools where they experienced daily assaults on their identities as learners. The expected benefits of integration—such as healthier self-images for young people previously denied a decently funded education in this country—have not materialized for many. If anything, historically underrepresented students face even greater isolation after being accepted into privileged institutions when administrators, faculty, and staff have little understanding of these students’ needs.

I learned of the *Critical Moments Project* when it began in the Goodrich Scholarship Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha where I guest lectured every year. I immediately saw its educational potential: the idea of teaching underrepresented students critical thinking skills leaped off the pages of the first *Critical Moments Manual*. That diversity is about critical thinking expressed something that I had long known. I wanted to be involved in the development and evolution of this project where critical thinking is the central organizing principle. I have remained committed to *Critical Moments*, still transfixed by the power of its central organizing principle, the caring and thoughtful scholarship it is built on, and the hope that it gives its practitioners—that all our children can learn in educational institutions.

For me, *Critical Moments* succeeds because it is based on qualitative research methods and, consequently, has the intellectual rigor necessary to sustain it. Above all, *Critical Moments* plants and nurtures essential academic skills so students will become good and fair-minded thinkers. In the Goodrich Scholarship Program, I saw students who had been involved in *Critical Moments* become student leaders committed to challenging institutional racism. Everywhere *Critical Moments* has taken root, students eventually take action to change unfair institutional practices.

*“I have remained committed to Critical Moments, still transfixed by the power of its central organizing principle, the caring and thoughtful scholarship it is built on, and the hope that it gives its practitioners—that all our children can learn in educational institutions.”*

The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education and its co-directors, Gillies Malnarich and Emily Lardner, with support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, brought the Center's organizational experience to *Critical Moments*' work in Washington State. Together with campus teams, we have created a sense of community. In my work at partner institutions, I have been moved when we discovered new knowledge about students whose personal stories brought us to a new appreciation of who is in our classes. *Critical Moments* continues to remind us that we do not know our students well.

An unforeseen benefit of my association with the Goodrich Program and the project in Washington State is that I have met many educators who share my sense of desperation about our children and their futures. I have participated in numerous conversations with talented administrators, faculty, and staff, who are determined to open up the doors of their institutions wide enough for underrepresented students to enter and are concerned enough about these students' futures to work with them so they can be successful.

*Critical Moments*' ability to focus the deep caring we have for underrepresented students is impressive. However, many committed faculty and staff are as rudderless as their students in knowing how to negotiate power relationships in the institution. The project allows *Critical Moments*' team members, in collaboration with students, to support or question intuitional practices; in turn, team members become more intentional as they direct their time, energy, and talents toward actions that contribute to the well-being of underrepresented students.

For me, *Critical Moments* keeps hope alive. I see a way to dispel the ennui that pervades so many of our young people's academic lives. *Critical Moments* is a small, radical, highly potent way to start to save society's children, and therefore, save ourselves. I have been blessed to be part of the first step of a long journey.

~ George Woods, M.D.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The *Critical Moments* Project: For Equity in Education**

Gillies Malnarich, Washington Center,  
The Evergreen State College

When students speak about their experiences at college, faculty and administrators are eager listeners. We pay particular attention to summaries from interviews, findings from focus groups, and reports on student-faculty dialogues when students do the telling.

In the classroom context, students' accounts of what they are learning often fuel faculty members' scholarly inquiry on teaching and learning. We are keen to know what works, what does not, and for whom. On campuses where student learning is central, the contributions of student affairs professionals are especially valued because they are privy to the "inside stories" told by students. We listen attentively for clues that might help us serve students from all backgrounds better, including those new to college life and college work.

The voices of students often identify higher education's shortcomings, even when students' comments are clearly positive. For instance, students' evaluations of the 2003 Washington State Students of Color Conference<sup>1</sup> are especially revealing for what they indicate about their on-campus experiences. A student, Mekdela, writes: "In everyday life, not so many of us get the opportunity to be involved in a *multicultural* environment. This Students of Color Conference opened my eyes to see the beauty of people of color and their culture." Compared to her home campus, Gloria, another student, suggests that a different dialogue is possible: "I loved being able to talk openly about racism with white people. In everyday life, racism is something I feel very uncomfortable discussing with white people because they usually become defensive and say things like, 'I know some racist black people too'." A third student, William, appreciates that the conference is "a birthplace for new leaders" and realizes what makes it special: "At this conference one can stand up and state their opinion, view, or belief without the worry of being criticized or judged from their position on a certain point."

For educators deeply committed to equity in higher education, student voices such as those above offer compelling evidence of the work institutions need to do to meet the ideals of inclusiveness found in most of their mission statements. Extended conversations with some of our own students

*"I don't want to interview everyone, but I think I'll be a bit more sensitive to the fact that each time I connect with someone we're both just one story away from understanding each other much more deeply, and relating to each other with more empathy."*

*-A South Puget Sound student*

underscore how difficult the first weeks, quarter or semester can be for students new to the academy. For students who are the first in their families to attend college, the adjustment is especially difficult since there are no familial advisors or cultural guides at hand.

### Who Completes College and Who Leaves?

A few years ago, in an article for *Change* magazine provocatively titled, “Diversity: Walk the Walk, and Drop the Talk,” Clifford Adelman (1997) pointed out that “numbers have a remarkable ability to cut through the fog” (40). He called on educators to set aside euphemistic rhetoric on diversity that obscures inequities in higher education in favor of facts, principally those on access and completion rates for whites and minorities. He cited longitudinal studies by the National Center for Education Statistics, beginning in 1972, which tracked several generations of college students. As Adelman noted, the access gap between whites and minorities had closed dramatically while the completion gap remained stubbornly wide. Students of color came to college but few stayed long enough to graduate with a baccalaureate degree.

Troubling facts about rising college attendance and falling completion rates have not changed for the better over the last seven years. Indeed, the completion gap Adelman referred to is now a veritable chasm on some campuses, a grim legacy of what Jonathan Kozol (1991) calls savage inequalities in K-to-12 schooling and Robert Moses (2001) refers to as a sharecropper’s education for children of color and the poor. While higher education no longer shies away from documenting the realities of student lives and the “facts” of their educational experience (for instance, see *Greater Expectations*, AAC&U 2002), we are still not that practiced in figuring out what needs to be done so many more students can be successful in their studies. We do know that unless entering students can develop their academic abilities in learning environments that are both supportive and challenging (Malnarich 2003), access to higher education will only be temporary.

#### Critical moments are

*...critical events in the educational experiences of nontraditional or historically underrepresented students, including mentally and physically challenged students, women students, students of color, gay/lesbian students, older students, and/or first-generation or working class students. “Critical moments” are those times when such students perceived that their difference set them apart and made them vulnerable to dropping out. Feeling silenced, misunderstood, or unable to negotiate articulately, they lived through these critical moments in isolation.*

*But the moments are also critical because they are opportunities for reflective practice, both on the part of students and the institution.*

Gillespie and Woods 2000, 1-2

### Critical Moments in Students’ Lives

When students of color and other underrepresented students in higher education tell their stories, often a single remark or incident is the tipping point that leads them to think about leaving college. The *Critical Moments Project* in Washington State—a collaborative initiative sponsored by The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education—highlights these “critical moments” in our students’ lives. Students are interviewed; their experiences are written as case stories;

these stories, in turn, become starting points for discussions in classroom and other campus settings.

Mindful of the attentiveness paid to students' voices in the academy, *Critical Moments* brings students' stories into the public realm, harnesses the evocative power of cases to promote discussion on difficult topics, and orients problem-solving toward a complex reality where multiple perspectives need to be taken into account. Although cases based on students' experiences offer faculty, staff, and administrators many entry points for rethinking institutional and pedagogical practices that may be less equitable than we believe, *Critical Moments* is primarily intended for students. The project encourages educators to create the kind of environment on campuses and in their own classrooms that Mekdela, Gloria, and William experienced at the Washington State Students of Color Conference.

In its essence, *Critical Moments* is a pedagogical intervention strategy that uses case teaching to promote student empowerment through the development of students' critical thinking and advocacy abilities. While it would be unimaginably short-sighted not to challenge the classroom and campus practices that prompt students to consider leaving college, *Critical Moments'* case stories invite students to work through the limiting situations experienced by other students so they can become more adept problem-solvers in the midst of their own complex "critical moment."

## How This Monograph is Organized

The aim of this monograph is to introduce the *Critical Moments Project* to a broader audience of educators than those at the four partner campuses—Seattle Central Community College, Tacoma Community College, The Evergreen State College, and South Puget Sound Community College—and at other Washington universities and colleges that became interested in the project once the work at the four campuses was underway.

The first section of the monograph describes the origins of the project at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and the fusing of this work to longstanding Washington Center initiatives on improving the academic success of students of color and on the use of cases to develop collaborative teaching and learning. The foundational practice of *Critical Moments* work is briefly described as well as the possibilities for using cases to spark reflective conversations in multiple settings, especially if the case is accompanied by carefully chosen supplementary materials that challenge thinking, deepen understanding, and include promising practices. Key lessons from our collective experience are also highlighted as well as our plans for continuing the inter-institutional aspects of the *Critical Moments Project*.

The second section of the monograph offers readers a more in-depth account of the "why" behind *Critical Moments'* essential foundational components. Diane Gillespie, co-developer of *Critical Moments* at the

University of Nebraska-Omaha and now a faculty member at the University of Washington-Bothell, describes three practices associated with successful *Critical Moments* work: first, the Freire-based critical pedagogy that informs case story writing and makes it different than personal testimony; second, the rationale for creating a multicultural team to shepherd and lead campus work from the project's earliest planning stages; and, third, the desirability of facilitator training if case story discussions are to foster intellectual curiosity and the habits of mind associated with empathetic, able critical thinking. We have divided this account of essential practices into three stand alone parts so each can be used for specific *Critical Moments* workshops.

The third section of the monograph highlights how the four campus partners have adapted the *Critical Moments* model to their own campus cultures and unique circumstances. These campus reports underscore a key lesson: only implement new practices which strengthen and broaden worthwhile work that already exists on the home campus. This section of the monograph also includes samples from *Critical Moments*' campus work: cases based on student interviews; companion cases based on both student and faculty interviews; student-written stories; a performance skit; and curriculum designed to introduce students to "critical moments" experienced by other students.

The fourth section includes references cited in the monograph along with resources that are especially useful in the getting-started period of this work. Appendices include thumbnail sketches of *Critical Moments*' initiatives on campuses other than the partner institutions, the transcript of the case, "What's the Point?," developed by Tacoma Community College and discussed in the first two sections of the monograph, and "A Very Slender Thread," a case specifically developed to address a white student's struggle with the meaning of her white privilege. And for campuses who are determined to base their equity work on "the facts," the last appendix is a brief overview of the *Framework for Diversity Assessment and Planning* developed by multicultural leaders in Washington State with the aid of institutional researchers. The commentary on this instrument's origins and implementation introduces what we hope will become a powerful impetus for change—the use of *Critical Moments*' case stories, coupled with campus facts to encourage difficult, yet rewarding conversations which lead to collective action.

We hope you will be inspired by the work described in this monograph. Adapt what is useful and then let us know how we can support your campus efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Tina Young, Seattle Central Community College, Shirley Sutton, Edmonds Community College, and Victor Chacon, Walla Walla Community College shared students' evaluative comments during a session at the 2003 Faculty and Staff of Color conference.

## ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT SECTION ONE

### **The *Critical Moments Project*: Empowering Students and Communities**

Gillies Malnarich, Washington Center  
The Evergreen State College

The idea for *Critical Moments* grew out of findings from qualitative research studies undertaken with students in the Goodrich Scholarship Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The Goodrich Program attracts academically able and highly motivated students who are often the first in their families to continue their education beyond high school. Known for its intellectual rigor and integrated multicultural curriculum in the humanities and social sciences, the program also offers financial support to students who demonstrate significant need. During their first two years in the program, Goodrich students—60 percent of whom are of color—split their full time course load between the Goodrich learning community and the university at large, earning half of their credits in each area. During their last two years, they take courses in their major while receiving financial aid.

In Spring 1993, when Goodrich faculty and a doctoral student compared research findings drawn from in-depth interviews with Goodrich students, they tracked a common phenomenon: some students did not feel more “connected” to the university by crossing back and forth from Goodrich to the broader academic environment. Instead, the dissonance between the two parts of their academic experience led many students to question their academic worthiness and self-worth. It seemed that the validating, inclusive culture found at Goodrich had not prepared all students to deal with mainstream academic culture and its often debilitating effects.

Goodrich students felt either *invisible* in the everyday activities of the broader university, or they felt *overly visible*, especially in public

“When these things happen to me in class I feel kind of embarrassed because I’m put out in front of the class for a kind of display. . . cause while all this is going on, the class is there. They all are listening, they’re watching and after a couple of minutes, whatever the instructor said just kind of goes through my ears and out the other side because I’m still thinking about that situation and so that interferes a lot with class.

When I got home I felt kind of belittled because I knew I couldn’t do anything about it. . . kind of a powerless situation and then I started thinking about that and then it started to depress me because it made me feel worse and worse as I kept thinking of just me and the whole world and how little I could do for my own situation and then the fear of having to go back to the class and face them again the next day.”

~ From a Goodrich student’s interview transcript

contexts where they were called on to “represent” a certain race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and/or economic class (Gillespie, Cederblom, Seaberry, Valades, and Harrington 1996, 2). These intrusive and imposed roles negated students’ sense of self, and faculty

researchers observed that students typically “used silent negotiations to try to overcome perceived condescension and/or invisibility” (3). The interpretative frameworks that served them well in some cultural contexts proved to be unhelpful and limiting. The “disconnect” between Goodrich students and the broader university further alarmed researchers who saw in students’ accounts evidence of disengagement, the forerunner to dropping out.

*In interviews, underrepresented university students shared patterns of thinking that seemed deeply interconnected with culture, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. For example, forming or joining study groups requires a level of assertiveness that was not comfortable for many students when they had to cross cultural borders.*

Gillespie et al. 1996, 16

Even now, the findings are not particular to the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Why would students underrepresented in higher education be at home in any academic culture that does not affirm their identity? Being written by others into “their” world is profoundly

disempowering; one’s very presence or absence, visibility or invisibility, is independent of oneself. So devalued, students’ self-confidence is undermined and, ultimately, their voice and agency.

The researchers, also teachers in the Goodrich Program, were keen to intervene. “We wanted,” they wrote, “to create spaces where students could make their silent negotiations public” (4).

### Development of the *Critical Moments* Case-Based Model

The Goodrich faculty chose to create *curricular space*—where, with the teacher as expert facilitator, students could examine the “critical moments” in other students’ daily lives, analyze the situational elements, interpret the moments from the different characters’ perspectives, and develop proactive options for the student stuck in the “critical moment” and vulnerable to dropping out. This response to Goodrich students’ academic struggles led to a new approach to case-method writing and teaching—one steeped in student experience, committed to student agency and leadership, and informed by research on racial identity development and the rich literature available in cultural studies.

The first how-to guide, *Critical Moments: A Diversity Case Study Project Manual* (1996), frames “critical moments” with the educational experiences of Goodrich’s nontraditional students in mind: “Feeling silenced, inarticulate, and/or misunderstood, they typically negotiate these critical moments in isolation. Such moments are also critical for the university or college as the presence of cultural diversity on campus is diminished or distorted by students’ silences” (7). With its underlying objective of reinstating student agency, the *Critical Moments* model is applicable to many students’ situations, not only those in the Goodrich

Program. The original project emphasized these aims: increase the contributions of culturally diverse and traditionally underrepresented students; ease their isolation; enable students to collaborate across cultures; promote critical reasoning and empathic understanding through the discussion of issues related to race/ethnicity, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, and physical disability.

The second manual, *Critical Moments: Responding Creatively to Cultural Diversity Through Case Stories* (2000), based on the experience of teaching cases in the Goodrich Program and implementing *Critical Moments* at Omaha’s Metropolitan Community College and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, recast the four original aims as both classroom and institutional goals. A fifth aim has also been added—an explicit reference to developing diversity leadership skills among students and consciousness raising across the campus about the crucial issues faced by underrepresented students.

These broad aims are grounded in a seven-step *Critical Moments* model, where each step creates conditions for the next: 1) form a multicultural team to oversee the project and participate in all stages of its work; 2) identify students to interview; 3) analyze interview transcripts to identify places where students get “stuck” (these places suggest core issues and possible “generative themes”); 4) construct case stories that embed diversity concepts in the narrative and lend themselves to rigorous analysis; 5) train facilitators in issue-oriented and critical thinking case method discussion; 6) integrate the teaching of case studies into existing course work through a course link or lab; and, 7) assess the project, especially the student learning outcomes. For readers who intend to implement *Critical Moments*, the manual offers detailed explanations and a rationale for each step with reference to the lessons learned from using the model on different campuses (also see Section Two of this monograph).

The *Critical Moments* model draws from a substantive teaching practice on case study pedagogy that dates back to 1908 when case teaching was first introduced to the Harvard Business School as a problem-solving laboratory method and from recent literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning (Christenson and Hansen 1987; Hutchings 1993;

*The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained. To some extent, we all know that whenever we address in the classroom subjects that students are passionate about there is always a possibility of confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict. . .*

*Many professors have conveyed to me their feeling that the classroom should be a “safe” place; that usually translates to mean that the professor lectures to a group of quiet students who respond only when they are called on. The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all ‘safe’ in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement.*

hooks 1994, 39

*Despite the focus on diversity, our desires for inclusion, many professors still teach in classrooms that are predominately white. Often a spirit of tokenism prevails in those settings. This is why it is so crucial that “whiteness” be studied, understood, discussed—so that everyone learns that affirmation of multiculturalism, and an unbiased inclusive perspective, can and should be present whether or not people of color are present. Transforming these classrooms is as great a challenge as learning how to teach well in the setting of diversity.*

hooks 1994, 43

McDade 1995; Shulman 1992; Washington Center 1993; Silverman and Welty 1995). Case dilemmas, which on the first reading suggest a simple solution, turn out to be more problematic in the hands of a skillful facilitator who elicits from discussion participants a more thoughtful approach than quick judgments afford. Assessment of the problem from multiple perspectives, a review of possible solutions, and a weighing of options and their implications become an exercise in rigorous analysis. The *Critical Moments* cases adopt this methodology, but introduce the multi-dimensional complexity of cultural diversity.

*Critical Moments* case facilitation also depends upon skillful case writing which extracts from students' stories the "moments" when lived experience, assumed by our students to be "personal," represent

"Having taken several classes that increased my awareness of different cultures and their perspectives, such as Sociology and International Relations, I consider myself relatively sensitive to the issues surrounding cultural diversity—but the Critical Moments class has brought out a number of misperceptions and prejudices that were still lurking in my subconscious. For instance, one of the case stories dealt with a female student attempting to cope with the pressures of raising a small child while going to college. A few of us 'hit the roof' when we read that the woman in the story had just gotten pregnant again. This brought out a deeply held antagonism that many in the class expressed toward women who have what they considered to be ill-timed pregnancies. For me, the case story brought out my own judgmental and culturally biased views in this area—and in the process of writing about the case story, I was able to address some prejudices that I'd been unaware of having. Each of the cases we've studied has had a similarly horizon-expanding effect on me—each of our class discussions has brought out truly valuable pieces of information—corny as it sounds, I feel I've really 'grown' as a result of the class."

~ A Seattle Central student's reflection paper

concentrated inequities. These moments are both windows into the world of social analysis and entry points for proposing solutions that are less about what individuals need to do to cope and more about the complex mix of thinking and practices that create "critical moments." The idea of a "generative theme" (see Diane Gillespie's discussion in the section two) is crucial to the *Critical Moments* diversity case method approach. Building on the work of Freire (2003) and Padilla (1992), the Goodrich team (2000) underscores the research finding that most troubled them about their students' experiences: "they had had, not singular, isolated, extraordinary experiences that led them to question their cultural competence and ability to stay in school, but ordinary experiences in their daily lives that led to a gradual withdrawal from potentially supportive networks" (26). The Goodrich team, informed by the work of Freire, wanted to develop a methodology that would "introduce" students to liberating interpretative frameworks and action.

Well-taught cases invite discussants to linger and stay present in the complexity of a situation. The attentiveness given to each

character's perspective and viewpoint models behaviors that mirror the abilities needed to thrive in and benefit from a culturally diverse campus and classroom. While educators appreciate the unpredictable nature of case discussions and the insights that result (Oberholtzer 1993), student-centered *Critical Moments*' case discussions tend to be very intentional: the five aims named earlier—from increasing the contributions of culturally-diverse students to changing inequitable practices in the classroom and on the campus—are realized through

case discussions over time. The development of students' critical thinking abilities is not constrained by the case narrative; classroom use of *Critical Moments'* cases assumes the use of supplementary materials. For instance, different campuses have used the work of Allan G. Johnson, specifically the book *Privilege, Power, and Difference* (2001) to introduce students to an applied theoretical model for understanding how various differences, especially those based on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, are attached to interlocking systems of privilege and oppression that play out in society. Johnson's concluding chapter, "What Can We Do? Becoming Part of the Solution," complements the *Critical Moments* approach.

### The Washington Center and *Critical Moments*

For the Washington Center, the opportunity to work with Diane Gillespie, George Woods, and campus partners on a statewide *Critical Moments'* initiative extended existing work on case-based professional development and also introduced an emphasis on students' voices in diversity work.

*The Washington Center Casebook on Collaborative Teaching and Learning* (1993) contributed to the renewed interest, among faculty, in case teaching and case writing. "Whose Agenda?," one of the most popular cases, raises issues about the roles of faculty and students in learning communities. Based on one faculty member's "critical incident" experience in the then "new" collaborative classroom, the authenticity of the case sparked spirited inquiries into changing expectations for students and for faculty. Best of all, the problem-based case methodology resulted in rich conversations that brought theory and practice together so participants went away with practical ideas in mind informed by research on learning.

Since 1989 the Washington Center has worked with the Washington State Board for Technical and Community Colleges, the University of Washington, and other institutions on a series of diversity initiatives beginning with the *Minority Student Success Project* (1989-1991), followed by the *Cultural Pluralism Project* (1991-1995)—a collaboration with the University of Washington's Ethnic Studies Department, and other projects related to the academic success of students of color (1995 to present). But as a reviewer of the draft proposal submitted to The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation commented: "The list of initiatives at work in Washington since 1989 is impressive but so are the dismal statistics you cite earlier. Why hasn't that decade-long effort had more effect?" In response, the Washington Center pointed to the "whiteness" of the state as well as to the following advances: the creation of campus-wide diversity committees, the addition of diversity and multiculturalism in college mission

*We can find guidance in the wisdom of many individuals, cultures, traditions, bodies of knowledge, and forms of practice. It need not be us versus them, old versus new, or one versus many—not if we can exercise some of the most basic of our human capacities fully and courageously.*

Minnich 1991, 6

statements, the upsurge in professional development related to cultural pluralism, and the development of inclusive curriculum. The Center also believed that *Critical Moments*, a means for developing student agency and leadership, would strengthen our collective efforts. A series of training sessions, begun in 1999, introduced campus teams to the *Critical Moments* model.

### ***Critical Moments* as an Inter-Institutional Initiative**

Like any practice, *Critical Moments*' work can be applied without regard to context or purpose. Cases that have little connection to the people asked to discuss them can end the potential of *Critical Moments*' work; cases introduced without regard for deepening participants' understanding through the use of substantive supplementary materials can reduce *Critical Moments* to just another trick from the bag of tricks, engagement severed from purpose.

Funding from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has allowed interested institutions to deepen *Critical Moments*' work on their home campus. Since 2000, the four partner institutions—Seattle Central Community College, South Puget Sound Community College, The Evergreen State College, and Tacoma Community College—and their *Critical Moments*' teams have shepherded *Critical Moments* through the high bank and rough terrain of institutional cultures. All of us involved in the project appreciate the hard, persistent work that precedes real change.

The evolving plans of these campus teams have been seasoned by individuals' years of multicultural activism; they are ingenious, complex, iterative, and sure-footed. The results are inspiring, participants' comments—students, faculty and staff—especially moving. Evidence of personal discovery is present, tempered by the development of critical inquiry, particularly where work with students occurs within the context of a course or module.

Each partner institution's work has moved *Critical Moments* into new territory. Seattle Central Community College has developed and piloted the use of companion case stories that offer two very different and detailed perspectives on the same "moment," one from a student's perspective and another from a faculty's. At both Seattle Central and Tacoma Community Colleges, the faculty/staff *Critical Moments* teaching teams represent groundbreaking efforts to bring expertise from student affairs into the classroom. The integration of *Critical Moments* into the work of First Peoples' Advising Services developed at The Evergreen State College illustrates how co-curricular activities are a fertile ground for developing student leadership and agency. *Critical Moments* is not for one set of students only; the decisions to find "curricular spaces" in particular courses led South Puget Sound Community College team members to develop curriculum designed to

give students an *experience* of empathetic perspective-taking. At this college and Tacoma Community College, student-written stories about their classmates' experiences have helped students appreciate the perspectives of others in a deep and, we suspect, lasting way.

To our collective surprise, on three separate campuses, two interviews with students and a student-written story turned into case stories about math. This unexpected development led to the publication of a *Critical Moments'* newsletter and its theme, math education. The headline for the lead article, "But Can They Do Math?" introduces Sonia Nieto's work to a readership beyond multicultural leaders. In her book, *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities* (1999), she argues that this question is profoundly multicultural since it is about access to learning. At Seattle Central, South Puget Sound and Tacoma Community Colleges, involving math teachers in the review and revision of campus-based math cases allowed *Critical Moments'* teams to work more directly with faculty associated with classic gatekeeper courses. We also invited math educators from these and other institutions to join a seminar at one of our retreats on issues related to standards, testing, and equity in mathematics education.

Case story discussion when tied to the use of appropriate scholarship advances critical inquiry in multiple settings. For instance, the Tacoma Community College math case, "What's the Point?," developed with support from colleagues at the University of Washington-Bothell, has been used in classrooms at several campuses, at faculty/staff retreats, at the National Science Foundation's *Project Kaleidoscope*, and at an Association of American Colleges and Universities conference. For math teachers, the work of such scholars as Robert P. Moses (2001) and Uri Treisman (1988) can connect the case to discussions of how socio-economic factors and culture can influence how one learns math. For students, a math case discussion may lead to the discovery that anxiety related to learning math is rarely tied to an inability to learn math but to humiliating incidents in grade school. For teachers, a math case discussion may focus attention on students' experiences of learning math and on creating a transition curriculum that helps translate everyday language into the language of symbolic logic. Adding the works of Robert Ibarra, bell hooks, and Beverly Tatum also re-situates the learning of math within the domain of cultural studies. For state jurisdictions, math cases may reveal the fallout from a

*I want to argue, the most urgent social issue affecting poor people and people of color is economic access. In today's world, economic access and full citizenship depend crucially on math and science literacy. I believe that the absence of math literacy in urban and rural communities throughout this country is an issue as urgent as the lack of registered Black voters in Mississippi was in 1961. I believe we can get the same kind of consensus we had in the 1960s for the effort of repairing this. And I believe that solving the problem requires exactly the kind of community organizing that changed the South in the 1960s. This has been my work—and that of the Algebra Project—for the past twenty years.*

*I know how strange it can sound to say that math literacy—and algebra in particular—is the key of disenfranchised communities, but that's what I think, and believe with all of my heart.*

Moses 2001, 5

poorly thought out and misaligned sequence of math courses. For national educational reformers and policy-makers, a math case discussion may prompt a more inclusive understanding of math reform.

Each campus will find its own way to work with *Critical Moments*. By the end of the third year of the Hewlett-funded project, it became obvious that institutions would eventually have their own public “critical moment.” And when this does occur, the insistence that a *Critical Moments* team be multicultural turns out to be wise since the trust developed among team members means this team will likely be the first to respond, marshalling expertise and resources.

Given what the project consultants have described as *Critical Moments* “center of gravity,” that is, underrepresented students’ stories, we need to heed Lee Shulman’s (1992) warning that cases can lend themselves to stereotyping. And, if this occurs, we stereotype our students and defeat the very purpose of *Critical Moments*. The hard work of figuring out a generative theme is the best antidote to stereotypical responses. This is why Paulo Freire’s work in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is so important to understand: we cannot, in the name of the powerful, liberate the disempowered.

For Washington Center, the first Campus Equity and Engagement Retreat in February 2004 brought together campus teams who want access for underrepresented students to lead to degree completion. *Critical Moments* is an integral part of the work we all hope to accomplish in the coming years, for what we collectively learn from students’ experiences—as told by them—brings the disparate parts of the academy together *to act*. Such is the power of student voice in all its diversity.

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES  
GENERATIVE THEMES  
SECTION TWO

**Generative Themes and Case Stories:  
Moving from Personal Experience to  
Patterns of Inequality**

Diane Gillespie, University of Washington - Bothell

The identification and analysis of generative themes anchor the *Critical Moments Project*, from conducting and analyzing student interviews to facilitating discussions of cases. The themes act as generators, giving energy and focus to discussions on the part of the team as they write cases and to the students as they discuss them. The term *generative theme* is taken from Paulo Freire’s (2002) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire believed that educators must listen to and “respect the particular view of the world held by [students]” (95). As they enter institutions of higher education, students bring with them ways of knowing and explaining their experiences. To understand how students think, Freire believed that educators must investigate their students’ “thematic universe—the complex of their ‘generative themes’” (96). Derived from lived experience, a generative theme is a general statement about or an assessment of reality that, upon investigation, reveals larger patterns of inequalities.

For example, take the working class student who said to her classmates, “I really type well but don’t qualify for the higher paying job at my company because I don’t own a laptop computer. All the employees bring them back and forth from home.” This statement is thematic; that is, based on her experiences on the job, the student has drawn a conclusion about personal resources necessary for promotion. The conclusion is generative because it points to larger economic inequities. Technology has widened the class divide. Those who are economically advantaged own home computers and other technological devices that economically disenfranchised people cannot afford. But the student has drawn an incorrect conclusion; namely, that the company did not provide laptops for their employees. (It turned out, when she investigated this situation, the company did loan them to employees.)

*The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.*

Freire 2002, 95-6

Generative themes, then, are a means to connect students' personal experience to larger socioeconomic and political patterns in society. Overwhelmed by the complexities of their everyday experiences, students can become buried in their situations. So stuck, they are unable to formulate larger contexts for interpretation and action and often

believe that they must act alone through exerting willpower. If a generative theme can be identified in their experiences, the theme will open up the situation for further thinking, investigation, and even collective action. Freire argues that generative themes arise in situations that have become *limited* through socially- and economically-oppressive practices. He identifies "limit situations" as the constellation of boundaries that constrain actions and thoughts and so prevent oppressed people from thinking and acting freely. Students must become aware of these limit situations so that they see such constraints are not immutable givens in the world but the product of history and social relations. And, not all themes work out so neatly as in the above example about laptops. What if the company had not provided them? What actions might change the policies and practices of such a company?

*Critical Moments* cases depict just such generative themes embedded in limit situations, but case writers build in potential openings—places where protagonists could reasonably (not magically) act to change their circumstances. During discussions of the case, the students are figuring out where there are possibilities for new action that might make a difference. Take, for example, the case "What's the Point?" (See Appendix Two.) A community college student, Brenda is in Math 97, a class she needs to pass to enroll in Math 107. She needs Math 107 to go into her pre-social work major. But the constellation of beliefs she holds about herself and

learning math paralyzes her, limiting her potential to act for herself and with others. Her father humiliated her when she sought help; she is embarrassed in front of her peers in small groups when she does not have the "right" answer; she has never had a foreign-born teacher before; she believes that learning math is an innate trait that people such as her friend Julie just "have." Julie is the first female peer she knows who does well in math.

The generative theme of "What's the Point?" is located in the knot of gender expectations that surrounds Brenda. She is a typically socialized young woman who assumes (via her father) that women cannot do math, but more she is motivated by helping other people. Her math experiences have rendered her incapable of being with or helping others

*True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. . . . For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of [human beings].*

*Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education.*

Freire 2002, 92-3

in her math class and thus her incompetence is painful. Her friendship with Julie is disrupting her schema about women and math, as is the friendliness and apparent helpfulness of her foreign-born teacher.

The generative theme opens discussion, Freire believes, because the perceived limits in any situation suggest their opposite; that is, the situation could have been otherwise arranged. Freire states, “[Themes] are always interacting dialectically with their opposites” (101). In identifying the theme, students and educators make visible the limits of the situation and concomitantly open up possibilities for how “things could be different.” Within any limit situation lie actions and interpretations that have not been tested or considered. In “What’s the Point?” for example, Brenda is very close to going to see the math instructor. Would that make a difference? Should she go with Julie the first time? Students often experience generative themes as double binds, paradoxes or contradictions. Naming and reconsidering them stimulates new thinking and possibilities for action. What was seen as given or fixed is now open for testing and transformation. *Critical Moments’* case stories, where diversity is at issue, give students opportunities to practice this way of thinking about situations.

Open discussions of generative themes related to diversity are also important for helping students to identify patterns of structural inequalities. Freire argues that those in power “mythicize” reality. For example, take the myth of meritocracy: students are told that their success is the result of their hard work and effort. In part, it is, but they also need to understand the correlations between status markers such as gender and class and educational attainment. Such structural analyses are often new to students or only intermittently available to them. Gaining a new, critical understanding of reality requires disciplined, intellectual effort. Freire notes that students experience fragments of the reality in a given context; they need a structural or holistic view but cannot get outside their position or standpoint. What the educator must do is *present the theme* so that it stimulates critical thinking. In the discussion of “What’s the Point?” facilitators might ask, for example, “Why are so few women in the field of math?” Through interaction about the circumstances, students develop a bigger picture of the situation, which then allows them to generate different possibilities and strategies for the protagonist and other characters in the story. What if, for example, Brenda’s teacher had required all his students to meet with him early in the course? What if he had invited them to come in pairs? What if the math course included Supplemental Instruction?

*The danger [of thematic investigation] lies in the risk of shifting the focus of the investigation from the meaningful themes to the people themselves, thereby treating the people as objects of the investigation.*

Freire 2002, 107

*Thematic investigation... thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character.*

Freire 2002, 107

*Critical Moments'* campus teams find that attending to generative themes determines the quality of interviews and case writing and teaching. Generative themes play a crucial role during the student interview and eventually in choosing students to interview. Interviewers must identify limit situations that have vital generative themes so that they can explore the experiential dimensions of those themes with

students. Such details about the overall experience of the situation are necessary for the case writer, who needs to embed the generative theme in a narrative that is believable. Both the plausibility of the case situation and its embedded generative theme create the spark for discussion among students. Finally, the facilitator of the case story discussion must be aware of the theme and plan questions in advance that will help it emerge during the students' discussion.

*The program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found. . . . The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to "re-present" that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and "re-present" it not as a lecture, but as a problem.*

Freire 2002, 109

Cases with generative themes encode experience so that it might be discussed at a more general level than if the experiences were just idiosyncratic or random. *Critical Moments'* cases are not direct accounts of experience. They are coded in narratives of students, as protagonists, facing problematic situations. Embedded in such real-life stories, generative themes awaken students' thinking and reflecting. Mobilized to respond, students learn to identify features of limit

situations, especially around issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and disability; they develop critical reasoning skills that allow them to test new possibilities in such limit situations; they experience the power of collective thinking in small groups (as opposed to an individual struggling in isolation); they generate new options for action.

## The Multicultural Team: Securing Success Early On

Diane Gillespie, University of Washington-Bothell

Identifying and working with generative themes requires sensitivity to and knowledge about students' cultural contexts. A *Critical Moments'* team needs to be culturally diverse in order to respond effectively to the critical moments of culturally diverse students. The team's diversity provides multiple perspectives on students' experiences so that the generative themes in student stories are discovered, understood, and accurately depicted in case stories. Different contributions can identify biased interpretations of student interviews, locate places in the draft of a case that might promote stereotypes, or help deepen how the theme is embedded in the case story. The role of the *Critical Moments'* campus team is to oversee the integrity of the project in the context of the diversity in a given campus setting.

If *Critical Moments* is to take root on a campus, our experience suggests that the team needs to be as culturally diverse as possible, and its membership should draw broadly from the school's community and be strategically composed so that administrators, faculty, and staff are represented. Above all, its composition should reflect, minimally, the culturally diverse perspectives that will be brought out in the case stories. The team also needs to garner administrative support for the project so that *Critical Moments* is recognized as a legitimate diversity endeavor on the campus. The multicultural team is not only necessary for the success of the project with students, but it can become a powerful catalyst for creating institutional change.

On the four partner campuses, *Critical Moments* began with a small group of interested faculty, administrators, and/or staff who had heard about the project or had attended *Critical Moments'* training workshops. As this group worked together to explore the feasibility of the project on their campus, they gradually coalesced into a core *Critical Moments'* team consisting of anywhere from five to twenty members, all of whom were interested in being actively involved in the development of the project. Each core team recruited a larger group of interested supporters who were willing to serve as specific needs arose.

*"We discussed all types of issues, male/female, black/white, you know, type issues. And when we got into Humanities, we discussed those same issues relating to different cultures and it did kind of prepare me for that, to the point that I wasn't so quick to anger. I was able to listen to the other side to see what the other side had to say and then I would still stand my ground if I still believed it. And if not then I was willing to say, 'you know, I see this from another side and I can understand your side.'"*

*-A Goodrich student*

As the teams solidified, they recognized that they needed legitimacy as a campus-wide project and so devoted considerable attention to recruiting team members and educating administrators about the nature of the *Critical Moments Project*. Such early groundwork with administrators proved invaluable since a supportive administration often finds resources or bureaucratic shortcuts to help support the team. Once administrators understood the nature of the project, it was evident that the team needed a coordinator with released time to oversee the entire process. The proposal to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation was also

predicated on partner institutions matching the grant funds with in-kind contributions. To maximize functioning, team members' work depended on the availability of such campus resources so energy could be spent on the central activities of the project: collecting interviews, writing cases, creating curricular spaces for discussion of cases, teaching them, and selecting supplemental materials.

In addition to *Critical Moments* being recognized as a campus-wide endeavor, all partner institutions' projects gained vitality from the variety of perspectives made possible by the mixture of faculty, staff, and administrators on the teams. Frequently, concerned educators say that culturally diverse students "fall through the cracks"; those cracks are more often than not part of a breakdown in communication between various areas of an institution. Faculty members do not discuss issues with staff and vice versa; similarly, administrators can become removed from the everyday experiences of students and faculty on the campus. All teams found that the cross-institutional communication between faculty, staff, and administrators strengthened the teams' efforts to create a more culturally responsive campus. On some teams, administrators and staff became directly involved in teaching the cases; on other teams, faculty conducted the interviews. Faculty members learned about the dynamics of staff's work with student organizations even as staff became more aware of classroom issues.

On one of the campuses, the diversity of the *Critical Moments'* team became instrumental when an institutional "critical moment" occurred that deeply hurt faculty of color on the team. In this situation, the administration saw first hand the value of having a cross-institutional group available for dialogue and cross-cultural learning. As a result of an intervention on the part of the team, the administration has begun to implement larger institutional changes, such as creating a multicultural center. On another

### On the diversity of the team

Little has been written, even in the *Critical Moments* manual, of the seminal role of a multicultural team in the success of teaching our students to think and feel culturally supported. In *Critical Moments: Responding Creatively to Cultural Diversity Through Case Stories*, we note: "Because of the cultural diversity issues embedded in the stories, we recommend that as diverse a team as possible be involved in discussing the interviews and writing."

But, what does "as diverse a team as possible" mean? What are the ways in which a group has to be "diverse" in order to develop and sustain *Critical Moments* work?

Each person brings a personal cultural knowledge to the team. ...a *Critical Moments* team that does not attempt to incorporate persons of color, older persons, physically and mentally challenged individuals, and people with religious differences, people of different genders, as well as people of different sexual orientations must be aware of the potential limitations in its ability to authentically and accurately portray students' voices.

The diversity of the *Critical Moments* team is a powerful modeling tool for the rest of the college and university, and its membership should attempt to represent as many of the cultures on campus as possible.

George Woods, consultant, Washington Center  
*Critical Moments Project*

campus, an administrator became involved in a student interview. In part, as a result of the experience, this person took on an even larger research project interviewing African-American female students who reported on the ways in which the campus had become an inviting educational setting for them. In team meetings, faculty, administrators, and staff come together to consider the welfare of culturally diverse students and inevitably find ways to connect their efforts in ways that might not otherwise happen. Such cross-institutional collaboration also allows the team to identify and change institutional practices that adversely affect students' educational progress. It also creates awareness of where students might be challenged.

Take for example, the case "What's the Point?" The diverse Tacoma Community College team that created this case made two important decisions as the case was being written. First, the faculty member in the case was of color. It would have been easy to overlook that aspect of the student's experiences in developing her math anxiety, given a focus on gender. Students' negative reactions to foreign-born teachers and/or teachers of color might result from their lack of exposure to them (another generative theme), but often the reactions are unconscious, a result of the assumption that everyone must adjust to predominant cultural practices. Unaware that they hold a stereotype, students are unwilling to explore their assumptions until such assumptions are made explicit. Keeping this aspect in the case enriches the students' discussion of the anxiety the protagonist experiences in her math class. Second, the protagonist of the case is a young woman who has anxiety about math, but the team recognized that not all women fear math. Thus they created Julia as a balancing perspective. With each of these issues, team members brought out multiple perspectives about the situation that led to writing a case that invites students and others to discuss its multicultural complexities.

*Critical Moments* embeds learning *in community*, both for students participating in case discussions and teams carrying out the project. The Project needs to be connected to the campus culture and its communities in order to grow and develop. Forming the multicultural team is an ongoing process as faculty, staff, and administrators contribute to *Critical Moments* in different ways and at different points in time. Managing the flux in involvement, a coordinator and core advisory group continues to develop curricular materials, organize case discussions, lead seminars, and assess project outcomes.

### **On the relationship between the student interviewer and the multicultural team**

The interviewer, although sensitive to the student's cultural experience, may not be in a position to understand the complexity and richness of the student's expression of his/her culture. For example, different primary languages, cultural differences in expressing power differentials, and use of dialect can be cultural subtleties that may be lost to the interviewer. However, a multicultural team allows others than the specific interviewer to "interpret" the cultural ramifications found in the interview, and focus on generative themes that develop from those ramifications.

George Woods, consultant,  
Washington Center *Critical Moments*  
*Project*

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES  
CASE FACILITATION  
SECTION TWO

## Case Facilitation: Deepening Understanding of Diversity Through Critical Thinking

Diane Gillespie, University of Washington-Bothell

The primary purpose of the curriculum materials developed by the *Critical Moments Project* team is to foster students' critical thinking abilities and enhance their capacity to imagine new responses when they confront diversity problems. The project also aims to help students appreciate peer collaboration. Good generative themes help spark discussion, but once the discussions start, facilitators need to know how to guide discussions so that students practice critical thinking. Since the exercise and development of critical thinking abilities is an intended outcome of case discussions, the teams have found that skillful facilitation of the cases is essential to the success of the program. They learn to be mindful about how a case will be taught from the beginning of its development, especially in team discussions that refine the draft case's generative theme.

In the manual *Critical Moments: Responding Creatively to Cultural Diversity through Case Stories* (Gillespie and Woods 2000), the chapter on teaching cases describes, in-depth, how to teach cases to enhance critical thinking. The campus teams use this chapter with a handout created for students which describes the four competences that are the central aims of the *Critical Moments Project*: problem-solving, social interaction, interpretation, and familiarity with cultural diversity. (The handout is reprinted on the following page). These competencies and skills become a way to help both students and facilitators prepare for case discussions. As team members began to facilitate case discussions, two challenges surfaced: how to get students to move, during a single case discussion, from initial one-dimensional analysis to multi-dimensional analyses and how to prepare the discussion for one class in light of past and future case discussions, so students systematically use their growing knowledge of diversity literature and research to appreciate patterns of inequalities embedded in case stories.

In their first experiences teaching cases, facilitators usually find that students participate readily in case discussions, but their contributions tend to be disconnected and "all over the map." As a result, the direction of the discussion becomes unclear and hard to manage. Often

## *Sample Student Handout*

### **Goals of the *Critical Moments* Diversity Leadership Learning Community**

The purpose of the case story discussion seminar is four fold: to increase students' abilities in problem solving, critical thinking, social interaction, and textual analysis and interpretation through exploring the meanings of cultural diversity. These abilities have been found to help students succeed academically. Throughout the quarter, the facilitator will highlight particular skills, such as perspective taking, to make students aware of the contribution of that skill to effective thinking and communication.

The cases for this seminar were drawn from the experiences of real students on this campus, students who were eventually successful in terms of reaching their academic goals. Through in-depth interviews, the *Critical Moments* team listened to students describe times when they perceived that their gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, and/or disability became problematic for them or put them at risk as a student. In other words, they described "critical moments" in their education. The team then used their words to craft problem-based stories. We do not think that every student will face the same situations that these students faced, but we think that knowing what happened to successful students and considering alternative responses will better prepare you to face challenges on this campus. The seminar is designed to strengthen the following capacities:

- **problem-solving:** attending to and defining the problem, brainstorming, considering alternatives through analysis of consequences, and determining goals
- **social interaction:** listening, taking the perspective of others, empathic responding, asserting one's own views, sharing feelings and important and relevant life experiences, bringing others into the discussion, negotiating differences and resolving conflict, and building consensus
- **interpretation:** extracting relevant material from the cases and using it as evidence to support one's opinion; identifying tacit and explicit assumptions and inferences in giving a perspective on the situation in the case; moving from concrete examples to explanation
- **mindful consideration of cultural-diversity:** understanding the social construction of categories such as race, sex/gender, class; identifying labeling and stereotypes and various "–isms," such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism including their institutional forms; gaining understanding of white privilege, assimilation and accommodation, and the complex relationship between identity and experience

encouraging many different students to participate compounds the problem as the thread of the discussion becomes hard to grasp, let alone to pull through to connect individual students' insights. In response, teams practiced facilitating case discussions by analyzing videotapes of case discussions in action. They also practiced talking about the case among themselves before teaching it to students. From these experiences, teams identified three phases as important in facilitating a successful single case discussion. In a first phase, students are encouraged to stay focused on their understandings of the situation. By asking them to tie their remarks to the text, facilitators help students develop a sense of what is explicit and what is implicit, what they know and do not know about the situation. In a second phase, the facilitator turns to the problem-solving skills and the cultural diversity content assigned to the case by framing questions that encourage multiple perspectives on the situation and bring to the fore the nature of the cultural diversity issue in the case. In a final phase, students consider different actions and their outcomes and apply what they have learned to other situations.

### **Making case discussions effective**

*The facilitator plans what intellectual skills the students will practice, from supporting their views with examples from the text to rephrasing what others have said to disagreeing and compromising. Choosing and defining certain diversity concepts such as stereotype vulnerability or marginalization before a discussion helps students apply those terms during the discussion...*

*Through discussion of case stories, we want students to become aware of their own others' patterns of thinking. Thus, the facilitator helps students examine explicit and implicit beliefs, assumptions, and preferences and become conscious of how they recognize and integrate new information into their existing knowledge structures as they analyze problematic situations. Students need to identify and examine evidence for their assumptions and beliefs and to recognize procedures for such evaluation.*

Gillespie and Woods 2000, 66

In the first phase of case discussions particularly, facilitators faced a common problem with student responses: some students simply blame the protagonist as victim. They announce that the protagonist is a loser, someone who is weak and ineffective. Their one-dimensional framing allows them to offer prescriptions: "She should just stand up to her antagonist." Such prescriptions are examples of wishful or quasi-magical thinking; that is, if the protagonist just does what we tell her to do, everything will work out. These responses seek to locate power outside the situation, as if a solution can be injected into the protagonist. Faced with prescriptive student responses, facilitators need to encourage students to see the situation from the protagonist's point of view. Students can be reminded that the cases are about very successful students who were ultimately able to accomplish their academic goals but got stuck in the situation described in the case. Their wish to control the situation from the outside in an authoritarian way is not surprising given the emphasis on individualism in our culture. Of course, troubles are neither located in a person or in a situation but in the interaction—really transaction—between persons and their situations. We learned that once facilitators anticipate this type of student response, they can ask questions that redirect students to the larger problematic situation and its multiple dimensions. In some instances, discussing wishful or quasi-magical thinking itself can be useful.

Finally, the facilitators also learned that framing each new case discussion in light of the competencies developed in former discussions and ones to be developed in future discussions help students

see the value of the case discussions for their learning. In the same way that facilitators thought of each case discussion in terms of phases, so, too, they began to think of case discussions as evolving over the course of a quarter or semester in stages. In the first stage of case discussions, campus teams find that students are developing trust and ways of working across their cultural differences. In the next stage, students test out differences, explore how cultural differences matter in the larger picture, and struggle to see how they fit in the power relations that are both in the group and the culture at large. And, in the last stage, students apply the discussions to their lives outside the group, seeing case situations as similar to those in their own or their friends' lives; they figure out how they will respond proactively in situations that appear limiting. In this last stage, facilitators found that they could then identify supportive institutional resources for the students as well as individuals on campus (or in the community) who could be allies with them.

Facilitation challenges can be exemplified by considering how one might teach the math case "What's the Point?" (See Appendix Two.) Before preparing for the discussion, a trained facilitator would involve team members in a conversation about key issues in the case to see how others framed them. She would also consider the stage students are in given their past discussions and their development of the four competencies. Based on these considerations, she would prepare a series of discussion questions that fall into the phases described above. First, she might ask questions, such as "What happens in this case?" "Who's the protagonist/the antagonist and why?" She then might compose questions for the next phase of the discussion that turn to cultural diversity considerations and problem-solving skills: "How does the label 'helpful to others' promote and hinder a woman's ability to act?" "Robert Moses has argued that learning math is a civil right. Do you agree with him?" Finally, in the last phase of the discussion she might craft questions about solutions and the consequences: "What are the advantages/disadvantages for Brenda of going with Julie to the teacher the next time Julie goes?" "What other potential resources does Brenda have for help with her math besides Julie and the teacher?" It might also be appropriate to introduce someone from the campus math lab at the end of such a discussion so that students see available, accessible campus resources. Such thoughtful preparations for *Critical Moments* case discussions are more than rewarded. Facilitators observe students as they link their critical thinking to issues of cultural diversity, equity and social justice.

### The role of the facilitator

*...the facilitator can successfully join the discussion as a participant. George Woods led a discussion of "Survival Soliloquy" with a group of African-American male students. At a crucial point, a student suggested that African-American men have difficulty asking professors for help because of pride. The student stated African-American men are unwilling to reveal that they don't know something or that they need help. An African American himself, Dr. Woods posed the question, "But is this pride?" In the discussion that follows, he didn't answer the question directly, but he talked about his own college experiences and listened as the students told about theirs. The same student who had originally appealed to pride concluded, "It's not pride that keeps us from seeking help—it's fear.*

Gillespie and Woods 2000, 77

*"I tend to think my point is correct all the time. And I complain to myself and I'm not afraid to voice myself. And I learned to step back and listen...I gotta sit back and be quiet for a while which was really different. Cause you really don't know someone else's culture. You gotta understand it from their side first. You gotta listen."*

*- A Goodrich student*

## PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

### SECTION THREE

The *Critical Moments Project* brings together faculty, staff, and administrators whose wisdom, tenacity, and long-term commitment to diversity and equity has earned the respect of their peers within and outside their own institution.

The reports of partner institutions that follow illustrate how different campus teams came to find the best fit between a *Critical Moments*’ approach and their existing work. Knowing how a promising practice from another place can be adapted to your campus circumstances—and complex set of relationships—is not immediately obvious, as anyone who has tried to root new ideas into the well-trod ground of campus culture, knows. The different pathways *Critical Moments* represent may not be so apparent, even to those colleagues immersed in the work, until time is taken to draw a collective breath and reflect.

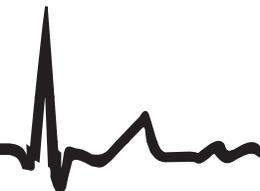
While the *Critical Moments* model originates from work undertaken at the Goodrich Scholarship program, it turns out that its essentials can be applied elsewhere as the reports indicate. Perhaps this is the case because *Critical Moments* grew out of an experience Goodrich students had that is still not so different for students like themselves on many campuses across the country. For students underrepresented in college, we seek a new pathway, one where there is no need to follow the too well-traveled road between very different places—one respectful and nurturing, the other unwisely and heartbreakingly indifferent. In its many iterations, *Critical Moments* aims to bring disparate “worlds” together.

Like any account of what has been done, why, and with what results, “text” rarely reflects the layers of what people individually and collectively learn. At a project meeting to plan this publication and discuss “lessons learned, wisdom earned,” we began to name what matters most about this work. As you might imagine, people’s practice comes from a deep place of knowing.

“What does difference mean on our campus, especially for students, and how are we all affected by or implicated in these meanings?”

-George Woods and Diane Gillespie

# SEATTLE CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



## The Critical Moments Project

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## CAMPUS PROFILE

**S**eattle Central Community College is located in the urban core directly above Seattle's business district. Since its beginning in 1966 as the first community college in the city, close to 350,000 students have attended the college. Seattle Central is known for a collaborative learning approach to education and its integration of computer use into most classes. The college offers a college transfer program, over thirty professional technical programs, a large international education program, adult basic education, and continuing education to a diverse student population.

In September 2001, *Time* magazine named Seattle Central Community College as one of four "Colleges of the Year"—the only two-year college and the only college located on the West Coast to be included in this annual college issue. The recognition brought the college into the national and international spotlight. Seattle Central was chosen because of its high quality instruction and unique multicultural environment. The *Time* article emphasized the diversity of its student body, staff, and faculty and how this diversity enhances the learning experiences of Seattle Central students. The article also cited the college's pioneering work in establishing learning communities and coordinated studies programs, designing professional technical programs, and providing integrated, cross-departmental support for the college's first-year students.

Each fall, Seattle Central enrolls close to 11,000 students. Almost 30 percent of the total number of students in programs eligible for aid receives need-based financial support and almost half of the students attend on a part-time basis. Close to a quarter of the student population have children or dependents. People of color account for over 50 percent of the student body and one-third of Seattle Central students speak a first language other than English. Of the over 900 employees, approximately one-third are people of color, and part-time faculty constitute about 25 percent of the teaching body.

## ABOUT CRITICAL MOMENTS AT SEATTLE CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**R**esponsiveness, innovation, accessibility, and diversity are the cornerstones of Seattle Central Community College’s mission and values. Since the early 1980s, diversity, in particular, has garnered widespread support across the institution. Through professional development opportunities, sponsored by outside agencies as well as by Seattle Central, faculty, staff, and administrators have been developing the skills and expertise necessary to transform the college.

### Diversity: A Deep-Rooted Practice

The *Critical Moments Project* is part of a number of efforts aimed at enhancing diversity and the learning that can result from it. Even before becoming involved in *Critical Moments*, Seattle Central named the recruitment and retention of students of color as high priorities. As early as 1989, the Minority Incentive Committee initiated a planning process to improve institutional practices, and cultural diversity has continued to be a focus for campus action.

Like most colleges around the country, Seattle Central is engaged in ongoing work to revitalize its curriculum and has taken advantage of workshops and resources provided by organizations such as the Washington Center. Since 1984, the college has been active in developing learning communities, a statewide and national initiative supported by the Washington Center. Its Coordinated Studies Program (the name for Seattle Central’s learning communities) incorporates multiple disciplines and accommodates collaborative and diverse learning and teaching approaches. In 2001, *Time* magazine highlighted these learning community initiatives when it named Seattle Central “College of the Year”.

During the early 1990s, a team of faculty and administrators participated in the Washington Center’s Cultural Pluralism Institute. Faculty also began working on a multicultural requirement for the Associate of Arts Degree. By 1996, the College had established a U.S. Cultures and Global Studies requirement for the degree, and work was underway through the faculty-run Curriculum Review Committee to ensure that new courses, as well as academic and professional-technical programs, demonstrated the college’s commitment to diversity. The Math Department, for example, organized a daylong forum that included

*“I learned how to say what I thought, to just put it out there, and let other people react to it.”*

*~ A student*

student focus groups which addressed the challenges for students of color in “barrier” classes. From the insights learned during this workshop, the department designed more effective classroom practices and changed departmental protocol.

Still, efforts to infuse diverse perspectives into all classes remains a challenge – one Seattle Central has continued to pursue for the last fifteen years through its faculty and staff development program.

Frequently offered workshops explore cultural pluralism and diversity issues as they present themselves in the curriculum, teaching practices, and the campus environment. In fact, in April 1997 the entire college closed so that all faculty, staff, and administrators would have the opportunity to participate in a campus-wide Diversity Day. Using the video *The Color of Fear* as a springboard, the campus community discussed multi-cultural issues and concerns and their own professional and personal learning needs.

Over the last decade the faculty-driven Global Education Design Team, an outgrowth of an initiative mandated by the Vice President of Academic Affairs to support instructional exploration of cultural diversity and globalization, has sponsored more than one hundred campus presentations covering a wide array of issues from the Patriot Act to immigration law to Hawaiian sovereignty. These workshops allow faculty, staff, administrators, and students to widen their fields of knowledge, understand current cultural issues, and appreciate different perspectives. Free to the public, these events attract an even more diverse audience given the college’s urban location.

“*Critical Moments* represents the core of what makes Seattle Central Community College so great. The almost over-used vocabulary of ‘diverse’ and ‘multi-cultural’ comes to one’s lips ...but I think it is so much more than that. It’s about individuals sharing their perspective... an **interacting** multiculturalism is something in which to revel.

Being part of the *Critical Moments* team has given me the opportunity to explore this aspect of human interaction. Working on case stories, either at the interviewing stage or at the writing stage, has been an important part of this exploration. Just as important has been the interactions I have had with the other team members. It never ceases to amaze me, the prejudices and stereotypes society has ingrained in me. It is a wonderful experience to be a middle class, Mid-West raised, white male at a table where incredibly diverse perspectives are being discussed.”

~A member of the *Critical Moments* team

Other academic divisions and college committees also provide opportunities to learn about and celebrate Seattle Central’s diverse population. Every year the college presents a weeklong program that simultaneously honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and raises issues related to human and civil rights. The Division of Basic Studies sponsors the annual English as a Second Language/Bilingual Education Awareness week; this celebration highlights the diversity of Seattle Central and includes guest speakers, cultural presentations, and interactive displays that are conceived, created, and staffed by current English as a Second Language students. The Multicultural Initiatives Office, along with the Multicultural Events and Activities Office in the Student Leadership Division, develops and sponsors activities to mark El Dia de los Muertos, Native American Heritage Month, Black History Month, Asian Pacific Heritage Month, Cinco de Mayo, and many other cultural events.

Over the last ten years, two photographic documentary exhibits—featuring student experiences and voices—provided invaluable data about the success strategies used by students of color. An action research project *Untold Success Stories of Students of Color* one of these cross-campus efforts, is now on permanent display on campus. *Refugee Stories*, the other project, is a multi-lingual pairing of student narratives with portraits. Through these activities and from the results of the 1996 and 1999 Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire, the campus community discovered that some groups of students experienced discomfort on campus. In response to these findings, the College held student focus groups and conducted extensive interviews that helped us to become more effective in addressing students’ concerns.

To support these many efforts, Seattle Central Community College established the Office of Multicultural Initiatives in 2000 to work on campus-wide diversity initiatives, such as curricular reform, inclusive pedagogical practice, professional development, and student retention.

Given the College’s longstanding work on diversity, its student-focused documentary projects, and student-experience survey results, educators from Seattle Central immediately recognized the potential of *Critical Moments* for the campus. When this project was first introduced at a February 1999 Washington Center-sponsored workshop, Seattle Central’s *Untold Success Stories of Students of Color* was underway. Team members attending the *Critical Moments* workshop saw in this new project a means to respond to student concerns. The already existing team of faculty, staff, and administrators imagined a smooth transition from *Untold Stories* to *Critical Moments*.

### ***Critical Moments: An Overview***

Our Seattle Central *Critical Moments* team has accomplished much over the past four years. Housing the project in the Office of Multicultural Initiatives gave our work credibility, provided institutional support, and connected *Critical Moments* to other multicultural and diversity campus efforts, based in both academic affairs and student services. Our team has been multicultural and cross-institutional since its origin; its membership includes faculty, staff, and administrators, reflecting the campus as a whole.

Workshops led by *Critical Moments Project* consultants helped to recruit new faculty and staff, as has word-of-mouth. Active and engaged, we meet regularly, even during the summer. Our team follows the case-story development protocol of interviewing students, interpreting transcribed interviews, identifying generative themes, and constructing case stories. The protocol allows us to develop cases that address our students’ pressing concerns. In the course of developing

“On the surface at times the case stories seem to be clear-cut, but then you re-read a little deeper and find something else.”

- A student

“I have to admit when I came to the class I thought that as people of color, we all had a tendency to view things in a like manner. However, what I found out is that even though two individuals might be of the same race [that fact] doesn’t necessarily mean that they will share the same viewpoint.”

- A student

new case stories, for example, we met with math faculty to share with them some students' math experiences and to talk about potential cases.

We have attended and organized *Critical Moments* training sessions, written many cases, developed a case story curriculum, and piloted our cases in seminars. Finally, we continually assess teaching and learning outcomes and use these findings to fine-tune our work. Our efforts have been supported by several grants: one from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (through Washington Center); one from the Byron W. and Alice L. Lockwood Foundation (through The Seattle Central

Foundation); and one from the Seattle Central Community College Retention Assessment Project. To date, we have interviewed ten Seattle Central students, one faculty member, and one staff member. We have written thirteen case stories, revised three student-written case stories, and piloted five seminars.

“*Critical Moments* allows me to focus on the teaching/learning process in the context of the actual lives of real students – not in the narrow, sanitized model of ‘ideal’ students who never really exist except in the minds of academic researchers and textbook developers.

It also allows a rare opportunity to interact closely with a cadre of colleagues who are both knowledgeable and passionately concerned about issues of pedagogical justice and cross-cultural communication in the classroom. I have found it a healthy experience to learn from these folks and immerse myself in a project designed to address the barriers and inequities that limit academic success among a vast range of non-traditional students.

In this age of mindless numerical ‘accountability,’ I am delighted to work on a project that makes us all more accountable to those who find their educational paths loaded with potholes and landmines.”

~ A *Critical Moments* team member

The evolution of the *Critical Moments* seminar on campus has been rapid. Eager to offer the first class, but lacking an adequate number of stories specific to Seattle Central, we revised some University of Nebraska-Omaha case stories and incorporated them into our first casebook. Offered as two-credit Humanities classes during the 2001 Winter and Spring Quarters, the first two pilot seminars used this casebook. When the course was revised and expanded to a three-credit class for the 2001 Fall Quarter and the 2002 Winter Quarter, we revised the casebook to include our own stories that team members had written. We continued to restructure the curriculum, based on our team’s assessment of students’ and facilitators’ experiences in the four pilot seminars. During the 2003 Spring Quarter, the seminar became a five-credit course. Through the commitment of faculty

members, staff persons, and administrators who have contributed to the idea and practice of *Critical Moments*, this initiative is now part of Seattle Central Community College’s culture.

The project has shown that everyone has “critical moments”; this realization means that we are much more attuned to students and to ourselves as educators and activists for social change. Team members genuinely care about students; we value the insights gained from students who, in turn, learn from us. Our assessment activities have targeted the pilot seminar, the case stories and curriculum, student learning outcomes, and team teaching and pedagogy so that we can evaluate the viability of establishing a *Critical Moments* course and

related efforts to further institutionalize the project. We have compiled and reviewed the following: student feedback from the seminars, evaluations provided by the five teaching teams, professional development workshop evaluations from staff and faculty, and our own reflections about the project's progress and evolution.

Team members have shared our work at regional and national conferences. Wherever possible, we invite Seattle Central students to present with us so that they can describe their experience working with cases. During the 2002 and 2003 Fall Quarters, we conceptualized and presented a series of professional development workshops entitled, *Critical Moments Conversations* for our colleagues on campus. Each quarter we offered three two-hour sessions using selected case stories that were facilitated by different team members. We were invited to participate in the Seattle Central Student Services Retreat, and we wrote a case story that targeted issues specific to Student Services. Within the campus community our work has become more broadly known through two articles that appeared in the college's on-line publication, *Seattle Central Questions: Institutional and Educational Effectiveness Newsletter*.

## **Adapting *Critical Moments*: Lessons Learned**

### ***Case Stories/Curriculum***

Through the process of writing case stories and using them in the classroom and professional development settings, the team learned that every story is a "draft." After careful consideration and discussion, we revised some stories to reflect the complexity and challenges embedded in the case situation. Because students repeatedly reported that there was "not enough time" for case discussions and debriefing, the team decided to create a new institutional structure to support a five-credit, team-taught class that would meet three times a week so students could explore cases in more depth. The opportunity to spend more time together supported peer-based community building, a significant factor in student retention.

A longer class period gives students the time to practice essential skills such as active listening and participation, perspective taking through the development of empathy, and generating options, a critical stage in problem solving. Developing trust takes time and truly productive conversations evolve over time. Students need to be introduced to some of the theoretical frameworks available in the diversity literature and research that will give them the ideas and language to develop multiple interpretations of case stories, an ingredient for substantive, rich, and unusual class discussions. We use every opportunity to identify and describe campus support services—tutoring, counseling, student leadership opportunities, and upcoming workshops—so students can become more active in seeking out the campus resources they need to

*"Because I participated in the Critical Moments Project, I think it made my discussions that I had in other classes and at my Field Placement site much more meaningful and thought provoking. I was able to listen to and respect another person's point of view or agree to disagree."*

*- A student*

be successful. We have found that students take the class more seriously when it carries more credits.

### ***Cross-Institutional Team Teaching***

The *Critical Moments* team chose a co-teaching model where a faculty member familiar with teaching methodologies pairs up with a staff member versed in student services or an administrator committed to student retention efforts. Because of co-facilitators' respective locations and connections within the college, students are presented with a more complete picture concerning institutional policies and practices. In the class, co-facilitators view cases through different lenses and, as a consequence, model perspective taking for students. The stories elicit powerful responses from students—and from co-facilitators as well. It is reassuring to have two instructors available to facilitate dialogue: if there is silence from one, the other can step in when necessary. A teaching team gives instructors more freedom to respond honestly; when one person feels “off balance,” another can keep the class discussion on track. Together, they model thoughtful behaviors during intense periods in the discussion.

### ***Pedagogy***

The teaching team works hard to establish the seminar as a safe place for frank, caring discussions and skill building that requires everyone present to take risks. Each course begins with the class developing a “Code of Conduct” document, along with a careful review of the course description, expectations, and methods of assessment. Throughout the seminar, co-facilitators demonstrate mutual respect, thoughtful listening, and critical engagement, whether or not they agree with the point of view being expressed. Even though members of the *Critical Moments* team find inductive approaches to learning more powerful than deductive ones, experienced facilitators acknowledge that a certain amount of “scaffolding” is needed. Facilitation of case discussion is like a dance: co-facilitators need to let students take the lead and to know when to step back in to further facilitate learning. This kind of facilitation requires us to be comfortable with silence.

“This class, even though it was a pilot class, taught me a lot; I will look at people and the way they perceive things in a totally different light. I myself will look at things in different ways; not just my way.”

- A student

In-class activities and journal writing enable students to see beyond their own individual perspective as well as the general student perspective; they are able to explore faculty and even institutional perspectives. When *Critical Moments*' team members and other faculty and staff lead the seminar, students realize that pedagogical strategies, such as fishbowl, interviewing, and role playing, commonly used in the seminar, are also strategies adopted by other college educators. These non-traditional teaching methods emphasize the dynamics of developing productive dialogue skills. Guest presenters who visit the class and join the teaching team further legitimize active learning approaches that *Critical Moments*' work entails, and their presence in class is evidence that the course is institutionally supported.

### ***Team Professional Development***

After several years of working on *Critical Moments*, our entire team appreciates how fundamental additional training is to becoming an effective facilitator. Even though seminar co-facilitators discuss their class experiences with the team and we analyze student and faculty evaluations as well as any debriefing notes taken during the class, this kind of analysis is not enough. Teaching the seminar requires expertise and experience with case method teaching and learning. For this reason, the team does not assign untrained people to facilitate *Critical Moments* cases. Even for experienced facilitators, training must be ongoing. It must focus on what the diversity literature and research contributes to deepening case discussions and on how to implement an inclusive, multicultural pedagogy.

### ***Student Learning and Empowerment***

A seminar on diversity that privileges students' voices has the potential to create a learning environment where students ask questions that they ordinarily are afraid to ask, and they can work through challenges that at first seem insurmountable. Such a class serves as a catalyst for self-disclosure for some students who feel it is a safe, supportive place. As students examine their own lives and begin to understand that inactivity is not consequence-free, they see the need for individual and social responsibility. They are less inclined to blame others or jump to conclusions. By seeing how other students deal with their "critical moments," they feel less victimized and less marginalized.

Although there is value in using the occasional *Critical Moments* case story in individual classes, a seminar based on locally-developed case stories, taught by a skilled team, allows students to consistently practice transferable academic skills: deep reading, empathetic perspective-taking, considering and summarizing divergent points of view, textual analysis, articulating ideas, and collaborative problem solving.

Through case discussions and journal writing, students become more confident, develop their capacity for honest exchange, are open to other perspectives, strengthen their ability to think differently and critically, and empathize with and respect other people. On seminar evaluations, students report a higher level of self-esteem and a stronger sense of personal identity. When problems arise, they are practiced in identifying options. Testifying about the value of the *Critical Moments* class, students often remark, "I did something (in another class or situation) that I wouldn't have done if not for this class."

### ***The Emergence of Companion Cases***

In examining student feedback on case discussions, team members found a surprising pattern: students wanted more than an explicit "student" perspective. The following comment expresses why this mattered to one student: "Personally, when I sense that I am hearing one side of the story, one that is suspiciously slanted in favor of the one doing the telling, I begin searching for bias in the writing and usually find

*"In the beginning, I did not want to try this course. ... In the end, I feel that I didn't do as badly as I thought I would. I give myself some credit for representing my Tribe in as honorable a way as I could. This is very important to me. We always feel like our ancestors are looking down on us at every moment and we must make them proud."*

- A student

it. Life just isn't always that simple; care must be taken to keep the class discussions from degenerating into faculty-bashing sessions. Maybe some case stories told from the instructor's point of view would help to correct the bias that I see." Similar student views led our *Critical Moments* team to invent and develop what we call "companion" case stories.

### Responses to "Mada-What?" and "Students Like Those"

"I liked the stories being somewhat uncertain (that is, we don't really know the motives of all the characters involved). This is true when we initially are presented with these types of problems in real life. Discovering and understanding motivation only comes with further investigation and problem solving ... the impetus for critical thinking as it were."

"The most valuable part of the workshop was the opportunity to talk with other teachers and staff about issues that everyone in education – administrators, staff, teachers, and students – are affected by. It was valuable to hear the perspectives of other people: to see how conversations reflect who we currently are and what we currently believe. I think if the same group came together six months from now to discuss the same case stories, the comments and perspectives would be different. That points to the timelessness of these stories. This opportunity to reflect on 'where I am' and 'where you are' is valuable to me."

"As a teacher, I am always concerned with the experience that students are having individually and collectively in my classes. These stories served to remind me of how important it is in my job to be deliberate and conscious of those assignments and activities that are part of a grade. It was also valuable to have a conversation with other teachers to hear how they handle similar issues."

~ From participants in *Critical Moments*' professional development sessions

In this Seattle Central model, a "critical moment" is described from two perspectives. One case story addresses the issues through a student's lens. The companion case story, while distinct, is linked to the first case story but it presents overlapping issues from either an institutional or faculty or staff perspective. To field test this approach, we selected a case story written during the first year of the grant, drafted a "faculty" companion case story, and taught the case stories pair in the fourth pilot seminar and in a professional development workshop. The responses from both of these testing arenas reinforced our commitment to this unique approach to the *Critical Moments*' case-writing and case-teaching method.

We have selected two companion case stories, "Mada-What?" and "Students Like Those" to illustrate how a different yet related story about the same experience can enhance perspective taking and critical reading. (Please see case stories that follow.) Both stories emphasize our campus commitment to providing educational opportunities for non-native English speaking students and to collaborative learning and teaching that occurs in learning communities, two practices that earned Seattle Central *Time* magazine's "College of the Year" award. Colleagues and students grapple with these companion cases because they reflect the reality at our college where simple "answers" are not helpful; the commitment to diversity is a commitment to a multi-faceted practice developed by the entire campus community.

### Next Steps

Our *Critical Moments* team plans to revise the companion cases included in this publication and we will write others for use across the campus and in the student seminar. Specifically, our team would like to

work with faculty who are developing curriculum for Seattle Central's learning communities to heighten awareness of the "critical moments" their students and other faculty experience.

We want to establish the five-credit *Critical Moments* case story curriculum as a transfer course that fulfills the U.S. Cultures credit requirement for the Associates of Arts Degree. How can we do this in a way that reflects the lessons we have learned? Where will we house the course, how will it be taught, who can teach it, and what kind of training will be provided? Currently at Seattle Central, faculty cannot easily teach in another academic division, except in the case of learning communities. We also know that moving *Critical Moments* from a pilot offering to established curriculum could very well lead to the exclusion of staff from the teaching team. While team teaching is the preferred structure, realistically and from an institutional point of view, the class may have to be redesigned as a stand-alone course taught by one instructor. To create such a new course format and structure, we might link the case discussions with an English writing class or a Human Development class. *Critical Moments* could also become part of an interdisciplinary, theme-based coordinated studies program.

We plan to organize more professional development workshop series for the campus community since these workshops have helped all of us to reflect on our everyday interactions with students, in both classroom and student service areas. We want to reach more of our colleagues and hope to encourage the use of case stories in existing courses and other academic settings, such as counseling sessions and classes in Human Development, Multicultural Counseling, English Composition, and advanced level English as a Second Language.

Other goals include further institutionalizing the project by recruiting new team members for *Critical Moments*, training facilitators, connecting the outcomes of *Critical Moments*' work to retention, and updating our casebook with new case stories. We will also continue to lead workshops and share our *Critical Moments* work with interested campuses. Finally, a constant goal is to secure additional funds so we can sustain and expand our work at Seattle Central Community College.

It was the end of the quarter, and Asiya Muhamed was sitting with her presentation group in front of her entire coordinated studies program class entitled “Colonizing the Mind.” The group was going to talk about “10 Years of Africa-Seattle Immigration,” and she was nervous, very nervous. In spite of the fact that she wore a hajab every day of her life, which made her stand out in this country, it seemed to act as a cover for her. But today, there was no hiding. She couldn’t wait for this day to be over. When it was, she would never enroll in another learning community, not ever...

“Me neither,” Elena had said when they’d met in the Atrium earlier in the week. “I know that Lila said she’d thought we would get a lot out of this class, but I feel like I’m in over my head.”

Asiya nodded, “But by the time I figured that out, it was too late to drop and add other classes.” The coordinated studies class had been a disaster from the beginning. What had started as slight beeps in her warning system had become full-out clanging bells by the third week in the quarter. “Besides,” she mused, “I’m just too stubborn to drop a class.”

“Yeah, me too,” Elena said. “This is our first real college class, you know, not ESL like Lila’s, but the reading and writing isn’t really the problem for me.”

“Me neither,” an exasperated Asiya added. “It’s the other students, I think.”

“I know. They talk so fast that seminars and discussions kill me. By the time I figure out what I want to say, the conversation has already moved on.” Elena gave Asiya a sheepish look and added, “Part of my problem is that I’m shy. What’s yours?”

“I don’t know. I’m not usually so quiet in classes, but I can’t seem to break in at the right moment. Also, half the time the other students speak, I can’t figure out what the connection is supposed to be. It’s like some people talk just to hear themselves talk,” Asiya said laughing.

“Well, maybe they do. I’ve noticed the same thing in my seminar group, too. We are getting graded on participation, so maybe some students just say something, anything to get noticed by the instructors.”

Asiya sighed as she said, “I may not know how to do that...yet; but it’s something I have to learn. Maybe I can learn from these students.”

“Like Jerry?” Elena offered.

Asiya responded laughing, “Especially Jerry.”

*Yeah Jerry...Jerry was in Asiya’s seminar group. Tall, slim and white with a goatee and tiny round glasses, he always seemed to be talking, mostly to the instructors, well, one instructor in particular. Asiya had learned that this learning community was Jerry’s fourth class with this instructor. Although it seemed strange to her, she knew what it was like to click with an instructor’s style, but four classes? Jerry was nice enough to her. He usually said “Hi” or asked, “How are you?” and “What do you think?” But he didn’t seem to wait for an answer. She had found this both irritating and amusing. She had been shocked, however, half way through the quarter to overhear a conversation between Jerry and another student in their seminar group: she was the topic. “But she doesn’t ever say anything,” Jerry was saying, “and I promised that I’d be responsible for including her, you know, and I just don’t think that she understands anything. She just hides underneath that scarf —”*

*“Jerry!” came the surprised response. “Maybe she’s just shy.”*

*“Well, don’t you get sick of her just sitting there, quietly taking notes on what we say but not sharing anything with us?”*

*Asiya had been mortified to hear that Jerry was “responsible for including her!” She had spoken with the instructors and shared her concerns about having trouble in the seminar discussions. It was more than just the quick pace; the other students interrupted each other with ease. Asiya didn’t know how to do that, not with “real” American students. The students all seemed to know each other so well from previous classes that she felt she would never fit in. Asiya had gone to her instructors because she wanted them to know that she was reading, learning and reflecting on the material, even if her performance in discussions didn’t show that. And they had gone to Jerry to help her. “Like he could,” Asiya thought laughing to herself.*

Elena tapped Asiya’s hand, bringing her back to their conversation. “Jerry’s not that bad, is he?”

“No, but it’s not just him. Everyone seems to get carried away.” Asiya told Elena about a particularly difficult seminar earlier in the quarter. After the first week of being passed over during discussions, Asiya had decided to keep track of how often she attempted but was unable to make a contribution to the discussion. She had given up trying to do so (at attempt #45) in the fourth week of the class. The comments were flying fast and furiously as she sat in her seminar group, hurriedly scratching notes on a piece of paper. Of the twelve people in her seminar group, seven were men and five were women. As usual, she was the only person who didn’t speak English as a native language. When things heated up, it was almost impossible for her to interject a comment.

“Remember when we were talking about civil wars?” Asiya said to Elena, who nodded in reply. “Everyone in the seminar was talking about civil wars and how terrible it was and how they could only relate to the topic in a political way. So I’m thinking, “OK. Well, ask me. I’m probably the only person in this entire class that’s lived through one and understands the effects in a personal way.”

“So, what happened?” Elena asked.

“It was so embarrassing.” Asiya responded.

*Really embarrassing. The seminar was so vivid in Asiya’s memory. Carmella, who worked hard at saying at least one thing in every discussion, was finishing up her two cents: “...separating families and creating refugees always happens during civil wars. It’s just, sad, you know?”*

*Asiya took a breath and decided to go for # 43; “Well, displacement, you know, having to leave your home and your family and friends, it’s really, uh...”*

*“Yeah, it’s really tough for those people,” Marvin interjected, “like in Ethiopia. What’s that one about? Oil or something?”*

*Asiya attempted # 44. “In Somalia,” Asiya continued, “it’s partly about clans. In fact, Somali society is based on...”*

*“That’s like the old Yugoslavia, right?” Marvin added. “That’s what it sounds like to me.”*

*Asiya attempted # 45. “Maybe. It’s just that in Somalia, there’s such a long history that you can’t just point to one thing or to one group and say that’s what caused all the trouble at home.” Asiya could see that Jerry’s mouth was open and he was about to say something, so she added hurriedly, “I watched members of my family starve and die; that’s what I remember. And, it...it’s just really complicated.” Asiya was surprised to see the members of her group staring at her, including a silent Jerry, who was nodding to her encouragingly, waiting for her to talk. She hadn’t meant to tell her own story. It was too personal. “Argh,” she thought to herself, “I hadn’t expected to get this far! I can’t think of anything else to say.” She looked down at her hands and tried to breathe evenly. Finally, Marvin filled the empty space, “Oil. It’s always there some place.”*

*A grateful Asiya sighed. At least she had finally been able to get her group members’ attention even though she’d blown it. Still, she counted it as a small success that they had actually allowed her to say anything. “Oil,” she wrote in her notes, and decided to concentrate on what the other students were saying.*

Finishing the story she was telling Elena, Asiya said, “Basically, I blew it! I’d been waiting the whole quarter to really say something good, you know, and I when I finally got the chance, I was just ‘uh, uh, uh,’ you know?”

“Yeah,” Elena said. “That happened to me during an identity discussion. I sounded like I had no idea who I am...was...am...was. Reported speech, right?” Will readers know what this is?

Asiya laughed, “Yeah.” Looking at her watch, she jumped up and announced, “Time for math. See you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be there,” Elena said, opening a book. “Bye.”

Asiya couldn’t help going over and over that day in seminar. “Ask me,” she’d wanted to yell. She remembered how she had escaped from Somalia during the intense civil war, crossing the desert during the night and hiding out during the day. Before being allowed to come to the United States, she had lived in refugee camps in Sudan for a few years. The civil war had ripped her family apart because only a few of them had been allowed entry to the US. It had been years since she’d seen her mother, although Asiya sent her money every month.

Asiya was attending school full-time, working full-time and taking care of the children in her family during the other hours. She got up at 5:00am every morning to get breakfast ready and get the kids off to school. After that, she attended classes and studied in the library at Seattle Central Community College until around 2:00pm and then worked the night shift at Harborview, from 3:00pm until 11:00pm. She took a shower when she got home and sat down to study for an hour or so before she went to sleep. There were some advantages to letting the other students in the class carry the discussion. Since she was physically exhausted, she didn’t have to work so hard to make a comment, and she could try and learn their ways.

*“Look, this is for a grade,” Jerry was saying. The group was planning their final group presentation. Although she and Jerry were no longer in the same seminar group, they were in this presentation group together. They were deciding who would do what and when. “Look, Asiya, I don’t want to hurt your feelings or anything,” he continued, “but like, you never talk or anything, and I don’t want you to practice speaking with my grade on the line. I just don’t want you to mess my grade up by freezing, you know? So, Asiya, here’s your part. You can be our Vanna White. You can point at all of the things that we’re talking about. Like, when we talk about a certain book, you can hold it up and when we’re talking about a specific place on the map, you can point to it. OK?”*

*“OK,” she answered. The other members in the group just nodded at her, and so she said it again, “OK.” But she wondered to herself, “Had they already talked about this and decided my part without me?”*

*“OK.” In some ways, Asiya was relieved; all she had to do was make sure that she pointed at the right time. Maybe she could get a list of exactly when the other presenters were going to need her to point at something. Anyway, this was better than having to talk in front of the entire class.*

...she was sweating buckets. It was such a small part that if she screwed this up, she might as well just quit school. As she waited for her cue from Jerry, she was trying to remember the different countries she was going to have to point to. The whole class was listening attentively and looking at the different places that she was pointing to. “The next country that was effected was Madagascar,” Jerry continued, glancing back to Asiya and nodding. She froze. “Mada-what?” she thought as her finger moved towards Mauritania. Jerry shook his head and repeated, “Ma-da-gas-car – it’s an island.” Asiya looked back at the map and began to feel sweat trickle down her back and her hajab began to slip off her head. She grabbed at it clumsily as she thought, “Madagascar, I know where that is, I know where that is.” “Where is it? This is my continent! What’s going on with me? Where’s my head?”

“God, I hope he’s not late. I’m going to die if I don’t eat something in the next five minutes,” Lila thought to herself.

After four hours of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, she was in what she called her “1:00 Daily Stupor”: starved, a bit disoriented, but definitely exhilarated from the teaching. She double-checked her appointment calendar. Yes, today was her lunch with another instructor, Nelson Mamet. Breaking open a box of raisins, she munched on them as she waited.

“Nelson didn’t really tell me why he wanted to meet with me,” she mused to herself. “Maybe it’s got something to do with those faculty senate committees we’ve been on.” Over the years, she had developed a good deal of respect for his ability to get to the substance of issues and express his opinions, even when they were not popular or politically correct. To Lila, that was the essence of integrity. Now with the threat of budget cuts from the legislature, she was glad to have him as a clear-thinking colleague and leader on campus.

Nelson sauntered up to her office door, brown bag in hand and said, “Hey, sorry to be late. Just couldn’t get the students out of the seminar today. Ready for some lunch?”

“Yes!” Lila replied with enthusiasm. “Your students wouldn’t let you go, huh? You must be doing some pretty amazing stuff. What is the topic of your Coordinated Studies Program (CSP) class this term?”

Smilingly, Nelson replied, “Colonizing the Mind.”

Lila said, “Mmm...provocative title. I’ll bet the students who have lived in colonized countries have plenty to say about that.”

In a serious tone, Nelson replied, “Humm. That’s part of the reason I asked to meet with you.”

A shudder went through Lila.

Although Lila was frequently asked by her advanced ESL students for recommendations of teachers who might be effective teachers of non-ESL courses, she always refused. But last quarter she made an exception. Asiya, a brilliant, intense student from Somalia, and Elena, a sophisticated 40-year-old physician from Venezuela, had asked her directly about whether they should take Nelson’s class. Lila had strongly recommended him to them. They were two of the strongest students Lila had ever taught in the bridge class, and so she had been pleased—delighted, actually—when they came by to tell her that they had registered.

“Good for you,” she told them. “You’ll really stretch yourself and learn a lot.”

As Lila and Nelson took their brown bags outside to a sunny place on the lawn that overlooked Pine Street, she suddenly remembered her meeting with Asiya and Elena two weeks earlier. Although she had expected them to feel somewhat overwhelmed in Nelson’s program, she was not prepared for their despair about what was happening in the class.

“I think I might have to drop,” Asiya began.

Elena chimed in, “The other students in our program have all taken several previous classes with either Nelson or the other instructor on the team, and they keep referring to readings, films, concepts and discussions from those previous classes. These students all know each other, too.”

“It feels like a club, not a class,” Asiya, added. “We are definitely outsiders.”

“Hey, you two,” Lila replied. “Let me remind you that you are both great analytical thinkers who contributed substantive points to the discussions in my class. And you carry that ability into your writing. Why don’t you go and speak to your instructors privately? Just be candid about feeling like outsiders. They probably haven’t realized that you’re feeling excluded.”

She could tell that they were reluctant, but before leaving, they assured her they would meet with both instructors.

“Ok, ok,” Elena had assured Lila. “We’ll stick it out.”

Settling into their lunch spot, Lila tested her suspicion about the reason for Nelson’s lunch invitation head on, “So how’s the CSP coming?” she asked.

“Great!” Nelson said as his face lit up at the invitation to talk about his favorite subject. He described the passion for learning that the students were demonstrating and referred to the scholarly exchange as “simply life changing.” “It’s humbling,” Nelson said, “to witness the growth in those students.”

Then Nelson’s voice got uncharacteristically intense. “Listen, Lila. I need to talk to you about some students in our CSP this quarter.”

“Oh, yes, Asiya and Elena?” Lila felt a little sheepish about the pride she felt in their accomplishments. “I’m sure that their cultural perspectives are really enriching for the other students.”

“Yeah. I think so,” Nelson began. “Elena Hernandez hyphen something from Venezuela and Asha from . . . uh . . . Ethiopia, I think.”

Lila finished, “Somalia. And it’s Asiya, not Asha.” Lila heard the words snap out of her mouth.

Nelson must have picked up the criticism. “Yes. Sorry. One of the difficult things about teaching a CSP is learning all the names of students in a double-sized class. I hate not being able to get to know students as well—and especially not getting their names right until later in the quarter.”

“So . . . how’re they doing?”

“Well, Lila, it’s not a pretty picture. They sit hovered together like newly arrived refugees—with blank, frightened faces, and they never say a word—except to each other.”

“Never?” Lila was astonished, putting down her sandwich.

“Absolutely never. There’s been no real participation from either of them in five weeks. I suspect they can’t understand anything that’s going on in the seminar. They’re just not ready, Lila. Actually, I don’t think students like those should be placed in learning communities, where participation is so critical. It’s painful to watch them. I mean . . . I can see that they’re struggling. They look just miserable. From what I read in their reaction papers, they have a lot of valuable perspectives, but they just don’t participate! And, Lila, I don’t know. It’s almost like . . . I mean, how do students with language barriers get placed in a CSP anyway?”

The question made Lila furious, but she made herself respond casually. “Well, actually, aren’t CSPs for all students who are eligible for English 101? Those two students are definitely eligible for English 101. In fact, I encouraged both of them to sign up for a CSP.”

Nelson screwed up his face. “You did? Why?”

“Elena and Asiya are two of the strongest students who ever completed ESL 098 and 099 with me. They were both natural leaders in my class, terrific at posing hard questions and expressing well-reasoned views about a huge range of topics. Asiya writes well, but Elena’s writing is—well, it’s amazing! They’re both used to giving and receiving useful criticism in peer reviews and honing their own writing from the results.”

Nelson was shaking his head. “Well, I’m not so sure about that. I’ve seen them both writing and working together during in-class peer reviews, but neither of them has turned in much. Asha—er, Asiya has turned in two essays, and Elena has completed one and turned in only an early draft of the second. The fourth essay is due tomorrow. It’s too late for them to drop and not receive a “No Credit” on their transcript.”

Nelson’s voice got quiet as he said, “But, Lila, it’s my opinion that they just shouldn’t be there. It’s just not fair to them—or to the traditional students. The ESL students need extra help, and if I have to back up or make extra time for them, we get behind schedule. With 60 – 70 students, we don’t have that luxury.”

Lila was beginning to feel defensive. “Actually, the two of them came to me about the second week of the quarter, and they shared some concerns about the CSP then. I suggested that they meet with you and Carmen. Did they do that?”

“Yes, they came, but it was a little difficult to understand what they were saying. When we got the idea, Carmen and I decided to break the discussion groups into two groups of 28 so it wouldn’t be such an intimi-

dating mass. We put Asiya and Elena in separate groups. It hasn't helped. They still don't speak much. And they look just as bewildered as before. My heart goes out to them."

Nelson continued to talk, but Lila was reeling with so much anger and disappointment that she couldn't think straight.

Her thoughts were racing, "Was it possible that Nelson actually believed that a learning community should exclude students from a diverse variety of cultures and languages? Was his idea of a learning community more like a 'gated community!'"

Lila tuned in just in time to hear Nelson wrapping up as he crushed his brown paper bag. "And, Lila, I've got to tell you the truth. Carmen and I have talked about your two students a lot. We're thinking of recommending new policies that would limit ESL students to taking stand-alone classes. A lot of students with language barriers aren't even ready for that!"

Lila was too stunned to form a reply, so Nelson continued. "Listen, we should talk about this more when Carmen can join us, but right now, I've gotta go." He pitched the wadded bag toward the trash, glanced at her, and struggled to his feet.

"Sorry to rush off," he said as he turned to leave. "I have a couple of students coming during office hours today. You should come and visit the CSP sometime, Lila. The class is just fabulous! Let's set up another conversation via e-mail, okay?"

Nelson headed back into the building, leaving Lila on the south lawn marinating in her fury.

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*"Mada-What?" and "Students Like Those," are two of many case stories written by the Seattle Central Community College Critical Moments Project Team with support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. These cases illustrate a unique case-writing and case-teaching approach developed at Seattle Central that explores a "critical moment" from two distinct, yet overlapping perspectives. "Mada-What?" is a case story from a student perspective; and "Students Like Those" is a companion case story from a faculty perspective.*

*Critical Moments' case stories are composed from interviews with successful Seattle Central students who describe difficult choices in their college experiences; others are based on interviews with faculty and staff members. The characters in the story are not necessarily individuals from the interview, but may be composites of personalities or are completely fictionalized for the purposes of achieving the goals of the project. All names have been changed, as have the events that would identify any people involved in the experiences. One of the primary goals of the case story is to encourage an investigation of the complexity of different individuals' perspectives.*

*This is a draft, not the final version of the case story. Feedback and suggestions are seriously acknowledged and generally incorporated into subsequent drafts. The Critical Moments Project paradigm of case story development assumes a process of multiple revisions and refinements of the story to produce an effective learning tool.*

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*Cases included in this Washington Center publication on the Critical Moments Project, may be freely copied and used with proper acknowledgement of who wrote and produced them. Critical Moments' cases are intended to promote discussion, not to document "good or poor" teaching or "good or poor" institutional practices.*

# SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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## CAMPUS PROFILE

**S**outh Puget Sound Community College began in 1955 as an adult education program at Olympia High School, evolved by 1962 into Olympia Vocational and Technical Institute, and by 1967 became Olympia Technical Community College—the only community college in the state devoted entirely to technical education. In 1980, an Associate of Arts degree program was added in response to student and community demands for an expanded curriculum. The College assumed its present name in 1984 and, a decade later, broadened its programs to include customized training and professional development for local agencies and employers.

The College's identity is rooted in its technical program origins and current program diversity. Fifty percent of students are registered in academic programs and 35.5 percent are in vocational programs, with the remaining students are enrolled in community education or developmental education. Other programs designed for special student populations, such as Adult Basic Education, GED, English as a Second Language, Work-first services, and Citizenship Classes—as well as Running Start for high school students—deepen the college's educational diversity.

This program diversity reflects a less visible diversity among students—of class, educational goals and needs, gender, age, and experience. Many students are connected to the military; many are returning students—homemakers and older workers seeking re-training and career changes. Sixty-three percent are women, and the average age is 29. While traditionally the college, as the region it serves, has been predominantly Caucasian, this demographic profile is changing. The present student body is 83.9 percent Caucasian, 7.3 percent Asian/ Pacific Islander, 5 percent Hispanic, 2.3 percent African American, and 1.6 percent American Indian/ Alaskan Native. The recent College mission statement, a “Commitment to Diversity Statement”, and “Multicultural/ Diversity Strategic Plan” all reflect a new, self-conscious commitment to diversity and multicultural education. Putting this commitment into practice across the campus and throughout the curriculum, however, remains a daunting challenge.

## ABOUT CRITICAL MOMENTS AT SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

South Puget Sound Community College's participation in the *Critical Moments Project* began with excitement and some trepidation about how the Project process could be incorporated into the reality of our campus. Our College had no office or director of multicultural affairs that could provide formal institutional support. Our Diversity Committee of five faculty and one staff felt overwhelmed by the grant's challenge to conduct and transcribe intensive student interviews and then write five case stories based upon the interviews for each year of the three-year project. We were all heavily burdened with full-time teaching loads and other service duties. Prospects for recruiting help from others at the college seemed dim.

What we did have, however, was a deep commitment to continuing the diversity work that had been a part of our institutional history for the previous decade. Moreover, members of our group and several key administrators were especially enthusiastic about the student-centered nature of the *Critical Moments Project*—that is, the attempt to capture student voices speaking about diversity and equity issues that affected them. The most successful diversity work at our college in the past had been student-centered in this way.

### ***Critical Moments and Student-Centered Practice***

*Critical Moments* seemed like a natural extension of the two successful Students of Color Focus Group surveys conducted during the previous decade, seven years apart. In these surveys, student participants were confidentially and anonymously asked about their experiences as students of color at South Puget Sound and the ways in which it could improve the teaching and learning environment for students like themselves. Their responses, stories, and suggestions were transcribed, analyzed by subject categories, and summarized for circulation to college staff, faculty, administration, and the Board. In the case of the second survey, the report was also shared with other colleges in conference presentations and workshops as a model for working towards institutional change. The first Focus Group, in 1992, generated a list of institutional changes needed at the College—all of which were made by the time of the second survey in 1999. Both Focus Group reports were highly successful in raising awareness of diversity and equity issues on campus, and both led to significant improvements in campus climate for students of color.

*"I learned that you don't have to be different colors, necessarily, that you can be culturally different in class, sex, or age and still come across differences that must be overcome. In the future I plan to take critical moments in my own life and think about how they are affecting others around me: what's at stake for this person or that person?"*

*- A student*

The *Critical Moments Project* was another way to elicit students' stories about their real life experiences with diversity and equity issues and concerns. We imagined that selected stories might be a rich and dynamic source of information concerning campus climate, resources and services, community outreach support, and pedagogy and curriculum.

After much discussion, we decided to adapt the project to the classroom. Because the majority of our group were faculty, and several of us taught courses that focused on multicultural content and cross-cultural communications skills, we realized that the *Critical Moments* case story project could be transformed into an effective class assignment, structured and presented as a series of activities and exercises culminating in a graded paper (the case story). Students in pairs could conduct interviews of their partner's "critical moment" around diversity and identity, communication, or educational experiences and then write their partner's stories. The instructor would carefully frame the assignment in terms of each course's objectives and then guide students through the process with supplemental handouts developed by the *Critical Moments* team. The project had enormous potential for developing students' critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills. In sharing their own critical moment story with another student, listening to their partner's story, and then writing what they heard accurately and respectfully, students were practicing the skills of diversity training which were already key objectives of courses which would incorporate *Critical Moments*.

The Project would have other uses beyond its implementation as a major assignment in diversity courses: as an exercise in critical thinking, it could be adapted to virtually any course or discipline; as a professional development tool for staff, administration, and faculty; and as a way to continue conversation between South Puget Sound and other

campuses about ways to strengthen recruitment and retention of students of color and other underrepresented students. In fact, the prospect of working closely with staff and faculty from other colleges in the state for three years, in a project facilitated by the Washington Center, was a tremendous attraction for our small group. We knew from experience how energizing, sustaining, and crucial to diversity work success such a community project would be.

This approach proved successful. Through *Critical Moments*, we directly contributed to the competence of students as citizens in a multicultural society and to the professional development of those who teach and serve them at the college. We are pleased with these results, but we never anticipated that as we were teaching South Puget Sound students, faculty, staff and administrators about the *Critical Moments*

### Critical Thinking Skills

1. What are the *perspectives* presented here, each one sympathetically viewed? Who's involved?
2. What is the *problem*? What are the issues? What is at stake for each party?
3. What might have been *done differently*? What could be *done now*—and what are the *consequences* of each possible solution?
4. What relevant life experiences or perspectives do *you* bring to this incident?

Come prepared to discuss in small groups.

~ A *Critical Moments* handout

process and skills, we—as individuals and an institution—would experience our own critical moment, with much more dramatic results.

## Before Critical Moments: A Brief History

Historically, our College has had very few faculty and staff of color. Even now, out of 97 full-time faculty, only 11 are faculty of color. Two of our team members are the sole female faculty of their respective ethnic groups on campus. The first significant diversity work at the College began in the early 1990's. Several white faculty and staff—hired, in part, for their multicultural expertise—collaborated with a few staff of color and a growing number of students of color. This group was characterized by a frequently shifting membership (part of the nature of a two-year college and the job market) as students, faculty, and staff of color came and went. Energy for diversity work was experienced as peaks and valleys and extended “plateaus.” Yet, the group's commitment and the work itself persisted, and minority student, staff and faculty voices were heard on campus.

“You need to incorporate *Critical Moments* into each classroom thoughtfully, considering how many days per week the class meets, how critical moments can help to deliver other academic concepts, how it helps students achieve course objectives. Also teachers can be selective; they don't have to incorporate the whole project.”

~ A *Critical Moments* team member

After 1993, most of the current faculty of color were hired, and more ethnically-diverse perspectives began to appear at different levels and areas of the college. Minority student leaders voiced their concerns and needs in public forums and organized student groups around diversity issues. A ground swell of interest in and support for these issues across campus and among administrators led to the development of several courses, such as Asian and Latin American Studies, Intercultural Communications, and Multicultural America, among others; the sustained, energetic work of multicultural committees, such as the Deepening Diversity Committee; and the creation of grassroots diversity activities, such as the Brown Bag Diversity Lunches and the Students of Color Focus Group Project. Several members of the current *Critical Moments* team participated in these various efforts, and attained, in the process, a deeper understanding of our particular college culture and context. These efforts and this understanding helped lay the foundation for more expansive and challenging changes to come.

## Evolution of a Project

### *Year One: Creating the Critical Moments Curriculum*

At a one-day retreat near the end of fall term, we created a “Critical Moments Teaching Packet” with handouts to guide instructors and students through the curriculum process, from students' discovery of their own critical moments, to self-exploration and focused partner sharing, to interviewing and writing each other's story, and finally to peer evaluation and self-and-partner assessment. (Three sample

handouts are included in this monograph; the Teaching Packet is available upon request.)

Early Childhood Education instructor, Marcia Somer, and Speech Communications instructor, Kitty Carlsen, then field-tested the curriculum in their two classes, “Educating Young Students in a Diverse Society” and “Intercultural Communication.” Both found the project useful, but often challenging. For many Early Childhood Education students who first felt overwhelmed by the project, clarity came in the final weeks of the course. Intercultural Communications students ultimately gained an understanding for a variety of people and situations and developed trust and new bonds among themselves.

### ***Year Two: Extending Critical Moments Beyond the Classroom***

We continued to incorporate Critical Moments into students’ coursework, now including “College Writing,” “Interpersonal Communication,” and “Multicultural America” (all three quarters). In Humanities instructor Sherry Sullivan’s “Multicultural America” course, students were encouraged to find their critical moments in events associated with their development of cultural identity (broadly defined) or sense of self and “others.” They also were asked to select a partner unlike themselves with whom to share their story. In this way they would be practicing cross-cultural communications skills and expanding their experiences of diversity. Self-assessment comments at the end of this and subsequent terms are particularly rich.

During this year, we also moved outside the classroom to the larger campus, with workshops for faculty and staff that emphasized what “critical moments” are and how this curriculum could be used in different disciplines such as math, art and drama. We explored the critical thinking skill of perspective taking and its value for instructors or staff experiencing real “critical moments” with their students. To reveal the power of student voices, we shared several of our students’ critical moments stories and self-assessments at faculty in-service workshops, campus-wide meetings, and the President’s annual Diversity Breakfast for community leaders. We also invited members of Seattle Central’s *Critical Moments* team to facilitate a well-attended workshop on analyzing one of their own case stories, with particular emphasis on perspective taking. In another very popular event, a group from Edmonds Community College presented videotaped versions of critical moments, written and acted by students at their campus. Through these activities and others, the *Critical Moments Project* and our team gained credibility and respect throughout the college for our collective work in addressing diversity issues and concerns. On several occasions students, staff, and other faculty experiencing their own “critical moments” at the college approached team members, particularly faculty of color, for support and advice. The absence of a multicultural center and a director for diversity and equity was keenly felt, as we saw ourselves filling a void in these services and resources.

*“I learned that I need to be less quick to judge and dismiss certain people. This only serves to alienate me and make me a less agreeable person in general. It makes it harder to achieve my goals when I decide to not like or respect certain people I have to work with.”*

*- A student*

The curriculum we developed interested colleagues from other colleges and universities, such as Seattle Central Community College, who used materials from our “*Critical Moments Handbook*” in their courses. We also shared our approach and materials at several workshops and conferences, including the National Learning Communities Summer Institute at Evergreen (with Tacoma Community College), the American Association of Colleges and Universities Conference (with the Washington Center and Tacoma Community College), and the annual Washington Center Conference (with other partner institutions) at North Seattle Community College.

By the end of the second year, *Critical Moments* had become a widely acknowledged and valued part of the College. Drained, but buoyed by the success of our work, we began making plans for next year’s activities. Then, several of our team members experienced a “critical moment” that changed everything.

### ***Transition to Year Three: The “Critical Moment” Within the Critical Moments Project***

Late in spring quarter, three *Critical Moments* team members who are faculty of color received an e-mail declaring, “This is to advise you [that] you have been drafted to serve on your division dean screening committee . . .” The recipients were stunned and angered by the wording and tone—particularly when they remembered that a general call for *volunteers* to serve on the committee had earlier been sent to all faculty. The email took no account of the faculty’s circumstances. The request occurred at a peak period of the term, and the first committee meeting was scheduled during morning classes. The request also ignored the faculty’s heavy committee service that year, the result of having been solicited for other hiring and tenure committees.

Team members who received the e-mail met immediately to plan a response, inviting a white member of the *Critical Moments* team to help them strategize. Intense, emotional, and productive, this meeting built on the camaraderie and trust already established by their work together on *Critical Moments*. Although the email did not come from the President’s office, the faculty of color decided to tell their story directly to the President. When they arrived at his office, his first response was to cancel scheduled meetings, sit down, and listen. He understood the magnitude of the “critical moment” from their perspective. What made a difficult conversation easier for everyone was the common, shared language of *Critical Moments*. At the end of this stressful meeting, the President apologized on behalf of the college and agreed with the faculty that more dialogue between faculty and staff of color and senior administrators needed to occur.

That summer the President convened three meetings with the four *Critical Moments* team members who had originally responded to the email, a staff of color who had also received the email, and the vice-presidents of Instruction, Student Services, and Human Resources. The

“The most rewarding part of this assignment for me is that I am able to make sense of my own critical moment and how it changed the way I feel toward certain ethnic groups. It was not by telling my critical moment to my partner, but only by reading the story [he] wrote, that I realized what it all meant. Only then could I explain what this very personal moment had created in me... I need to rid myself of the stereotypes that my critical moment created and see people for who they are.”

- A student

*Critical Moments* team organized the meetings, prepared materials, and selected who among them would lead the discussion. The President elected to be listen attentively, take notes, and provide a list of the most important topics raised. His final list included: recruiting, hiring and retaining diverse faculty, staff, and administrators; recruiting and retaining diverse students; creating a safe environment; and strengthening diversity curriculum, teaching, and learning.

“The power of *Critical Moments* in the classroom was its transformative impact on students’ beliefs and values—on their very lives. You could see some students expand and deepen their thinking and gain understanding and sympathy for people unlike themselves that they never had before—almost before your eyes—all from the emotional power of listening to, and identifying with, someone else’s critical moment story.”

~ A South Puget Sound Instructor

After the last meeting, our entire team created a plan for the coming year called “*From Critical Moments to Best Practices for Diversity and Equity*.” We would hold campus conversations focused on a succession of the topics that had been raised in order to generate ideas for “small, meaningful acts for change” which could be put into practice immediately and assessed after an appropriate length of time. Our plan offered an inclusive, participatory, building-block strategy for helping the college meet its diversity and equity goals.

### ***Year Three: Transforming College Practice Through Critical Moments/Best Practices***

While we were engaged in leading the campus conversation on diversity and equity, we continued our work with *Critical Moments* in the classroom. Speech Communications instructor, Kaidren Sergienko used the project in her Interpersonal Communication class, emphasizing the power of perspective taking in developing interpersonal communications skills. Students learned how to create trust by sharing personal experiences with a partner, how to listen sympathetically to each other, how to ask questions respectfully to elicit disclosure, and how to write with empathy and sensitivity each other’s stories. Students valued this work and recommended that more class time be given to practicing their critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Early in fall quarter we moved full force into the Best Practices phase of *Critical Moments*. Three workshop sessions focused on interrelated topics selected by our team in consultation with the President: recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse faculty, staff, and administrators, and the retention of diverse students. An average of forty faculty, staff, administrators, and students attended each session and generated a huge list of “small meaningful acts.” *Critical Moments* team members organized the acts from each session by themes and were joined by a small group of dedicated colleagues to select one or two doable acts within each category for implementation across campus.

### ***Year Four: New Directions***

*Critical Moments* curriculum continues to be an important part of two established courses, “Multicultural America” and “Educating in a Diverse Society,” and has been adapted by Jane Stone for her Art 101

class, where students created a visual representation of a critical moment around their cultural identity development.

Several “small meaningful acts” selected by the Best Practices process have been implemented on campus. For example, Allan Johnson’s visit to our campus occurred in response to a recommendation that fall in-service activities regularly include a diversity session facilitated by an outside speaker. A significant number of the college community also read Johnson’s books, *Privilege, Power and Difference* and *The Gender Knot*. Other accomplishments include the hiring of a new part-time Director for a soon-to-be Diversity and Equity Center, mandatory diversity training for new employees of the college, creation and dissemination of a “College Diversity and Safe Environment” statement, and several physical and technological accommodations for students with disabilities. Two *Critical Moments* team members, Marcia Somer and Lisa Lawrenson, have worked with South Puget Sound’s Vice Presidents for Instruction and Student Services to establish a diversity course requirement for graduation—the initial planning occurring at Washington Center’s February 2004 Campus Equity and Engagement Retreat.

Finally, the President’s new “Diversity Action Plan: 2003-2008” is deeply rooted in our *Critical Moments Project* work. The Plan reflects and continues the language and structure of Best Practices sessions from last year, evidence that the President really did listen. He understood the concerns and needs expressed and assumed leadership and responsibility for beginning the process of institutional change.

As we reflect on this work, we are reassured by our growth individually and institutionally thus far, and hopeful of more good work to come. So much has been accomplished in the past four years, including some things we could not have imagined when we first began the *Critical Moments Project*. But we remain anxious about the future. Our team has introduced a radical shift in campus thinking about how institutional change occurs, and we do not want to lose the momentum of *Critical Moments* and its empathetic, collaborative potential—the grafting of a grass roots initiative to strong administrative leadership. Both are indispensable for positive institutional change; partnerships strengthen the work. For those of us who have long been involved in diversity and equity at the college, the initiative and the organization for change must always be inclusive.

“You can’t rush people to make big steps when it comes to values. The same is true for institutions. It is the small steps that matter, with some backwards steps.”

~ A *Critical Moments* team member

## **CRITICAL MOMENTS PROJECT GUIDELINES**

Throughout this quarter, you will participate in a Critical Moments Project activity. This is a project designed to help you meet the course objectives and develop practical skills through your participation in a variety of learning experiences.

In sum, you will partner with another classmate and identify a “critical moment” in each of your past educational experience, interview one another in greater depth about that experience, then write each other’s story in an engaging and responsible manner. The case story that you develop is designed to help the interviewee, writer, and other readers understand and discuss issues surrounding diversity. Skills in areas such as perspective-taking, critical-thinking, problem-solving, interpretation, consideration of cultural diversity, and social interaction will be explored through this process.

An additional purpose of this project is to develop a comprehensive case book comprised of student stories to use as teaching and learning tools for future SPSCC students, faculty, staff and community members.

This project has several components and stages described below:

**Step 1: Conversation with project partner**

This activity is designed to give you the opportunity to introduce yourself to your partner, and get to know each other.

**Step 2: Practice interview with project partner**

This interview will allow you to understand your partner more in depth while creating a comfortable climate. Interview techniques will be practiced.

**Step 3: Complete self-reflection worksheet and personal cultural history questions**

Each of you will be given a self-reflection worksheet and personal cultural history questions to be completed as homework. These allow personal exploration and reflection of past educational and cross-cultural experiences. They will be used later as guides for identifying each partner’s critical moment.

**Step 4: Complete peak and valley timeline chart**

Using the self-reflection worksheet (and personal cultural history), you will create a peak and valley timeline chart that illustrates the high and low points in your educational career thus far. You are not required to place anything on this chart from the self-reflection that you do not want to share with others. When this activity is completed, it will be shared with your project partner.

**Step 5: Select a critical moment**

Next, partners will share timelines with each other and help to identify one critical moment for each that is appropriate for this project and meets the criteria for a “good critical moment”.

- Step 6: Interview project partner (critical moment)**  
Partners will interview each other with the goal of gathering information about the critical moment. This information will be used to write each other's story.
- Step 7: Write the critical moment story**  
You will then write your partner's story based on the interview(s) about the incident. In this step, you should simply write an informal, story-line sketch of what occurred.
- Step 8: Shape story with partner**  
Share your working draft with your partner to find out if it is accurate and to gather any more information, if necessary, to create the story.
- Step 9: Write rough draft**  
Write a rough draft of the story, implementing the components of a "good critical moment".
- Step 10: Peer feedback session**  
After completing the rough draft, you should share it with at least three (3) other classmates and get feedback.
- Step 11: Write final draft**
- Step 12: Presentation of completed critical moment story**  
You will then share the story that you wrote with the class. Be certain that you are presenting it accurately and that your partner is given the opportunity to add comments.
- Step 13: Self-evaluation**  
At the conclusion of this project, you will complete a self-evaluation assessing and exploring what you learned as a result of participating in this process as both an interviewer/story-writer and as interviewee.

**CRITICAL MOMENTS:  
Personal Cultural History**

Answer the questions below as time & memory permits—rough notes are ok:

1. What was the first time you remember relating to people of a different cultural or racial group than yours? What were your feelings/reactions to this situation?
2. What people, events or influences in your life have helped shape your attitudes/feelings about cultural or racial difference?
3. Describe a situation in which you were the only one like you. What happened? How did you feel?
4. Describe a situation when you were discriminated against because of who you are.
5. Describe an occasion where you had to leave your cultural identity, a part of who you really are, at the door.

The following class meeting, students meet in groups of 4 and each person shares their response to one of the questions. Homework after this class is to answer the following questions:

- What surprised you during your group discussion today?
- What did you learn about yourself? About others in your group?
- What did you learn about intercultural communication?
- Do you think personal cultural history impacts how you communicate with others? Why or why not?

### **CRITICAL MOMENTS: Self Reflection Worksheet**

Answer the following questions about your own experiences:

A.

1. What does it mean to be educated?
2. Is education important to you? Why or why not?
3. What are you majoring in and/or what career are you pursuing? Why?
4. Why did you come to this college? What brought you here?

B.

5. Name a time when you floundered in school? How did you feel?
6. Name a time when you felt a) discouraged because of your educational experience and, b) encouraged because of your educational experience?
7. Name a time when you doubted yourself in an academic setting.
8. Have you ever questioned your self worth due to an educational experience? If so, when? Where and who did this occur with?
9. Name a time when you either felt:

a. Defeated	h. Visible
b. Successful	i. Overworked
c. Over-looked	j. Valued for your work
d. Prominent	k. The only one like you
e. Silenced	l. Part of a group
f. As if what you said mattered	m. Excluded
g. Invisible	n. Included

C.

10. What would have been different in your life had you not felt invisible, validated, etc. (see #9).

D.

11. Describe the first time you became aware of cultural differences in an educational setting.
12. Describe your first experience with a person from a different cultural background in school.

### **CRITICAL MOMENTS: Self Reflection Peaks and Valleys Activity**

Draw a 'Peaks and Valleys' map or time-line based on your responses in the Self Reflection worksheet and the Personal Cultural History homework. This will be shared, so be sure to omit items you do not want to share.

Also, feel free to add any other 'peaks' or 'valleys' from your educational experience that were not brought out in your reflections earlier.

## CRITERIA FOR A CRITICAL MOMENTS CASE STORY

### 1) A Critical Moments story is a multi-layered problem.

In other words, the story should include more than one perspective, and multiple issues or forces impacting the situation. Be certain to explore the situation in its entirety and ask questions that reveal the context surrounding the incident. Through understanding the context and looking deeply at the situation, you will be better able to recognize the complexities involved, and describe those issues in richer detail for the reader.

In addition, the story should be written so that the reader feels both emotionally and intellectually engaged. By doing this, the reader is better able to perspective-take and learn from the material presented. The reader will also gain more from a story that does not “give the answer” to the dilemma and allows the reader to explore many possible solutions or courses of action.

### 2) A Critical Moments story includes a protagonist and an antagonist.

Protagonist: The protagonist can also be described as the story-teller or student whose story is being told. This person should not be categorized as a victim; rather she or he should be presented as having control over what happened or what could have happened in the situation, and as making choices along the way. The story is told in 3rd person.

Antagonist: The antagonist can also be described as the blocker (a person or institution that blocks the protagonist from reaching her or his goals) or as motivator (the person who, within the educational institution, allowed the story-teller to meet her or his goals). The antagonist should not be presented as a villain; rather, this person should be described as having a counter position to the protagonist, or as preventing the story-teller from reaching her or his goals.

### 3) A Critical Moments story creates sympathy in the reader toward the protagonist.

The reader should understand the protagonist’s perspective and also the goals that she or he is working toward achieving. In addition, the value of reaching those goals should be implied.

### 4) A Critical Moments story needs to show the protagonist entertaining or envisioning alternative possibilities but feeling stymied.

The protagonist may feel thwarted by either the institution or an individual (blocker). It is important that the reader see the story-teller searching for strategies in order to understand the effort that is being put forth to create a more positive situation.

### 5) A Critical Moments story presents the protagonist as at a crossroad.

After exploring the goals, roadblocks, situation, and complexities of the protagonist, the student should find herself or himself faced with a decision. This is where the story ends, allowing the reader to develop potential courses of action that could be taken to gain positive results.

### 6) The final paragraph of the story explains how the protagonist responded

What did the protagonist decide to do, how did he or she act or what did they say, and what (if appropriate) were the consequences, long or short-term of this response? What are his or her thoughts now, new insights, and awareness of skills needed? (**Analyze!**)

### 7) A last paragraph presents the writer’s perspective on the critical moment.

What did the writer learn from this narrative and the project over all? What was seen or understood differently as a result of working through the story? How does this activity relate to Takaki’s “different mirror” image and the theme of this course? What can you, the writer, take with you from this experience? (**Analyze!**)

The first day of high school was a shock for Yvonne, as it would be for anyone transferring into a new environment. But this was a culture shock in more ways than one. Not only did Yvonne have to deal with being the new kid in school, a stranger among peers who had attended the same schools for years together. She also had to deal with the fact that the majority of the student body was Caucasian. Yvonne is Native American, and her ethnicity seemed to isolate her more and present another barrier in her quest for acceptance in this new, unfamiliar and initially unwelcoming place.

The first few weeks were the worst. Yvonne dreaded waking up every morning to go back to that cold institution where everyone seemed to be so closed-minded. But eventually, people began to warm up, conversations happened, and casual friends were made. One girl in particular ended up being the friend Yvonne hung out with, the one who gave her real hope for fitting into a social circle. Jenny was warm and friendly, open, fun to be around. They had several classes and ate lunch together every day, their relationship growing steadily as they learned more about one another.

During this time, even as Yvonne was struggling to fit in and feel comfortable in a new environment, she was also exploring more deeply her Native American cultural identity. She was proud of her heritage and had grown up influenced by her grandparents, who still practiced some of the traditional ways. But she knew she had a lot to learn yet about this part of herself. She began to read more about the culture and ask her mom more questions. At school, she became involved in groups like the Leadership Team and the Diversity Council as a way to practice her cultural values, share them, and learn about others. When her math teacher approached her one morning with an invitation to say a few words during all-school announcements in celebration of Native American week, she eagerly agreed. She saw this as an opportunity to educate her classmates and publicly affirm her pride and knowledge of her own ethnic origins.

On the way to class that day, Yvonne excitedly mentioned this new assignment to Jenny. Jenny laughed in surprise and jokingly made an Indian war whoop with her hand to her mouth like an old T.V. cartoon. Yvonne was stunned; her mouth dropped open and she felt her stomach plummet to her feet. “Are you #\*\*%ing stupid?!” she found herself saying. “Don’t you realize what you just did?”

The conversation—and the walk to class—came to a screeching halt. Jenny, looking utterly blank and shocked, shook her head. Emotions surged through Yvonne—first anger, then sorrow, then dismay. How could this person, her first friend in this new environment, behave in such a disrespectful and ignorant way? She had managed to insult Yvonne’s entire ancestry with a few thoughtless gestures and sounds. What was she thinking? Was she really that ignorant, that inexperienced, that unaware that racial identity can be a very touchy subject for people, especially minorities? Were other students that ignorant? What kind of place was this, anyway?

Yvonne shook her head in disbelief and frustration and ran into class, leaving behind a bewildered friend. As the teacher began the class, Yvonne sat in the back trying to sort through the chaos in her head—what had just happened and what she should do. How could she explain to this close-minded, amazingly unaware friend what she had done wrong? Obviously Jenny had no idea how deeply her joke cut. Could she trust Jenny to understand, to want to understand? Could she trust herself to explain effectively? She felt so emotional about this, but it was emotion almost beyond speech and reason. Could the friendship, which wasn’t yet very strong, survive this rupture? Did she even want it to? Part of Yvonne wanted to crawl into a hole and forget about the stupid little Native American day announcement, forget about sharing and feeling proud in front of others, and definitely forget about trying to explain to would-be friends like Jenny!

## Marissa's Math Challenge

### STUDENT-WRITTEN STORY SOUTH PUGET SOUND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Marissa walked into class the first day and took a seat near the front. "This is going to be great. I am so ready for this class," she said to herself. As the students began to fill the room, she sat in her chair glowing with the excitement about the new quarter and more challenging math. The sullen faces of the other students made her squiggle in her chair. They did not look ready for this class. But math had always been a strong point for Marissa, so the somber looks of the other students did not deter her. As the instructor walked to the front of the class, a student walked in and sat down next to Marissa. The student in front of her turned to her and her neighbors and asked, "Has anyone heard anything about this instructor yet?" Marissa shook her head no.

The class began without incidence. The instructor started to explain the concepts of "math for liberal arts." Marissa felt a twinge in her stomach but relaxed, remembering she had taken supporting math classes, including Math 94, 98, 99. She felt confident.

That feeling didn't last long, however.

For one thing, Marissa found the class more than challenging. After a week, she realized that the instructor didn't give enough examples to support the theories. He also tested on material they had never even talked about in the class. The text was bad, too. Even the instructor said, "This book is no good. I just chose it because we had to have a book." Marissa couldn't believe that she had to buy a \$75 book that the instructor didn't even want to use. The more the quarter wore on, the more Marissa started worrying that her GPA was going to plummet just because of "this stupid class."

Three weeks into the course, Marissa decided to start a study group with the guy who had taken a seat next to her on the first day of class. Other students joined them, forming what they called the motley study crew. She felt a little reassured that people in the group saw the instructor and the class the same way she did. They studied together, got lost together, and practiced things they thought they were supposed to know.

Despite the help of her group members, Marissa's angst grew as the quarter progressed. She felt confused and lost; she didn't know what it was she didn't know. There was nothing to practice or build on, and the teacher would joke with the smarter students at the expense of other students. Self-doubt was closing in on her. If she could not excel in a course that used to be comfortable for her, what would she do? She suddenly understood what claustrophobia meant. "Oh, Marissa, just do whatever you can," she said, hearing her former teacher's words in the back of her head. "Ok, I'll do that. I'll just get through this class with whatever I can and take it again later if I have to."

So Marissa and her group persevered. A crucial mid-term exam was coming up and Marissa e-mailed her teacher to ask him a question. She wanted to know which problems she had missed on the last quiz so she could go back and study them. She watched her e-mail anxiously for a reply during the long weekend before the big exam. Nothing. When Marissa got to class on Monday, she confronted the teacher about her concern with the exam. The teacher just laughed as he said, "By your quiz scores, I'd say you needed to review everything, Marissa."

# TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



# The Critical Moments Project

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## CAMPUS PROFILE

Tacoma Community College's mission is to provide quality educational programs in a dynamic learning environment to anyone interested in continuing their education. The College offers almost 8,400 students a range of academic and occupational degrees, worker retraining programs, continuing education classes, and developmental learning opportunities. Opened in 1965, the College's aim is to be accessible, comprehensive, and flexible, and to address the personal, professional, and social needs of its diverse on- and off- campus communities.

By fall 2003, over one-third of state supported students attending Tacoma Community College were students of color, and six percent were students with disabilities. Although the largest group of students is in the 20 to 24-age range, close to a quarter of the student population is under the age of 20, and those aged 25 to 64 comprise about fifty percent of the student body. The College's students are ethnically diverse and come from widely diverse backgrounds. The international program further enhances campus diversity with students from Asia, Latin America, and Europe.

Compared with the ethnically diverse student body, the College's full-time faculty, which numbered 103 in 2001, was only about sixteen percent people of color. Additionally, a recent Climate Survey revealed significant differences between the perceptions of students of color and other respondents regarding how positive the cultural climate is at Tacoma Community College. These survey findings and the contrast between the low number of faculty of color and the large number of students of color on campus has motivated the College to emphasize various initiatives to ensure that the campus is skillful and competent on issues of diversity. One of these initiatives that seemed to fit the College's needs—especially the continuing need to find a way to have students and faculty work together to address diversity—has been the Critical Moments Project.

## ABOUT CRITICAL MOMENTS AT TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Historically, Tacoma Community College has been committed to innovative programs that aim to graduate well-prepared students. In order to keep students engaged in their studies, we extend our educational efforts beyond classroom instruction. We strive to establish a holistic learning environment throughout our campus so that students find the support they need to overcome multiple challenges they face while attending college. Tacoma Community College's *Fresh Start Program* is an example of this approach. It actively engages the college, the local public school districts, community-based organizations, and family members in redirecting youth who have dropped out of school. Our team felt that this program would be an ideal setting for *Critical Moments*.

Our *Critical Moments* work has taken three main directions: one where we developed campus-wide workshops and presentations to encourage faculty and staff to become more aware of diversity issues and how *Critical Moments* might enhance the learning of students in their own classes; a second where we used *Critical Moments* to enhance student leadership; and, another where we integrated *Critical Moments* into an already existing program, *Fresh Start*.

### Using *Critical Moments* in Professional Development

We began our efforts by putting together a team of faculty and staff whose first task was to receive approval from the Human Subject Review Board to interview students for the *Critical Moments Project*. Through the help of The Center for Multi-Ethnic and Cultural Affairs, the team met and interviewed five interested students. We also decided to adapt three of the University of Nebraska-Omaha cases—“Sinking in Sociology,” “Between A Rock and a Hard Place,” and “Annette’s Dilemma”—from the *Critical Moments* manual so we could introduce the project by actively involving the campus in case discussions.

Working as a team to write a case proved challenging. We wanted to maintain the anonymity of those students whose stories were being told and eventually decided to choose an individual faculty member to write case stories. We also relied on the training provided by the *Critical Moments* consultants. With a case writer in place, we wrote and tested our first case story, “You’ve Got A Good Head on Your Shoulders.” After revisions of this case, based on feedback from faculty, staff, and

“I was forced to look at myself and consider my biases and how I fit in the world. The world is a small place, and my attitudes and beliefs can make a difference – in my reflection back.”

-A student

students, we felt more confident about writing cases. We found that although the transcribing process is laborious, it is crucial for the success of the cases. When a multicultural team goes over a transcript together, possible generative themes emerge that can be further refined in conversation.

“As an educator, study and use of the *Critical Moments* model has been rewarding both professionally and personally. The background information that led to the formulation of the model, helped increase my own awareness of the impact diversity has in every facet of life in U.S. culture... I was privileged and honored to conduct the interviews for the Tacoma Community College case stories. The generative themes from these stories led to fruitful conversations among students, faculty, staff, and administration.

What I find to be the most exciting part of using the *Critical Moments* model, whether in our 3-D (Diversity, Difference, Dialogue) Conference, credited human development classes, Teaching Learning Forums, Professional Development Trainings, or faculty workshops, has been watching the growth of participants, seeing enthusiasm and creativity, and opening minds. Individuals (including myself), develop awareness, tolerance, understanding, acceptance, and celebration of the dynamics of difference.”

~ Peggy Sargeant, faculty member

Later in the project, we would discover that some of our team members could “speak” a case, and we piloted an oral method for case writing. For instance, we developed the math case, “What’s the Point?” (see Appendix Two) by working with a team member who had interviewed a student. This conversation had not been transcribed, but the student’s story was memorable and the team member could recount it in vivid detail.

In the first year of the project, we introduced *Critical Moments* to the broader campus community through the established Faculty Teaching and Learning Forum with a focus on how to use *Critical Moments* case stories in the classroom. We also presented workshops for a faculty retreat entitled “Critical Moments As An Educational Model” and for the College’s Professional Development Days, an opportunity for staff to participate and learn about *Critical Moments* as well.

At the retreats and workshops, the *Critical Moments* team facilitated case story discussions so participants could see how powerful cases can be for students, especially those historically underrepresented in higher education. During the discussions, faculty felt more open and less resistant to “diversity workshops” or a project like *Critical Moments* since the focus is on critical thinking and communication. In working with faculty on how to use case stories in teaching, team members emphasized pedagogical approaches that would support active student learning.

Over ninety Tacoma college faculty members have attended *Critical Moments* workshops. We have also offered intensive training attended by fifteen faculty from the following departments: English, Administration of Justice, Reading, Human Services, Engineering, Physics, International Business, Counseling, Health Services, *Fresh Start*, and Academic Career Preparation.

In working with faculty from the campus as a whole, the team wanted to use *Critical Moments* to raise awareness about the ways in which many underrepresented students, who are not knowledgeable about academic culture, “misread” what it takes to be a student. Trying hard to accomplish the tasks set for them by faculty, these students do not understand the requirements necessary to succeed. They often lack

effective study habits, time management skills, and/or social support systems. Students might perceive themselves as studying, that is “putting in hours,” but they cannot compete with students whose skills are more refined; faculty often do not recognize the efforts made by students who use their time poorly.

Students new to college culture typically do not know anyone who can show them how to study. When students who put in the hours do not perform well, they feel terribly disappointed by poor grades, and they are angry. In the *Critical Moments* work we do, we emphasize how faculty can help students become familiar with the language of academia so they can learn the skills associated with academic success and can become better interpreters of implicit academic expectations.

### Using *Critical Moments* to Enhance Student Leadership

The *Critical Moments* team also organized a statewide, student leadership conference based on *Critical Moments*. Participants representing nine community colleges registered for “Seeing in 3-D: Diversity, Difference, and Dialogue On Our Campuses.” Forty students, faculty, and staff from our College also attended this all-day event. We used case discussions to explore issues about diversity with young student leaders. The conference had as its goal the participation of students in a conversation about how diversity influences all of our learning experiences.

Some students who attended this conference were enrolled in a companion one-credit Human Development course, a two-hour class that met three additional days. The course has now become a three-credit class titled *Diversity and the Dynamics of Differences*. The course curriculum supports three of Tacoma Community College’s Student Learning Outcomes: Communication, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Living and Working Cooperatively. Initially taught by campus faculty members, the course is now team-taught by a faculty member and student affairs professional. One of the goals is for the course to have a multicultural designation that will fulfill one of the graduation requirements. With its multicultural emphasis, we are hopeful that the Human Development and the American Ethnic and Gender Studies departments will jointly sponsor this course.

“What makes *Critical Moments* a powerful tool is that it helps students learn empathy, and in that process students learn how to behave civilly. This matters because it gives everyone room to speak, and in turn, room to listen. So whether students agree or disagree with one another, there is more room to continue a conversation. This equalizes the learning environment.”

Ricardo Leyva-Puebla, *Critical Moments* Coordinator

### Integrating *Critical Moments* into the *Fresh Start Program*

*Critical Moments* has also been integrated into an established program at the College. *Fresh Start*, an inter-local agreement between Tacoma School District and Tacoma Community College, first enrolled students

in Fall Quarter of 1999. It was modeled after similar programs for young adults between the ages of 16 and 21 found also in Portland, Boston, Baltimore, and Washington State. These programs provide alternative educational opportunities for students who, when in need of some kind of help, go unnoticed especially in overcrowded high schools. In response, community and technical colleges have developed partnerships with local school districts. To improve their employment opportunities, *Fresh Start* students enroll in college courses that simultaneously meet requirements of high school diplomas and earn credits toward their college professional-technical degrees and certificates. The program utilizes public secondary funding resources and requires students to meet state standards for high school graduation.

Frequently, *Fresh Start* students have failed to achieve minimal high school standards. Many have had histories of drug and alcohol abuse, unstable family lives, and chronic absenteeism. Others report that high school was never a place where they fit in or felt accepted, and those from non-dominant cultures feel the added strain of being unrecognized and devalued. Most report that they could not wait to leave high school because they found the experience negative and frustrating.

At *Fresh Start*, students work one on one with an educational planner who closely supervises their academic progress and provides support in whatever way it is needed. During the first quarter students participate in a course called *Career and Life Planning* where they question past patterns, discover aptitudes, develop new interests, and set goals. *Critical Moments* complements *Fresh Start* because it allows students to identify factors that prevented them from succeeding in school. The emphasis on critical thinking skills helps *Fresh Start* students stay in school by alerting them to new social and cultural dimensions of academic life and the practices of successful students.

When introducing *Critical Moments* to a *Fresh Start* class, Wendy Flores used the adapted Nebraska cases. Students seemed to connect well with the cases and teaching approach, and their interest increased especially when she brought in a case story that she had written with assistance from the *Critical Moments* team. After students became familiar with case stories, they wrote their own based on the steps outlined in the *Critical Moments* manual. Typically, every story written by these first-quarter students was not about college but high school, still their main frame of reference.

Using student-written case stories, students worked in small groups with invited guest faculty and staff who facilitated writers' workshops. During these workshops, students read their stories aloud and received feedback from their group. The students were asked to look for multiple and layered meanings in the case, the core issues or "generative themes," the protagonist/antagonist relationships, and whether the dialogue was realistic. Students revised their stories based on peer feedback and then read their stories aloud in yet another small group.

Becoming very interested in one another's stories, lively conversations led to the reciprocal discovery of common "themes."

Several quarters later, Marla Tam-Hoy joined the *Fresh Start* faculty team, and she and Wendy Flores decided to expand the use of *Critical Moments* in the program. After a visit to South Puget Sound Community College where they learned about the curriculum Kitty Gray Carlson had developed for use in her course, they decided to adopt a similar approach in the *Fresh Start Program* as a means to deepen the effects of the case discussions. The South Puget Sound Community College materials brought in self-reflective exercises, such as the "peak and valley timeline" worksheet. In this exercise, students identify a time when they felt defeated, silenced, invisible, or overlooked and a time when they felt valued, included, and successful. Because students work with their personal life stories, they are able to "re-author" negative experiences by describing to another student what they have overcome. Based on these interviews, students write their partner's story. This collaborative approach provides a vital "piece of the puzzle" missing in prior *Fresh Start* case writing exercises: empathetic listening to another's story.

In *Fresh Start* when we added the partner interviews, the students took the experience seriously, spending over an hour on each person's story. Students who never thought they had experienced a "critical moment" lit up when they remembered a past event after doing the peak and valley timeline exercise. In the conversations that followed, students explored "valley" experiences with the goal of figuring out how to overcome obstacles standing in the way of their education. Students carefully and considerately portrayed their partner's difficult experiences in the cases they wrote.

The quality of students' work indicates why a student's own experience is an important starting point for developing their academic abilities. The *Fresh Start* students identified *Critical Moments* as one of their favorite parts of the quarter. Several students commented that they valued the opportunity to hear another person's story in an intimate setting, and they felt that they had gotten to know their partner in a significant way.

From reading students' case stories over several quarters, faculty discovered an important theme for teaching *Fresh Start* students: their high school experiences still dominated; they have not yet seen themselves as real college students. *Critical Moments* became a valuable tool for the instructors to better help students make the transition from high school to college. The approach corresponds to our own belief that students must first examine the roots of their present attitudes and behaviors about school before they can create new ones.

The *Critical Moments* team found the results of the *Fresh Start* program's involvement with the project compelling. The team

"... this class made me think in different perspectives."

"...this class [has] been really valuable; it got me thinking a lot!"

-From students' course evaluations

coordinator, Ricardo Leyva-Puebla, offered students the opportunity to write a case story that would be published in the Tacoma Community College's casebook.

One student, whose draft was selected, agreed to attend several meetings with the team and the *Critical Moments* consultant. They worked together to discover the underlying generative theme by linking the protagonist's experience with larger patterns of inequality through the writings of bell hooks and Peggy McIntosh. *Where We Stand: Class Matters* by hooks opened the student's mind to new ways of thinking about the effects of poverty on staying in school. As the student and committee worked on revising the story, the student began to understand how his experience was part of a larger social pattern. These meetings were also a unique and special opportunity for the student-writer as he learned about writing for a "real" audience. This case, "Ben's Story," is the one we have chosen as an example of Tacoma Community College's *Critical Moments* work.

“So what does William Ryan mean by ‘blaming the victim?’” Mr. Anderson asked his sociology class. Late to class, Ben had just slipped into his seat at the back of the room. Mr. Anderson glanced at Ben and then called on the student who was sitting beside him. Animated, the student answered, “We use fancy terms such as cultural deprivation or disadvantaged to place fault on the individual who’s in a bad economic situation.”

“Good,” Mr. Anderson replied. “And is this done out of meanness, as a put down?” Another student in front of Ben answered, “No, Ryan argues it’s done in a tone of kindness and concern. And that makes it worse because it’s so subtle. It’s a way of deflecting the issues of social injustice.”

Ben glanced around the room and noticed that his friend John was absent. His day is always better when John was around. Like Ben, John came from a poor family. They had grown up in the same neighborhood with a lot of struggling families. Unlike Ben, though, John had gotten really involved at TCC. He now worked as a tutor in the tutoring center and helped others, and he was in the debate club. John kept telling Ben to get involved in something, even though he knew that Ben’s schedule was really tight.

Mr. Anderson shifted his attention from how blaming the victim contributed to racism to asking about victimization and social class. “So in the class system that we’ve studied, which class is likely to be blamed for its status?”

Ben found himself shifting in his seat. He had never contributed to the class discussion, but John usually did. It was clear that Mr. Anderson liked John’s contributions, so Ben was pleased to sit by John, clearly his friend. But now he felt nervous that Mr. Anderson might call on him, expecting him to be smart like John.

Bertha’s hand shot up. She said, “It’s like Ryan says. Poor people are described as having defects inside them from their poor upbringing. Ryan claims that it’s really society’s defects, such as the unemployment rate, the lack of educational opportunity, for example. Like you said, we have permanent unemployment in this country.”

Ben immediately thought of his own circumstances. His mom struggled to raise him and his brother; her struggle made such a big impact on his own life. His mother simply couldn’t rise above her situation, even working two jobs for the last year. He felt so trapped. “Was it her fault? Was something wrong with her brain?” Ben wondered. He couldn’t help but compare her to John’s mom, who worked at one job where she had been promoted twice. Now her family was not living from paycheck to paycheck like his family was. Ben listened closely to the students talking about how blaming the victim took the focus off conditions of poverty. He thought he was interested in the class because John was in it, but he found himself interested on his own.

When class was over, Ben walked to the cafeteria where other students were sitting around in groups talking. He felt alone, even left out. He only had one true friend. He didn’t belong to any groups because he just didn’t have the time. He bought his sandwich and decided to take it with him to eat work.

When Ben got home from work, he called John, who sounded tired, like he had been sleeping: “Hey, John, why weren’t you at school today?”

“I felt really sick today, man.”

Ben responded, “I really had a bad day being by myself at school. You know what that is like.”

“Well, I’ll be there tomorrow Ben, for sure.”

Ben was hanging up the phone when his mother walked in the front door. Looking around the front room, she said, “Ben, please clean up this house; it’s a mess. You know I need your help.” Ben couldn’t believe that she didn’t even say “hi” or ask how his day had gone. He felt so unimportant when his mom didn’t take the time to ask how he was doing. He thought, “It makes me feel like she doesn’t care about me.”

Without saying a word to her, Ben started picking up as he was told. When he finished, he sat down to study for his math test, but before he could start reading his mom said, “Remember, you need to pick up Steve from the bus stop in twenty minutes.” She was packing her dinner to take to work with her.

“I know. I wasn’t going to forget my little brother,” Ben grunted back. It was his responsibility to pick up Steve and watch him while his mom worked the early night shift. Watching him made studying really difficult, as Steve had lots of energy and not much homework of his own.

As Ben and Steve walked back from the bus stop, they ran into some older neighborhood guys who harassed them and took the only money that they had on them, a total of two dollars. Ben felt really humiliated, but he had to give it to them, or they would harass Steve if Ben showed up late some day.

Safe inside the house, Ben broke down, crying and yelling at Steve, “I hate his damn neighborhood. I wish we had money and could live in a nice quiet, safe neighborhood. There isn’t anyone who cares about how we live or what happens to us here. We have very little chance to change the situation that we are in, and society just leaves us here to fail. They don’t care about how we are treated.” As Steve went into the kitchen, Ben couldn’t help but recall the lines from Tupac’s poem, “Sometimes I Cry,” a poem John had given him and that he had reread many times:

*The world moves fast and it would rather pass u by  
Than 2 stop and c what makes u cry  
It’s painful and sad and sometimes I cry  
and no one cares about why.*

Steve brought Ben some juice from the kitchen. Ben sat down next to his open textbook. He just couldn’t see any way out of his mess unless he could complete college and make something of himself. He tried to get good grades, but he just couldn’t seem to do it. It was getting harder every day, and he didn’t know how much longer he could take it. “At least I have John,” he thought. “Maybe talking to a school counselor would help like John said. I guess one had helped him when he felt lost.”

The next day at school Ben tried hard to do well on his math quiz, but he felt that he had probably failed it because he had been too upset the night before to study. He had too much on his mind to concentrate.

As Ben and John walked to lunch, Ben asked John, “How do you think you did on your history test?”

“Pretty good I think.” John still sniffled from his cold.

“I think that I failed my math quiz,” Ben confessed.

“What happened?” John asked with concern.

“Man, I just couldn’t study. I’m really getting tired of the way my life is going. Mom has to work all the time and I have to take care of Steve, the house, plus work part time to be able to stay in school.”

John’s voice got quiet as he replied, “I’m sorry, Ben. I know it’s not easy for you. You know that she really cares about you and that she needs you. We’ve been studying about this in our sociology class—being a victim. You’re internalizing society’s message about poor people and single moms. Like in our sociology class, you’re seeing yourself as a victim. Is it your mom’s fault that daycare is so expensive and that she can’t find jobs that pay more than the minimum wage?”

What John said sunk in. “I don’t know about being a victim. All I know is that I’m starting not to care about it anymore,” Ben replied sullenly.

John looked Ben in the eye as he said, “You need to care, Ben, or you’ll be the victim society wants you to be. School is your only way out of the situation that you’re in. Remember when we listened to Tupac? Remember “The Rose That Grew From the Concrete?” We should read his poetry again. It’s all about how he had to struggle in life and how he overcame his problems by doing what he loved most. He didn’t give up and he had high expectations for himself. He didn’t let his problems get him down. He was born into poverty and had a real tough life. He discovered that sometimes you have to give up things in life in order to gain success.”

Feeling himself coming out of his bad mood, Ben responded, “Yeah, I know you’re right, but at this time in my life it seems I have too many things to worry about and I’m tired of feeling like such an outcast at school.”

“Ben, you’re letting these things get under your skin. It will all work out. Just keep doing your best. I know you don’t have the time to join any clubs or try out for a sport. Maybe things will get better and you can

start to do some of these things for yourself. Let's get ready for that sociology exam after work. I'll come to your house."

"I guess your right. Man, you're a good friend. You help me to see things more clearly."

After John and Ben got off work, they picked up Steve and went back to Ben's house. John pulled out "The Rose That Grew From Concrete":

*Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete  
Proving nature's law wrong it learned 2 walk  
without having feet  
Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams  
it learned 2 breathe fresh air  
Long live the rose that grew from concrete  
when no one else ever cared!*

"I wonder if we could use this as an example of how victims stop blaming themselves?" Ben asked John. "I wonder what Mr. Anderson would say about Tupac's poem?" They both started figuring out how they might work it in an essay, and Ben realized that he understood more about sociology than he realized. He could tell that John liked how they were discussing Ryan's theory. Ben opened Ryan's book.

"Hey, look, John. Ryan says that the student in the inner city school 'is blamed for his own miseducation.' That's deep. The student doesn't have textbooks or computers and the classroom ceiling is leaking, so he doesn't learn as well as kids with books and computers and beautiful school buildings. But then the politicians and social analysts blame the student for not learning." John nodded in agreement.

They worked on sociology until John had to go home.

As John walked out the door, Ben said, "You really make me think about things and I really appreciate that."

"No problem," replied John. "See you tomorrow." Ben went back to his books and studied until he could no longer keep his eyes open. Steve seemed to sense that Ben needed time to study and didn't bother him.

In the morning before Ben's mom left for work, she woke him up for school. She sat on the edge of his bed, clearly exhausted. Trying to look cheerful, she said, "Well Ben, guess what? I lost my job. I've decided we will move to California to live near my sister. She said she would help us out for a while until I can find a job and get on my feet. We will be leaving in one week, so start packing!"

Ben sat up straight in bed, unable to believe the words coming out of his mother's mouth. He thought, "How can she do this to me? I'm in the middle of my quarter in school!"

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*This case was written by student Eugene Kiss from Tacoma Community College with editorial assistance from Wendy Flores, Diane Gillespie, and other members of the committee. The Critical Moments Project is a collaborative initiative sponsored by The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education in partnership with Tacoma Community College and other colleges. Funding for writing this case was provided, in part, through a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.*

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# THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE



## The Critical Moments Project

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## CAMPUS PROFILE

**F**ounded in the late 1960s as an experimental higher education alternative for Washington State residents, The Evergreen State College is one of six public 4-year colleges and universities. Undergraduate and graduate student enrollment is 4,380 students, of which 18 percent are students of color. Nearly 84 percent attend full-time; 56.3 percent are women; and the average age is 26.

Located in the state capitol of Olympia, Evergreen offers Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees as well as Master degrees in Environmental Studies, Public Administration, and Teaching. Since Evergreen's opening in 1971, academic programs have been organized around interdisciplinary themes, collaborative team teaching, and active approaches to learning. Over the years, hundreds of campuses across the country have adapted this "learning communities" model to their campus circumstances.

The Evergreen State College has made a commitment to multicultural education, to diversify its student body and faculty, and to assist the region's public schools in pursuing similar ends. "Learning across significant differences"—where students learn to recognize, respect, and bridge differences—is one of five foci that guide curriculum planning, teaching, and learning.

The college has two unique programs, designed specifically for groups not well served in higher education. The Evergreen Tacoma campus, in the inner core of the city, offers an upper-division program; its students are primarily students of color as are the faculty and staff. The average age of the Tacoma campus' student body is 39, with 98 percent enrolled in full-time studies, and women comprise 74 percent of the student population. The commitment of the Tacoma campus to the community is expressed in its motto, "enter to learn; depart to serve", and many graduates are community leaders throughout Tacoma and the urban Puget Sound region. The Tribal Reservation-Based Program serves five Native American tribes in the Puget Sound area, and the commitment is to help people living in isolated, rural communities develop community and leadership skills.

## ABOUT CRITICAL MOMENTS AT THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

The *Critical Moments Project* at The Evergreen State College is a project in transition. While the core values the project represents have remained constant, the way they are implemented and framed has changed to fit the institution and Evergreen's unique culture.

Over the last three years, Evergreen's version of *Critical Moments* has come into focus and taken its own shape. The project has found a home, firmly grounding itself in the Student Affairs Division. *Critical Moments* has been integrated into professional development for student leaders across the division and institution. It has also moved into the K-12 system, having been recently used by the college's Gear UP<sup>1</sup> project. This evolution may not seem obvious to all, but it feels very natural to those working on the project.

Initially the Evergreen team struggled with the implementation of the project while we tried to duplicate the model exactly as it had been developed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. We created a team that was multicultural and began to outline our work for the three years of the grant. As we saw it, there were two primary tasks of the project: develop case stories that were specific and unique to our institution and implement *Critical Moments* within the curriculum.

Members of the team were culturally diverse, but we were not very diverse in terms of job function at the college. The majority of the members worked in student affairs or were non-teaching members of the academic affairs division. This made it more difficult to implement the project within the curriculum.

Another challenge to implementing the use of *Critical Moments* cases is the way in which the curriculum is structured. Evergreen's curriculum consists primarily of self-contained, full-time programs that do not easily lend themselves to small credit generating courses. At the beginning of the project, students were limited to taking sixteen credits per quarter.<sup>2</sup> and the only way for them to participate in ongoing case discussions in an academic setting was for *Critical Moments* to be embedded within a full-time program. This was challenging to do, even with faculty who were members of the *Critical Moments* team and understood that the project offered another way for students to develop critical thinking skills and learn about diversity.

“High-risk students benefit most from *Critical Moments*. The ability to think things through is essential to their ability to cope with difficulties in an academic setting as well as everyday life. Students appreciate the opportunity to discuss situations that trouble them and they become less inclined to find easy solutions to complex problems.”

~ A *Critical Moments* team member

Evergreen faculty are cognizant of the limited time-frame they have in which to engage students in interdisciplinary programs. Therefore, they are hesitant to allow non-content related activities to infringe on classroom time. Although it was evident to members of the *Critical Moments* team and others on the campus that the cases adapted from the Goodrich program would allow students to develop skills central to being a liberally-educated person, many faculty could not see beyond the fact that the content or generative theme of the cases did not align with the content areas or themes of the program.

In our attempts to implement the project in the curriculum, the faculty were introduced to *Critical Moments* case story methodology on several occasions. First, a number of them learned about the project through their participation in *Critical Moments*' summer institutes, sponsored by the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. Other faculty members were introduced to the project in the fall of 2000 when *Critical Moments* was part of the annual fall Faculty Retreat, a three-day off-campus gathering where faculty construct future curriculum, discuss issues facing the institution in depth, and learn about ways to improve teaching and learning at the college.

After the retreat, several members of the faculty included *Critical Moments* workshops in their programs<sup>3</sup>. The majority used a single case in their programs, as opposed to several cases which would allow students to build on skills learned in earlier case discussions following the Goodrich model. This use of cases required the team to create workshops around a particular case and critical thinking or interpretative skill, such as problem solving, perspective taking, and empathic communication. We wanted to create a broader context and understanding for the use of the case.

The team's attempts to find a home in the Evergreen curriculum for *Critical Moments* were not going well, yet we were successful in using the cases as a teaching tool in training student leaders in the Student Affairs Division. *Critical Moments* cases were well received in training Resident Assistants in Housing, Peer Support Advisors in First Peoples' Advising Services, and Academic Advising. One of the benefits of this approach and model was that student leaders were exposed to the cases primarily for the purposes of their work, but we found that what they learned from these discussions carried over to their academic lives and influenced how they approached discussions in seminar and other interactions in the classroom.

Another critical shift in the implementation of *Critical Moments* at the college is how the project has been described. Initially we referred to it as a diversity program and resource or tool. Although one of the five guiding foci of the institution is *learning across significant differences*, the team found that framing *Critical Moments* as a

“diversity project” masked its value for academic programs. Part way through the project, there was a paradigm shift in the way *Critical Moments* was described and “advertised.” Instead of focusing on the diversity component of the stories, we re-centered the description on the development of critical thinking skills. An outcome of the paradigm shift was the linking of *Critical Moments* to one of the general education expectations – *demonstrate integrative, independent and critical thinking*.<sup>4</sup> Connecting the project to both the Five Foci and Six Expectations made it easier for members of the college community to see *Critical Moments* as a project fully integrated with the College’s values and mission.

### ***Training Student Leaders***

*Critical Moments* is part of the training curriculum for several groups of student leaders on campus. The cases help illustrate the diversity of students at the college and the challenges they face. Approaches vary based on needs. For instance, the Housing staff uses *Critical Moments* during a preparatory course and for in-services throughout the academic year. The Writing Center included *Critical Moments* in a spring quarter course for future tutors. First Peoples’ Advising Services and Academic Advising peer support programs use *Critical Moments* throughout the year.

### ***New Student Orientation***

The format of *Critical Moments* workshops in New Student Orientation has evolved over time. Initially the *Critical Moments* workshop was offered as a ninety-minute workshop that included a case discussion and supplementary activities where students examined assumptions and identity. *Critical Moments* is now part of a four-day series of workshops titled *Learning to Learn*. The first-hour of the two-hour workshop is focused on a particular topic or skill and the second-hour is a *Critical Moments* case, which allows students to apply the skill(s) to a scenario that they or a peer may experience. The four topics covered in *Learning to Learn* are Getting Organized, Writing At Evergreen, Quantitative Reasoning, and Staying Balanced.

### ***Day of Presence, Day of Absence***

The Evergreen community honors its rich cultural diversity with a special two-day celebration. The Day of Presence and Day of Absence observance was created to celebrate culture, heritage, and community at Evergreen. The Day of Presence represents the uniting of our community and consists of campus-wide workshops, seminars, and performances. On the Day of Absence many of the faculty, staff, and students of color are absent from campus in order to participate in an off-campus retreat. Their absence serves as a tangible reminder of the diversity that is present at Evergreen.

*Critical Moments* has been a part of both the Day of Absence off-campus retreat and Day of Presence programs. Following the Day of

“A real-life ‘critical moment’ that happened to two students in a class that was using cases made us realize that real-time events do not allow for extended deliberation. The two students revealed to their classmates that a degrading cartoon had been slipped under their door in their residence, how they felt, what they did, and planned to do. The rest of the students fell silent. While the Evergreen Critical Moments team’s insights and experience were invaluable during the incident we are still working through the implications for our work.”

~ A *Critical Moments* team member

Presence workshop, several students commented that the case allowed them to apply things they had learned in other diversity training sessions and allowed for a more realistic exploration of the issues.

Over two hundred students, staff, and faculty have participated in these *Critical Moments* seminars. One of the benefits of including *Critical Moments* in the Day of Presence, Day of Absence programming has been increased exposure of the project. There have been requests for additional cases to be taught in academic programs. We have been contacted by the Civil Rights Peer Trainers to explore the possibility of including *Critical Moments* in their workshops.

### ***Gear UP Student Seminars***

Following the Day of Presence, Day of Absence workshop the Gear UP Director approached the team about using *Critical Moments* when the students visited Evergreen during spring quarter. A new case was written because it was important that the middle school students be able to relate to the generative themes of the case. There was not enough time to develop a new case so we used one from the Goodrich program as a framework for writing this case. The case writer interviewed and consulted with an eighth grade teacher and her students regarding the details of the case in order to create a story that was authentic and realistic.

Nearly three hundred seventh graders and their teachers from three middle schools participated in the seminar on *Ashleigh's Dilemma*. Several of the teachers are interested in learning more about *Critical Moments* and exploring how it can be used to enhance their students reading comprehension and critical thinking skills.

### ***Conclusion***

Evergreen's *Critical Moments* project continues to evolve and become infused into the fabric of the institution. The project speaks to all components of the college's mission. A thorough analysis of the interdisciplinary cases allows students to learn across significant differences, become personally engaged in learning, link theory with practice, and participate in collaborative learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Gear UP: *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs*, is a federally funded program for low-income students and their schools. The goal of the project is to provide early awareness and readiness for college.

<sup>2</sup> During the second year of the grant (2001-2002 academic year) the maximum credit limit was increased to 20 credits per quarter.

<sup>3</sup> The use of "program" in this context refers to a self-contained, interdisciplinary learning community that is structured around a specific theme and is often taught by a faculty team.

<sup>4</sup> The Six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate are the general education requirements. All six expectations can be found at [www.evergreen.edu](http://www.evergreen.edu).

Ashleigh just couldn't say no. She needed to finish her history project that was due in three days. She wanted to do a little more research before finishing her paper, and her portfolio still wasn't totally together. But her mom needed her to babysit her little brother and pick up the house while she went out with her girlfriends. Ashleigh knew that these times out were really important for her mom because she usually focused on the needs of her children and family. Ashleigh really didn't have time to take care of her brother Jaden but felt obliged to help her mom out.

While she was watching her little brother, Ashleigh's favorite cousin, Markus, called to see what she was up to. He was the older brother she'd never had. He went to college in California for a while, but moved back home when his girlfriend became pregnant. Although Markus hadn't been able to finish college in California, he was taking classes on the weekend at the local university to finish his degree. Ashleigh didn't know how he managed all of his responsibilities—being a dad, working full time and going to college. She was barely managing middle school and helping out at home. Ashleigh dreamed of being a teacher like Ms. Miller, her favorite teacher from fifth grade. However, she didn't have very good grades, except in math, and was struggling to get C's in her other classes. She wanted to be a teacher because she loved young children, but she wasn't sure if she was smart enough to go to college.

After hearing about Ashleigh's day, Markus excitedly told her that his boss had invited him and his wife Elisa to dinner day after next. "Ash, will you be able to babysit for us? I'll give you \$20 for the night."

Ashleigh's throat tightened because she knew she needed to tell Markus that she couldn't watch little Jesse because she had to finish her history project. But she knew this dinner was really important to him and his future. Anyway, he always helped her and her mom out when they needed it. Unenthusiastically, she responded, "Yeah, I guess I can if you're not too late because I have to finish my portfolio for history." "Not a problem," Markus responded, "We'll be back by 10:00."

After hanging up, Ashleigh decided to fix dinner, clean the house, put her little brother to bed, and then begin working on her paper. Hopefully she'd be able to go on-line and finish her research. The computer that her mom bought from someone she worked with was so old it took forever to download anything from the Net. Although she was panicked about how she was going to get all her studying done, she was excited to spend time with Jesse; he was a sweet little boy. At a minimum she'd have to finish her research tonight and work on her portfolio. Just as she started to wash the pile of dirty dishes, the phone rang again. It was Brianna. She was upset because of the rumors circulating at school about her and her boyfriend.

Before Ashleigh knew it, a whole hour had passed. At least Brianna had calmed down, and they had worked out a plan for Brianna to deal with things. Exhausted by Brianna's crisis, Ashleigh still had to do the dishes and get her brother to bed. By the time she finished everything, it was after 10:00 and she was sleepy. Settling into the couch, Ashleigh decided to rest her eyes for a quick minute and then go on-line. When her mom came home at 1:00 am, she found Ashleigh fast asleep.

When Ashleigh woke up the next morning, she knew that she had to use all of her free time to work on her project. To make things worse, she hadn't done any of her other homework. As she got ready for school, Ashleigh decided that she would go to the library at lunch so she could finish her research. After school, she'd go to the community center to work on her paper.

As Ashley was getting ready for school, her friend Lauren called and asked Ashleigh to walk to school with her. It would take her an extra fifteen minutes to walk to Lauren's and then to school. She would probably be late, but Lauren was a good friend and had walked with Ashleigh last week when the high school boys had been bothering her after school. "All right, I'll be there in ten minutes. You'll be ready, right?" she asked, before rushing out the door. But Lauren wasn't ready when Ashleigh got to her house. Angrily Ashleigh said, "Lauren, you said you'd be ready to go. Now we're gonna be late!" By the time they left her house, they were late for school and had to go to the attendance office.

At lunchtime Ashleigh decided to get something to eat instead of going to the library because she had not had breakfast and was hungry. As she sat down with her pizza and milk, Jessica joined her, and frantically said, "Ashleigh, you've gotta help me with my homework for Mr. Bryant's class! I don't know how to do the problems." Feeling overwhelmed, Ashleigh said, "Jess, why don't you get help from Mr. Bryant? I don't have time to help you 'cause I have to finish my history project and babysit." "Please Ashleigh," Jessica begged, "You know I don't understand Mr. Bryant." Giving in to Jessica's begging, Ashleigh said with a heavy sigh, "OK, I'll meet you at the center after school. And don't be late! I won't have a lot of time before I have to go home." "Girl, thanks!" Jessica said, with a sense of relief.

After school at the community center, Ashleigh was determined to find one more reference and write some of her paper before helping Jessica and going home for dinner. She wished that she could stay at the community center for a while because the computers in the study center were a lot newer than hers and a lot faster, but she had to pick up her little brother at the sitter's and help cook dinner. After helping Jessica with her homework, Ashleigh rushed to get Jaden and head home.

Arriving home with Jaden, Ashleigh found her mom upset; she looked like she'd been crying. She said, "Your Uncle Kenneth went into the hospital again, and they're not sure he's gonna make it this time." Uncle Kenneth was her mom's baby brother, and he had really bad asthma. He'd been sick for a while, but it seemed like he was in the hospital a lot more lately. Tears filled Ashleigh's eyes and streaked down her cheeks as she listened to her mom talk about what the doctor had said. As the reality of her uncle's latest trip to the hospital settled in, she realized that she'd have to help out even more than usual. After a while, Ashleigh stood and said, "Mom, I have to study. This is the last night I really have to finish my history project because I'm supposed to babysit for Markus and Elisa tomorrow night. Remember?" As Ashleigh went to her room, her mom began to cry again.

In her room upstairs, Ashleigh found it hard to concentrate. She kept thinking of her uncle in the hospital. And her mom was banging pots and slamming the cabinet doors while cleaning the kitchen as her emotions swung from sadness to anger. Then she heard her mom holler at Jaden. "Aaughh! It is too loud around here; I can't get anything done," she muttered to herself. "I wish I could go study at Lauren's where it is quiet, but now it's too late for me to go over there. Maybe it will be quieter when Jaden goes to bed." At 9:30 she began studying, but by 11:00, she was tired and completely overwhelmed by all that she still had to do.

The next morning she was exhausted and barely able to get out of bed. Sighing to herself she said, "Maaann, I don't feel like going to school today. If only I had finished my portfolio yesterday." After school she went to the community center to finish her paper, but when she got there all of the computers were being used. Ashleigh realized that her study plan was once again falling apart. She'd have to pull an all-nighter when she got home from watching Jesse in order to get her history project done.

Ashleigh got home from Markus and Elisa's after 10:30. She finished her paper by 3:00, but could not stay awake to finish her portfolio. When she woke up in the morning, Ashleigh was exhausted and depressed because she hadn't finished her work. "I can't deal with this anymore!" she agonized. "How did this happen? What am I gonna do?"

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This case was adapted by Holly E. Colbert from "Annette's Dilemma," a case story from the *Critical Moments Project* in the Goodrich Program at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Ms. Miller's 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> period classes at Jason Lee Middle School, Tacoma, Washington, provided comments on earlier drafts of "Ashleigh's Dilemma," a case developed for Gear UP students. The *Critical Moments Project* at The Evergreen State College is funded in part by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

## PERFORMANCE SKIT

### THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE

This script attempts to give voice to students' perspectives on diversity and racialized conflict in college classrooms at predominantly white institutions.

The script is most effective when read out loud (ideally after some rehearsal). If performers strongly identify with their characters, they should feel free to change the script to make the language more consistent with their own ways of speaking. If performers are playing the role of people who are not like them in significant ways, then they should stick relatively close to the written dialogue.

Three of the characters in the script are people of color (one African American, one Asian-American, and one recent non-white immigrant). Alternative identities for these characters can be performed with just a few changes to the text. The remaining characters are white-identified. Speaking parts can be divided further or consolidated depending on the number of performers available. None of the parts are gender specific. The ethnic identity of the faculty role is also variable.

#### NOTE TO PERFORMERS:

When the stage instructions say {ALL FREEZE} everyone should hold a pose except the next speaker who will stand and deliver his/her lines directly to the audience (this is the character's internal voice). When the speaker sits back down, all performers should {RELEASE} their frozen positions. Freezes are most effective if performers lock their positions with a sudden and slightly exaggerated tensing of their muscles. It also helps if the freeze is done in the middle of a physical gesture (for example, half way to resting your chin on your hand). Releases work best with a sudden, slightly jerking motion that looks as if one is bouncing out of the frozen pose. If there is extra time for rehearsal, performers can practice synchronizing the freezing and releasing. Whenever performers are not speaking they should make non-verbal listening/responding gestures appropriate to their character (nodding, shifting position, looking at one another, etc).

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**NARRATOR VOICE:** Imagine a class of 25 students. Three of these students are people of color, and the rest are white. It's about 2 weeks into the term. Today the class is discussing a chapter on tax reform.

**Faculty member:** OK, everybody's back from break. Let's continue our discussion of possible state tax reforms. I'm sure many of you have opinions about this topic. Who will get us started?

**Pat:** Well, I liked what the author said about the need for more funding for public colleges.

**Chris:** I don't think the author makes a very strong argument though. I mean, I agree that students shouldn't have to pay so much for school, but most of the public already thinks colleges waste money on recruiting students who aren't qualified. Like that case in Michigan recently where those three white students sued the University because they didn't get in, and some Black people who weren't qualified did get in. You know, voters want their kids to get in

to good schools and when they see publicly funded schools biased against them... well then they'd rather support private education than pay for public colleges. You know what I mean?

Elli: How do you know the students of color weren't qualified? Maybe their test scores weren't as high as the whites, but maybe they had other qualifications that were important.

Chris: Well, you know they wouldn't have sued if they didn't have a good case to begin with. And I'm not saying that I agree with them, OK? But lots of people do. Even black people often do. I had a class last year where we read this book by Shelby Steele, who's a Black scholar, and he said that Affirmative Action ended up causing more discrimination than before.

{ ALL FREEZE }

[Loren: {STANDING} *Huh? That doesn't sound right. Maybe I should say something. I just don't know enough about this stuff though. And talking about race is so touchy. What if I say the wrong thing?*]  
{RELEASE}

Chris: I mean Affirmative Action just demoralizes black people. That's why there's such a high drop out rate for black kids in college, if you ask me. You know, if they aren't qualified to be there, aren't we just setting them up for failure? It's really kind of cruel when you think about it.

{ ALL FREEZE }

[Tye: {STANDING} *I can't believe this guy! He has no idea what he's talking about! He's read one book and thinks he knows all about Black people. Stuff like this makes me so mad. But if I really showed how I felt, everyone would see me as just an angry black kid—I'd be the problem. I have to work with these people all term, and I can't afford to be ostracized. Sometimes I really hate being the only African American in class. Everybody's just waiting for me to speak. I can just feel it. Let 'em wait.*]  
{RELEASE}

Chris: There was a kid in my high school who was Black and you know, I liked him and everything, but when I heard he got into the University of Washington...well everyone knew it was because of quotas. And the white kids who didn't get in, they couldn't believe it. Those are the kinds of people who will never want to put more tax money into higher education.

{ ALL FREEZE }

[Elli: {STANDING} *Oh my God! Sometimes it's just embarrassing to be white. I hope the students of color know that all the whites here aren't like that. I gotta say something.*]

[Juan(ita): {STANDING} *Hey, why isn't the professor saying anything? Doesn't (s)he see what's going on here?*]

{RELEASE}

Elli: Look, the public tax system is supposed to meet the needs of the society as a whole, which includes people of color. White people have benefited from discrimination for 500 years. So maybe we should have Affirmative Action for 500 years before we think about calling it even.

Shawn: Well, I'm not sure if Affirmative Action is a good idea or not, but I don't really think the past is a good argument for it. My family came over from Ireland in the 1900's, and they were discriminated against too. If someone's not responsible for slavery, why should it affect their chances of getting into a good school?

{ ALL FREEZE }

[Pat: {STANDING} *Yeah! Why do people always go back to slavery? Like that class where they forced us to watch a film on lynching—It was horrible. It just makes me feel guilty. I can't do anything about all the bad stuff white people have done in the past, so what's the point of rubbing my nose in it.*]

[Yuko: {STANDING} *What about other people of color? This is the part of racism we get all the time. It's like our history didn't happen.*]  
{RELEASE}

Loren: I'd like to hear what students of color have to say about this discussion. I know that some Asian Americans feel that Affirmative Action programs discriminate against them, and I know that there's a lot of tension between groups on this topic. I just think it's really important to hear everyone's perspective.  
{ALL FREEZE}

[Juan(ita): {STANDING} *Oh man, I hate being put on the spot like this. I don't trust these people. I'm not going to tell them what I really think about prejudice between people of color. It's too complex and too painful. And white people just use it to justify their own racism. Besides, most of these students probably think I should just shut up and be gratefully that I'm in this country.*]

[Yuko: {STANDING} *Well at least someone noticed that white people are doing all the talking. But I sure hope they don't expect me to represent all Asians now*]  
{RELEASE}

Yuko: I certainly don't think I'm in competition with other people of color, and I don't resent Affirmative Action. I would not want to go to a school that had only Asian and white students. Besides, that stupid model minority myth isn't even true. I think we need to have more Affirmative Action and more diversity.

Loren: I think that's a really good point. There aren't many people of color on campus. I mean, I came to this school in part because they had this great catalog which made it seem like there was all sorts of diversity, but then I found out that they were including the branch campuses too. I felt ripped off.

Shawn: You make it sound like people of color are just needed in order to make white people's lives more interesting.  
{ALL FREEZE}

[Loren: {STANDING} *Oh my God! That's not what I meant. I hope that's not what other students think I was saying. This is so embarrassing. I wish I had kept my mouth shut.*]  
{RELEASE}

Shawn: The question is whether or not there is still a need for Affirmative Action any more. And I think it's really hard to convince people that there is.

Tye: That's cause people are so ignorant. The truth has been whitewashed by the news media, by Hollywood, and by our racist politicians. All someone has to do is look at the facts and they'd see that Affirmative Action is still needed. Look what it says in our book; it says that the most important indicator of whether a child will go to college is not their IQ—it's their family's income and wealth! That's so wrong. It also says that the average black household has \$200 of accumulated wealth, and the average white family has \$18,100, and the difference is mostly due to inheritance—which means history is still with us.  
{ALL FREEZE}

[Shawn: {STANDING} *Oh great! Now it's gonna look like I didn't do the readings, which...I didn't. But still, this sucks.*]  
{RELEASE}

Tye: And I have to tell you, Chris, I think you've really got to get some new source material—because Shelby Steele does not represent the majority of Black people, let alone other people of color. And let's not forget women's thoughts about Affirmative Action. You know, I may not like the fact that some white fools think I'm not as smart as them, but they're gonna think that whether there's Affirmative Action or not. Every kid who makes it through college was qualified to be there. They passed the same test and they got the same education. My parents and a lot of really bright friends of mine would never have had a chance to go to college if it weren't for Affirmative Action, and Bridge programs, and scholarships. They needed those things because they grew up in places with crappy schools. And the schools were crappy because of the way our tax system funds education...with property taxes! Which is what this class was supposed to be about  
{ALL FREEZE—except Chris}

[Chris: {STANDING} *I hate it when people of color take things so personally. And then they make personal attacks on white people. Now everybody's gonna think I'm a racist or something. There's 25 people in this class and hardly anybody else says anything. But I know most of them think the same way I do. They're just too darn chicken to say anything.*]  
{RELEASE}

Chris: You know I'm not saying that I'm against redistributing tax money. But I think there's a difference when you're talking about funding primary schools or colleges. If the criteria for Affirmative Action in colleges were class and not race, for instance, then I think a lot more people would support it.  
{ALL FREEZE}

[Pat: {STANDING} *That's a good point. Like what about my issues? We never talk about how educational institutions discriminate against working class white people or queers. And if I bring it up, then people get all uncomfortable. They just don't know how to relate to me. So much for diversity.*]  
{RELEASE}

Juan(ita): But class and race go hand and hand. Look, it says here that, in the State of Georgia 29% of the population is Black, but Black people make up only 6% of the students at the University. That was before they banned Affirmative Action. Now the freshman class is only 5% African American. That just isn't fair. Maybe we should be talking about why all those unqualified white people, like George Bush, get into Ivy League schools. That isn't fair either.

Faculty member: OK. Let's not get into partisan politics here. I think I'd like to shift our focus now and talk more about tax reform in general. Let's take a look at page...  
{ALL FREEZE}

© 2003. This skit was written by Lori Blewett, Member of the Faculty, The Evergreen State College (blewettl@evergreen.edu). For permission to copy or perform the text please contact The Washington Center for Undergraduate Education at The Evergreen State College. This text is based on discussions with students over a number of years and does not represent any actual event or person. Special thanks to Kabby Mitchell for his helpful ideas and to the students in the TESC Day of Presence 2003 Committee who responded to the first reading of the play.

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## Web Resources

### **Diversity Web**

<http://www.diversityweb.org/>

A comprehensive "virtual library" of campus practices and resources about diversity in higher education, this website includes strategies for institutional change, syllabi and resources for curriculum transformation and faculty development, campus climate research and assessment practices, research on the impact of diversity on student learning, and examples of effective campus initiatives and community partnerships

### **Center for Case Studies in Education School of Education, Pace University**

[http://appserv.pace.edu/execute/page.cfm?doc\\_id=8912](http://appserv.pace.edu/execute/page.cfm?doc_id=8912)

Respected for its work on cases, the Center has extensive resources on case method teaching, case writing, and the development of cases as curricular materials as well as a collection of case studies in diversity for faculty development.

### **Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning Harvard University**

<http://bokcenter.fas.harvard.edu/>

Among its resources on the use of cases and case-like material, the Bok Center has produced a series of videos designed to prompt discussion of racial issues in the classroom as well as guidelines for how faculty can work with hot topics in classroom discussions such as religion, politics, class, race, and gender.

### **Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education The Evergreen State College**

<http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/home.htm>

This website details Washington Center's current initiatives and related opportunities for faculty development: *Critical Moments*, the annual Campus Equity and Engagement Retreat, quantitative literacy across the curriculum workshops, learning communities summer institutes, and curriculum planning retreats. Go to <http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu> for more information on the Center's national work on learning communities.

## ***Critical Moments at Eastern Washington University***

Helen M. Bergland, Teaching & Learning Center  
Nanette Wichman, English Department

One of the great joys in working with *Critical Moments* has been our ability to modify the program to suit particular needs of our University. Instead of sporting an ill-fitting garment—as the adoption of many diversity programs has seemed to feel—we have worked with Drs. Diane Gillespie and George Woods to fit ourselves with a diversity project, specifically tailored toward our population and goals. This has been no easy task since, from outward appearances, we work within a largely monochromatic population, where students not only seem to possess little awareness regarding diversity issues but have also demonstrated resistance to change.

The organizational home for *Critical Moments* at Eastern Washington University is the Teaching and Learning Center. Beginning in 2001, we formed a Multicultural Team to (1) integrate *Critical Moments* case stories into 6-10 courses at Eastern, (2) create EWU-specific case stories to integrate into future courses, and (3) help permanently implement *Critical Moments* on our campus. Over the next two years, the Team struggled to keep the project alive as we searched for ways to integrate it successfully into our particular campus climate.

By Spring 2003, we felt we knew enough about ourselves as a team and as an institution to further tailor our efforts to fit the University and to meet the goals we had set and refined over time. As a next step, we formed a Scholars Learning Community (SLC) for the purpose of systematically exploring the use of students' personal narratives around issues of diversity. The SLC was comprised of twelve faculty and two staff members, representing eight disciplines ranging from English to Social Work along with representation of both the Academic Affairs and Student Affairs divisions of the University. Members agreed to a one-year commitment to the community and several have recently expressed interest in participating a second year.

Focusing our work within an interdisciplinary learning community of the nature described above drew out widely varying approaches to *Critical Moments*. Of particular interest is the way this method encouraged the unexpected to happen. For instance, while the interest and scope of projects has broadened over time, the sense of progress and impact has deepened, grown stronger, and has been more focused—a result that was far from apparent at the onset. Another instance is that where we had thought to focus either with the Student Affairs or Academic Affairs division, in reality, the blending of faculty and staff from the two areas served to strengthen our personal and professional growth.

Overall, our success with this year's project can be attributed to two things: That we began our work with *Critical Moments*—a strong but flexible model to work from, and that we developed a solid sense of community over time. With that community came trust, openness, vulnerability, and honesty. Through those qualities,

community members could then investigate their teaching practices, student learning, critical thinking, ideas about diversity at this time and in this place, and much more.

Beginning this summer, we will take some of our results to the broader academic community. Having tested the use of personal narratives from the *Critical Moments* case book in both basic English and Graduate Social Work classes with positive results, two of our members will present at an international conference on diversity this summer and later at an EWU faculty workshop this fall. Moreover, staff and faculty will collaborate to address diversity issues and awareness during Freshman Orientation as a move toward making the campus climate more open and accepting. These are only two of many outcomes from this year's efforts.

We would be remiss if we didn't close by noting that the most valuable aspect of our work with *Critical Moments* to date is the sense of not being alone. We have formed a cadre of members who are committed to the same issues—each from their individual scholarly and personal perspective. We care about each other, we help each other, and we are all more alert for opportunities to make the most of *Critical Moments* as they arise. We are a community.

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## ***Critical Moments* at Edmonds Community College**

Edmonds Community College has produced a series of videotapes and accompanying case stories to promote institutional development and diversity instruction on their campus. Some colleges involved in the *Critical Moments Project* have used these videos in professional development activities on their campus and the play was performed at Student Leadership conference.

### ***A Community of Voices: A Video “—Isms” Project***

The goals of the *Voices Video Project* include collecting qualitative data about students' experiences with —isms, developing additional resources for classroom diversity instruction, and developing diversity resources that reflect the experiences of Edmonds Community College students. “Critical moments” that students experience are the focus of the videos along with “circumstances of uncertainty,” defined as “those instances where perceptions of difference create uncertain interpretations.” When colleagues from Edmonds Community College present these videos at professional development workshops and conferences, they invite participants to explore three questions: what are —isms?; where do —isms come from?; can —isms be changed?

### ***A Community of Voices: An original play based on students' voices***

*A Community of Voices*, written by local playwright and college educator Sue Sather, is based on what Edmonds Community College's students wanted to talk about. As the introduction to the play notes, the topics of conversation became the “core” of the play: diversity; power; stereotypes; the ghosts of misunderstanding; experiences that divide students from each other; and experiences that draw them together. The first production was directed by Loren Reynolds who teaches drama at Edmonds Community College, and it was spon-

sored and funded by the Campus Enrichment Program, Multicultural Services, Office of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities, Student Programs, and the Edmonds Community College Foundation.

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## ***Critical Moments at Western Washington University***

Linda Clark, Office of Survey Research

*"I look at my classes in a different light and have begun to analyze my role in the classroom in different settings...I realize I do have the power to influence the atmosphere of the classroom."*

~ A student in Communications 339

Western Washington University's *Critical Moments Initiative* is co-sponsored by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Vice President of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services, The Office of Survey Research-Institutional Assessment, Research & Testing, and the Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA). There are four co-coordinators, and fifteen team members. Western's goal is to utilize *Critical Moments* methodology in multiple settings as part of Western's assessment activities, and to enhance teaching and learning at Western.

Western began their *Critical Moments Initiative* in Spring 2003 with three workshops facilitated by the *Critical Moments* consultants. The workshops introduced the initiative, including the seven steps involved in the project, facilitation methods, and interviewing methods. During this past year Western has been busy building its multicultural team, interviewing selected Western students, analyzing the interviews for generative themes, creating some case stories unique to the university, and planning for professional development. Case stories were piloted in two different venues: Health Education 250 as part of the training for Lifestyle Advisors; and Communication 339, where the stories and ensuing class discussions have helped students broach sensitive topics, listen to different viewpoints, and gain valuable skills in civil discourse. Carmen Werder, who with Pat Fabiano, co-teaches the Communications 339 pilot, notes, "The stories resonate with students, but they allow them to step back and think. The students value such learning because it's authentic." A student in class reflected, "I think I have developed more of a sensitivity for what others of different ethnic backgrounds face on a daily basis in the world."

Western's *Critical Moments* team has been very committed to including students throughout the evolution of the initiative. During Spring quarter, a group of twelve students were videotaped as they participated a "model" case story discussion facilitated by Diane Gillespie and George Woods. The resulting videotape, produced by Western's Center for Instructional Innovation, will be available to use as a training tool for faculty and staff statewide who are involved in the project. The tape will be ready in Fall 2004.

Next year the team will focus on professional development for faculty and staff wanting to use *Critical Moments* curricula. The team is also developing assessment measures for the project, and will continue to gather Western student's stories, with the goal of eventually creating a multicultural case story textbook.

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Praxis article: <http://pandora.cii.wwu.edu/vpue/Praxis/default.htm> (Spring 2004, p.3)

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## Highline's Legacy: Untold Stories of Success

At Highline, *Critical Moments* resonated with a student leadership development initiative, "Untold Stories." The goal of this project has been to increase the visibility of successful students from diverse backgrounds on campus in the community. A student leadership module using *Critical Moments* case stories has been created for instructors' use in their course curriculum. This module is offered as part of the Multicultural Freshman Seminar, a college success learning and study skills course, and *Critical Moments* cases have also been used at the annual Unity/Diversity Week Program. At a Faculty and Staff of Color conference, Highline introduced a new way of presenting cases to faculty, staff, and administrators: a student from the leadership program began the conference session by telling his story, stopping at the "critical moment." After a spirited discussion on how institutions were currently supporting students with similar experiences and what else might be done, the student then described what actually happened.

In honor of Highline's 40th anniversary, the small group of faculty and staff members involved in *Critical Moments/Untold Stories Project* decided that they wanted to highlight the accomplishments of non-traditional students. The result has been a published volume of students' stories and a photo exhibit, available on the College's website. This work has attracted a growing number of faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the College and the *Critical Moments* team includes representatives from most areas including student affairs, advising, professional and technical programs, international student programs, multicultural services, developmental education and English as Second Language, and career employment services. Currently, a group of students are writing their stories as are *Critical Moments* team members. The team will then invite Highline graduates to tell their stories, and from this pool, a second volume of stories will be produced. The team plans to interview some students in-depth and blend interviews together to create case stories based on generative themes.

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## What's the Point?

## APPENDIX TWO TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASE STORY

Sitting at her desk with her math book opened, Brenda remembered how the sun had fallen across her shoulders and onto the paper as she stared at her math assessment score: a 95. That score placed her in Math 97, a class that she would have to pass in order to get into 107. Now three weeks into Math 97, she was beginning to struggle with graphing problems. The instructor told the class that graphs were about relationships between things. But she couldn't see them, even when they came to a point on the blue-checked paper.

It's not as if she couldn't see relationships. Last quarter in her English 101, she had written an essay on the Peace Corps, which her instructor had her submit to *Una Voce*. The essay was about the relationship between her sister, who had volunteered in the Peace Corp, and a village she lived in for two years in Paraguay. On the last day of class her instructor had told her, "You're great at capturing complex relationships in your writing, Brenda." "So why can't I get these graphs?" she asked herself. "Maybe I don't understand why people would want to reduce things to a point on a piece of paper."

Math had always been a struggle for her. At 29, the struggle hadn't changed. As she stared at the graphs in her book, she thought about her conversation last week with her friend Julie, who was whizzing through the class. Julie could see Brenda's frustration with the class and had asked her directly, "What's the problem?" Brenda had replied, "I guess that I feel really cut off from our teacher. I haven't felt this helpless since I was in junior high. Maybe it's the way he puts us all in groups and then comes around to check on us to see if we've done our homework." What she didn't tell Julie was that she felt put on the spot and humiliated in front of her peers. Julie had responded, "But don't you think that helps? Most of the students don't have the right answer, so they figure it out together. Then he can come if we get stuck. I guess that the groups have helped me." Brenda had nodded affirmatively as she replied, "Maybe it helps for some students, but his approach has the opposite effect on me. I want to fade into the wall when I hear him tell us to get into groups."

Now she was stressed again, just thinking about the groups. Trying to look back at the problems, she told herself, "You have to pass this requirement!" The first week she had kept up. But when she had to graph equations, she felt lost. She looked back at problem #6, which asked her to graph  $y=2x + 1$ . She didn't know how to find the numbers for the x column. She thought, frustrated, "Where did he get the numbers for that column? If I could plug in the numbers, I could multiply! But why have a graph?" (See last page of case.)

Yesterday at school, Brenda watched her friends solve the first 3 graphing problems. And when she and Julie went for coffee afterward, they did #4 and #5. But she had 15 more problems due the next day. She thought she understood by watching Julie, but now she was stuck. She felt too embarrassed to call Julie for help because it seemed to come so easy for her. "She just has a knack for this," she thought to herself. "I don't. But at least I have five problems done," she tried to reassure herself. "Maybe I can find another friend before class who might let me see their work on the next problems." It's not that she wanted to cheat; she just didn't want to feel so helpless in the class in front of the other students.

Julie was the first friend that she had who loved math and did well in it, and she knew that she would have probably dropped the class if Julie hadn't been there. Most of her friends in high school had avoided math, and she hadn't thought it was all that important for her life because she wanted to be a social worker and help people. But to transfer to the university her counselor said she must have Math 107. Her parents hadn't helped in this area. Her father was very good in math, but he became very impatient with her when she asked

him questions. She could just hear him say, “You should have learned this in middle school.” Whatever she had taken in middle school, she had forgotten it. She felt trapped by her inadequacies.

And then there was the teacher. She wasn’t sure about how to approach him. “He seems warm and open,” she thought to herself, “but I haven’t had a foreign teacher before. It’s like I have to adjust my hearing—like, I’m asking, ‘Did he just say what I *think* he said?’ And then I’ve lost what he said in the meantime. I haven’t even been around anyone like him before.”

Because her teacher was foreign born, she went the second week of class to the Multi-ethnic and Cultural Affairs (MECA) office. She hoped that the counselor she saw would help her transfer out since she had a teacher she did not understand. But he told her that she should go and talk to the instructor first before trying to change the class. “I could also just drop it,” she had replied. But he had advised her to work with the teacher. Instead of seeing him, though, she relied more on her friendship with Julie.

The next day, before class, she ran into Julie, who said, “Hey, I just saw our teacher in his office. He was so helpful on that last problem! I can’t believe how well he explained it to me! Did you get it?”

Brenda replied, “I don’t have time to go see him before class starts. Do you mind if I look at your paper now, so I don’t feel so lost?” Julie replied, “Sure, take a look, but I have to finish one more problem, so I need it right back.” Brenda glanced at the paper and saw all the ways the teacher had shown Julie how to think about the problem. It all looked like a foreign language.

Now in class, she sat down in the back of the room hoping that she could hide. At least she had the first five problems done and could recite from her paper on those. “I suppose,” she rehearsed to herself, “that I could say that I couldn’t get the next problems after number five. Or maybe I should just volunteer in my group to do problems two and three and hope other students do the rest.” She looked around the room and realized a lot of students were absent, so the groups would be small. Julie wasn’t in her group, so she couldn’t count on her. As he told the class to break into their groups, her heart started pounding, and she felt a big lump forming in her throat. What other strategies could she use to get through this class? And what about the next class?

Brenda thought about her dreams to transfer into a university. She had always wanted to help children get out of abusive situations because she had seen firsthand in her neighborhood how kids with abusive parents had given up on their dreams. She wanted to make a difference in a child’s life. She knew without a college degree that she would only be able to work at a childcare center at low wages and without any power to create or influence the learning environment.

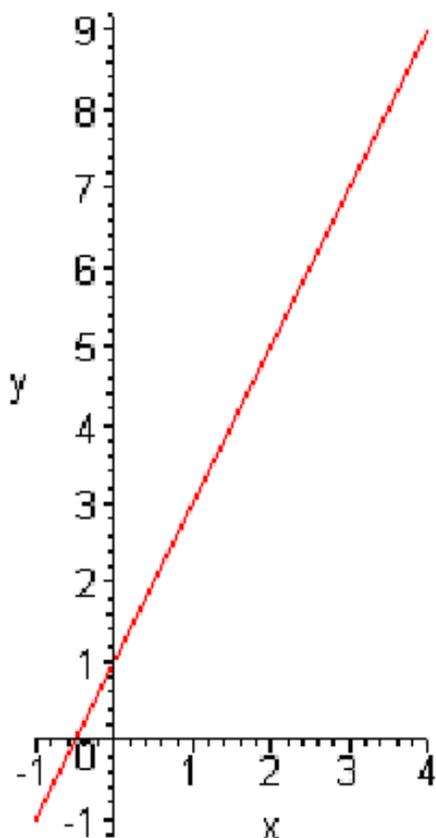
Sitting in her group, she could feel her heart race as the instructor watched the students as they started to show their graphs to each other. They were to do problems 3, 6, 12 and 18. The students in her group watched Tony show and explain his graph; then the instructor pointed out to Tony that he had missed the third value of  $y$ . Brenda actually followed his explanations! Then the instructor turned to her and asked her to show her work for the sixth problem. She mumbled that she couldn’t get it. The instructor responded, “Well, try now; we’ll help.” She could see that all the other students had it graphed. Flustered, she knocked her papers on the floor. She felt her face turn bright red.

Another student tried to start discussing the question, but the instructor stopped him, waiting until Brenda had her papers back on her desk. He said to her, “Come on, Brenda, show us how you would go about this. Your classmates will help you out.” She hesitated, looked down at her papers, and then feeling light-headed said, “I’m sorry. Excuse me.” She got up out of her chair and walked out in the hall, leaving everything behind. She knew Julie would get her books and purse. She stood in the bathroom fighting back tears, unsure of what to do next.

Here's the table and graph for the problem. The  $x$  value is actually arbitrary, but students often want it to have meaning. It functions symbolically in the algorithm.

Table and graph for the problem: "Graph  $y = 2x + 1$ "

$x$	$y$
0	1
1	3
3	5



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Written by Scott Earle and Ricardo Leyva-Puebla from Tacoma Community College  
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## Writing “A Very Slender Thread”: A Case About White Privilege

Diane Gillespie, The University of Washington-Bothell

The *Critical Moments Project* originated in The Goodrich Scholarship Program at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, a program for underrepresented students who demonstrate significant financial need, and the place where I taught Humanities and Social Sciences classes for 27 years.

Historically, the Goodrich student body has been very diverse; at least sixty percent of the students are of color. As the original *Critical Moments* project team listened to the voices of these students, we immediately recognized the value of their experiences for developing more effective teaching and learning practices. As a result, our early work in *Critical Moments* focused primarily, but not exclusively, on students of color.

The diversity evident in the Goodrich Program was not reflected in the rest of the University’s student population or its faculty and staff. Even so, from *Critical Moments*’ inception, the team resisted turning *Critical Moments* into a project for white students and white faculty development. Although we did use the diversity faculty development cases, written by William M. Welty and Rita Silverman from the Center for Case Studies in Education at Pace University, we felt that faculty development work would be too slow given the alarming attrition rate of students of color.

As the Goodrich *Critical Moments* team began to teach cases in seminars, we saw students of color in these seminars becoming empowered. Working with the actual experiences of students of color provides indirect and maybe more powerful ways to reach faculty. If students of color practice critical thinking and advocacy skills when diversity is at issue in their educational experiences, they will be better positioned to effect institutional change, be more knowledgeable about campus resources, have practiced arguments against commonly expressed racist views, have resources to contribute to race-related discussions, and feel a sense of community with their peers. The Goodrich’s *Critical Moments* team found, too, that students become animated by particular cases and talk about them outside the seminar, with their peers—and their other teachers. These teachers often read the case and inquire about the methodology.

Even given these and other reasons for focusing *Critical Moments*’ work on historically underrepresented students’ experiences in our higher educational institutions, educators need new ways to work with diversity in predominately white classes and institutions. When I first co-facilitated *Critical Moments*’ workshops in this State, participants frequently commented that they were struggling to teach diversity in classes with predominantly white students. They wanted to know how cases could be used to teach white students who harbored explicit and implicit racial stereotypes. They also asked about the effectiveness of diversity cases for sensitizing white faculty.

Compared to my experience in the Goodrich program, I now teach a very different student population at the University of Washington, Bothell, one that is predominantly white and female. The Bothell campus is not alone; many other institutions in Washington State have similar student bodies and I, too, wrestle with how best to teach this new student body. Some of my students have accused me on their evaluations and outside of class of white bashing.

As a result of these experiences, I took up the *Critical Moments* methodology to see whether it could be a viable means for examining the experiences of middle-class white students within a curriculum centered on social justice. I joined with two other female colleagues who were also teaching about racism. Together we interviewed recent women graduates of our Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program about their experiences of being taught about racism by white female professors. Our article, “White Women Teaching White Women about White Privilege, Race Cognizance and Social Action: Toward A Pedagogical Pragmatics” (2002) explored the themes from these interviews, the most important which was that white women lacked knowledge about and experience with white women doing antiracist work. Without role models, any discussion of racism resulted in increased anxiety. They perceived the introduction of the topic of race to be inherently full of conflict that challenged their gender role training—to keep the peace, to say nice things, to smooth over the conflict. They uncritically adopted a colorblind position in public by saying, “I don’t see color,” as a way of deflecting their anxiety about conflict. In this defended position, they clung to an abstract ideal at the expense of recognizing the everyday racial assaults on people of color.

The value of the *Critical Moments* approach is that the interviews and generative themes embedded in them allow educators to see students’ internal logic, their interrelated set of assumptions about their experiences. Before interviewing the students, I found some of my students’ dogged adherence to colorblindness irritating and irrational. Once I identified the source of their anxiety, however, I could re-imagine how to teach about racism in my predominantly white classes. (I suspected that the white men in my class lacked antiracist role models too.) One of the ways was through writing and teaching “A Slender Thread.” Published recently in *Teaching Sociology*, with an accompanying theoretical background on white racial identity development, the case generated wonderful discussions as I tested and then taught it. We include it in this appendix as an example of how *Critical Moments* can refresh and enrich our diversity work.

Staring at her dinner plate, Maggie tried to avoid eye contact with her uncle, who was sitting across the table from her. He was in rare form that night after finding the textbook from her sociology course. “*Displacing Whiteness*, eh?” he laughed. “And just who does this author think will displace us, huh?” he asked Maggie with a smile on his face, egging her to respond. Maggie felt her insides tighten, right below her solar plexus. Maggie’s grandparents had been openly racist, and her mother and uncles had simply absorbed their views. Her mother tried to avoid conflict at all costs and so never said much directly about race; she was more indirect, reinforcing how important it was to date and marry what she called “like-minded people.” But her uncle had learned his lessons well, and he liked to flaunt his bigoted views. Maggie usually left the room or ignored him when he got in one of these moods. It was hard when he became bigoted, though – she loved him. When she was growing up, he took her to Mariners baseball games and taught her how to drive a tractor. The two of them would put sugar on big slices of his homegrown tomatoes.

Maggie looked at the last diced tomato from her salad still sitting on her plate. Before she could say anything, her mother replied to him, “Please don’t disrupt our dinner with bickering. I made this meatloaf just like you like it, Larry. Why don’t you tell us about the new stray cat you took in? I thought you said you had saved enough animals.”

While Larry talked about rescuing his newest stray cat, Maggie thought about her sociology teacher, Professor Gail Ligon. Just last week, Dr. Ligon told the class about her own experience of standing up to her racist grandfather, who then kicked her out of the house. “Now looking back,” Dr. Ligon had said, “I would do it differently; I wouldn’t have lost my temper. I think that I would have tried to talk to him about the different experiences I was having. ‘It’s not like that for me, grandpa,’ I could have said. I might have still been kicked out, but I wouldn’t have that shame, the memory of losing it.” Maggie couldn’t imagine Dr. Ligon having a temper. As a professor, she had such a way of making everyone feel comfortable—or at least it seemed that way to her—until this last part of the course on whiteness.

In fact, Dr. Ligon was the first white woman that Maggie had heard talk openly about racism and white privilege. Also new to Maggie was Dr. Ligon’s observation that white women were somehow complicit with racism. Maggie realized that before this class, she just assumed that fighting racism was men’s work. It seemed to her that men might be in a better position to take social risks. Maggie felt she took risks in thinking differently from her family, but most of her thinking was private, inside her head. When racism or race relationships became a topic of conversation, she just stuck to the belief that skin color wasn’t important. “I try to treat everyone the same,” she told her friends and family.

It was really hard for her to read the book by Frankenberg. She could identify with some parts of the book, having personally experienced some of the issues Frankenberg raised. But she was unsettled by some of the hard-hitting language that Frankenberg used. Maggie persevered, though, because she really liked Dr. Ligon, who had praised Maggie’s journal writing and really paid attention to her ideas in ways that no other instructor ever had. Dr. Ligon’s questions in class made her think, made her feel that she had something important to contribute to the class. She could see that Dr. Ligon worked hard to be what Frankenberg called “race conscious,” and Maggie felt that she might be able to emulate her.

So that evening at the dinner table, Maggie decided to do something she had never done before. She wanted to say something significant to her uncle, something that would engage him so that he might see his bigoted ways. “I mean,” she thought to herself, “his racism is so transparent. He’s never gone to college and

works with guys who think just like he does—or at least don’t express themselves around him if they do think differently. No one I know has ever tried to have a discussion with him about this.”

Finished telling the story of how he rescued the stray cat, Uncle Larry turned again to Maggie. “So are you forced to take this class?” he asked her bluntly.

“Oh, Uncle Larry,” Maggie said slowly, her voice shaking slightly, “I’m really enjoying this class. It’s making me think about my values—about human dignity and human rights. We’re all more alike than different in the long run.”

“Yeah, right.” Larry responded sarcastically. “Are you going to have a bunch of poor ignorant colored people take over everything in this country, just *dis-place* the people who have worked hard to get where they are?”

“Oh come on,” Maggie’s mother intervened. “Please don’t argue at my dinner table. Maggie, can’t you just keep what you’re learning to yourself? You’re both spoiling my dinner. Larry, I’ve made a new dessert. Maggie, why don’t you help me bring it in?”

Maggie’s insides were tied in knots. She recognized from her reading assignments that she was in the middle of a double whammy—a complicit mother, a belligerent uncle. She thought to herself, “I am 20 years old and have gone along with unspoken rules all my life—just make everyone happy by remaining quiet. I can’t disappoint anyone, especially mom. But I can’t keep fading into the woodwork; I have to do something different.”

“Mom,” Maggie said, “I don’t want to stop this discussion.”

Looking at her uncle, Maggie said quietly, “I really disagree with you, Uncle Larry. People of color are not all ignorant, just like white people are not all smart. It’s hurtful to make gross generalizations like that.”

“You’re getting too good for your family, huh?” responded Larry, getting red in the face. “Want to take up with the colored now, huh?”

“No,” Maggie said her voice steady now. “I want to ask questions about what’s fair and right in treating people humanely.”

Maggie had never spoken up for herself before, and her uncle was glaring at her. She thought, “I’ll bet this is the first time anyone has challenged him this way.”

Putting his napkin on the table, Uncle Larry said, “I don’t have to take this white bashing or hear how you’ve been brainwashed. I’ve done a lot for this family since your father died. I’m only trying to protect you from the harsh realities out in the real world.” He slowly got up from the table and headed to the front room.

Getting up to follow Larry, Maggie’s mom said frantically, “Now Larry, come on and have some dessert. Maggie won’t say any more, right Maggie?”

“Mom,” Maggie said without thinking first, “I can’t keep quiet in front of such racist views anymore. I just can’t; it’s not right. It’s not even Christian.” She realized that she said “Christian” very loudly.

Hearing that word, Larry said, clearly agitated, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. This discussion is finished. Thanks for the dinner, sis. I’ll be going now.”

As he left, Maggie’s mother turned to her and said, “Family’s all I have, now that your father’s gone. And I need Larry to help me out, and your Uncle Sonny too. You can’t talk to your uncle like that; please understand. You can have these conversations when you’re on your own, in your own house, but not here. I can’t afford this to happen.”

“But mom,” Maggie implored, “can’t you see me too, my views?”

Her mother turned and walked out of the room. Maggie knew her mother was going to call Larry’s message machine and leave an apology. Maggie sat alone at the table, dazed but different inside.

The next day at school Maggie tried to find Dr. Ligon before class to tell her about her experience, but Dr. Ligon was deep in conversation with a student about an assignment. Then Maggie looked for her new friend Lucy, another white student with whom she had talked about the textbooks. But Lucy was not around. So when Maggie got to Dr. Ligon’s class, she felt full of her confrontation with her uncle and wanted to tell the class what she had done. She felt fear because her mother was still upset, but she also felt tinges of courage for speaking against racism the first time ever. Lucy finally came in and sat next to her. Dr. Ligon began class

by asking the students for reactions to the readings, and Dora, a Latina student, said that she thought that *Displacing Whiteness* was long overdue. Dr. Ligon seemed pleased that Dora responded. Dora had participated very actively in small groups but less so in the larger class. She was one of three students of color in this class of 40 or so. “Go on,” Dr. Ligon encouraged her. “Tell us more about what you mean.”

“I mean,” Dora said with quiet conviction, “what the author argues is true, and it makes me very upset because I’m tired of being patient. Why is it taking whites so long to see their unjust ways? It’s like a luxury, you know, for them to sit around and discuss their whiteness and privilege while my uncles and aunts are dying in the fields and not getting educated.”

Suddenly, Maggie raised her hand and before she could think, she blurted out, voice shaking again like it had with her uncle, “But this book is so important to help us whites think about these things because it is so hard when you’ve been raised around racism and get punished, ignored, or made fun of when you try to refute it. I know, I almost got excommunicated from my own family last night.”

“Well,” Dora said, taking a deep breath, “Maybe your family is upset with you for a moment, but don’t think that you can equate that with the trauma of migrant field workers who are sprayed everyday with chemicals and can’t find adequate shelter. You sound like you’re asking for a pat on the back.”

“I can’t believe she thinks that,” Maggie thought. She felt her face turn red. “Don’t cry, don’t cry,” Maggie told herself, “And just stay where you are—don’t leave. But I really am afraid I will lose my mother’s love. And what will mom do if Uncle Larry stays mad?” Maggie tried to catch her friend Lucy’s attention for support, but Lucy just averted her eyes and looked out the window. No other student spoke up. She felt as if she were hanging on to a very slender thread. “What now?” she asked herself.

## Background to *Framework for Diversity Assessment and Planning*

Emily Lardner, Washington Center  
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### ***Historical Context: Grass-Roots Recommendations***

In 1996, the State Board for Technical and Community Colleges embarked upon a two-year Multicultural Efforts Project. The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education became a co-sponsor of this project. Between February 1996 and November 1997, all of the community and technical colleges in the state were involved in a process of assessing, planning, and implementing projects to foster and improve academic success for students of color. As this project came to a close in the spring of 1998, the staff of the State Board decided to involve campus diversity leaders in the development of what would be the State Board's next state-wide diversity project. The State Board issued invitations to about seventy-five people, representing the various sectors of the colleges, to attend a two-day planning workshop designed and facilitated by the Washington Center.

On June 4-5, 1998, a group of forty-three faculty, administrators and staff members from across the community and technical college system in Washington state met at Seabeck Conference Center to discuss this question: *What can the community/technical college system do to help students of color achieve more academic success?* The group included nine faculty, ten multicultural affair directors, ten student services staff, four academic officers, six State Board staff members, and four presidents and trustees.

By the end of the two-day workshop, participants had generated ideas for many projects that would help students of color achieve more academic success, but a clear future direction for the State Board's work had not emerged. The group agreed to reconvene for a daylong workshop in July to finish the work by producing a list of strategies that could be carried out by the state system. A smaller group, about twenty-five, met on July 22 to develop and prioritize possible strategies.

The final recommendations to the staff of the State Board, listed in order of priority, were:

1. *Retention: Address the issue by developing a plan based on careful listening to students' voices.* The first step of this system-wide but campus-based project would be to conduct focus groups with students to find out what makes them stay, and what makes them leave. Use the information gleaned from those conversations to develop a campus-wide retention plan. From the beginning of the project, aim for wide campus participation so as to address the underlying issue about retention—namely, whose job is it to do anything about it?
2. *Professional Development: Offer staff/faculty-training workshops on specific topics on a regional basis.* These workshops would address the concern that many people do not understand what it takes for students of color to succeed. In particular, the workshops would be designed for staff members who are first line people working with students of color, and would address the multiplicity of students of color.
3. *Link diversity to accreditation: Work with the accreditation liaisons.* This is a long-term goal, and participants' reactions were quite mixed about taking it on. This work could happen regionally, if a small group wanted to find out what other states in this accrediting region are doing with diversity and

then to try to build a coalition. An alternative is to propose that Washington state colleges be held to a diversity standard in their accreditation processes. Another route would be to propose a diversity performance funding goal/indicator for the system, or at least collect information about how many campuses already do this.

4. *Clarify system goals related to diversity for use by individuals and by institutions.* Clarify State Board's current language about diversity to catalyze conversations and initiate action among system-wide groups. Emphasize and publicize good practices, recognize work that is already going on, and disseminate that information across the system via a newsletter and/or web site.
5. *State Board staff convene groups to share ideas and training.* For example, one group might meet around strategies for folding diversity action plans into campus strategic plans. Curriculum infusion/development, assessment resources and results, and sharing best practices in a number of areas are other potential topics

The report to the State Board included the observation that data distributed by the Board, on which the Multicultural Efforts Project was based, demonstrates clearly that students of color do not enter and proceed through college transfer and vocational programs at the same rate of progression as white students do, particularly students with limited proficiency in English. Since the community and technical colleges serve as the entry point to higher education for a large proportion of students of color, every small success opens paths for people who might otherwise be denied access.

The report concluded with this observation: "As we moved through the three days of retreat time, we tended to repeat our frustrations and feelings of fragmentation and alienation, even loneliness, that many of us feel in our daily work. We may not see how our everyday tasks are contributing to change, or fear that they are not contributing to change fast enough. More importantly, we may not see how small incremental changes that we do have the capacity to control can be part of larger organizational change. These are the leaderly roles that we are called upon to learn more about, whether we are in a formal position of authority or whether we learn how to make our own less prestigious work site a position of power."

### ***Development of Framework: A Grass-Roots Leadership Initiative***

Two years later in October 2000, during the fifth annual Faculty and Staff of Color Conference, at one of the most well-attended sessions at the conference, a team of experts from the Commission of the States, including Dr. Mildred Ollee, reported on efforts in other regions to link diversity with accreditation. During the discussion, a suggestion was made for Washington state to explore ways to link diversity with assessment on campuses. A group of people who had helped shape the recommendations from the Multicultural Efforts Project, including staff from the State Board and Washington Center and multicultural affairs directors, organized a meeting with Mildred Ollee to further discuss the idea of linking diversity efforts to accountability and accreditation. That meeting was held in July 2001 and the committee began meeting regularly from this point on, growing to include institutional researchers, and academic and student affairs administrators.

Over the course of two years, a framework was designed to do what had been recommended in the Multicultural Efforts Project report—develop a tool for holding campuses responsible for their diversity efforts.

The framework does not tell campuses what to do; its power lies in the suggestion that campuses look comprehensively at all their divisions and quantify their diversity efforts. Campuses can elect to focus on particular divisions; they can determine what progress will look like. The value of the framework, which is now in use at five or six two- and four-year campuses in Washington, is that leads institutions to make data-based decisions about diversity work.

The Framework for Diversity Assessment and Planning is available at [www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/DiversityFramework.htm](http://www.evergreen.edu/washcenter/DiversityFramework.htm).