



## SCOPE VISITING SCHOLAR JANUARY 2013 REFLECTION

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I am really excited and feel very honored as I prepare to serve the SCOPE membership as the 2013 Inaugural Visiting Scholar. In this role, I will be sharing monthly Practicing Prevention tips and reflections, conducting webinars, contributing to blogs and other media, speaking at the national conference, and visiting member campuses. My fundamental goal involves energizing and informing the unifying commitments we share as SCOPE colleagues.

This first article is intended to introduce myself and to reflect on the aims of SCOPE, calling on fellow members to begin 2013 with a renewed sense of urgency, but also a contemplative patience. How can these two seemingly opposing things be done together? Well, I speak from experience in this regard.

In the late 1980s, I was an ambitious undergraduate student at Central Michigan University. Admittedly, this motivation evidenced itself more often outside the classroom through involvement in campus life. I began my stint in the Student Government Association during my first year, eventually becoming the Vice-President, then mounting an unsuccessful but educational bid for the local City Council. I was in a Fraternity (something I said I would never do, but my curiosity prevailed and, well, save that for another SCOPE article about why prevention work is so important to enacting the espoused values of Greek Life). I was involved in the Residence Hall Council and then became a Resident Assistant. I worked in offices of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Provost and President.

One of the most significant and rewarding experiences though was serving as a Peer Health Educator and volunteer at the Wellness Resource Center on campus. This role had me receiving training in peer support around a number of important health issues such as alcohol abuse, sexual health, and stress management, among others. I recall, as a 19-year-old newbie, lecturing an Accounting professor who came to the WRC for a blood pressure check. His levels were too high, and I scolded him about working too hard and not taking time to relax and take care of himself. How ironic (or even hypocritical?) that I was juggling so many things and working several campus and off-campus jobs to pay for school, and here I was telling him to chill out (or maybe in the 80s it was to "take a chill pill?" ...but you get the idea).

Another memorable experience was taking the sexual health "kit," with its transparent 3-D mock up of uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes; wooden condom demonstrator, diaphragms, spermicidal gels and so forth to give a presentation to an all-women's residence hall floor. These presentations always generated large audiences (again, another article), but in any case I remember asking the women whether they were comfortable with a guy presenting about this (e.g. explaining how their uterus works, etc.) and they responded with enthusiastic approval. These two instances were important to the foundation of my personal and scholarly interests in Gender, Men's and Masculinities Studies. In the former, I was operating from a place of care and concern for another man's wellbeing, and in the latter I was operating from assumptions about who can and should be talking to whom about wellbeing. Both were breaking deeply held but unwritten social rules, and both were instances of expressing myself authentically despite them.

As a Broadcasting major, I also worked as a DJ on the campus radio station and news reporter on the television station (here I am thankful that this was pre-Internet and pre-Youtube!). I had every intention

of pursuing that as a career, but the breadth and depth of involvement in campus life changed everything for me. I decided to get into Student Affairs, and found my first job as a Residence Hall Director at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. It should be mentioned that I had never been out West, and since there weren't websites or email back then, I mailed a résumé in response to a small listing in the Chronicle of Higher Education. After the campus interview (and my first ride on a tiny turbo-prop plane to get there), they offered me the job. Anyone who knows me would agree that it's just not my style to buy a Harley (or even sit on one) and head where the wind takes me. The idea of moving out to this remote (though incredibly beautiful) place was really scary to me, but it stimulated another important life theme for me, in that I told myself, *"if you don't do this now, you will never do it."*

So, being a poor college graduate, I bought a bus ticket from Detroit, Michigan to Durango, Colorado and mailed all my possessions (5 boxes) ahead to be there for me when I arrived. When I agreed to the position, with its tiny apartment and meal plan, and the hefty salary of \$1000/month (\$788 after taxes and benefits), I believed with little hesitation that it would serve my long-term interests to do this. I also enrolled in an Master of Arts in Community Counseling program through Adams State College, offered two evenings a week in Durango for three years, loans for which I will be paying for another decade, also with the belief that it was an investment. I met my wife in Durango, and we had our first child there. From there, I worked in Residence Life at the University of Delaware and the University of Arizona (where I also completed my Ph.D. in the Center for the Study of Higher Education and moved from Residence Life to serve as Director of Business Programs and Workforce Development—another in the "try new things" series), then as Dean of Campus Life at Saint John's University in Minnesota and faculty in Gender and Women's Studies, then moved to Canada to oversee the Division of Student Affairs at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario (and on the faculty of Gender Studies), and then to California to serve as the Vice President for Student Affairs. In 2011, I stepped down from the VPSA role into my faculty role as Professor of Counselor Education, and recently got elected as Chair of the Department.

If you had told me in 1992 that all these things would happen, and that I would be writing about them in my first article as a Visiting Scholar for SCOPE, I would not have believed you. As a first-generation student, my skepticism might have been rooted in insecurity even as I have come to recognize a host of privileges attached to my social identities. But neither of these dimensions fully explains our life course. We, and our circumstances, are far more complex, and the explanations for our successes and failures—or even whether we view any given situation as one or the other—include many unknowns, which is why I believe in the power of themes rather than checklists for navigating our lives.

No one's story can be bottom-lined or finished, but I can say that four themes in particular remain core in my life and work (unfinished and imperfect though they may be):

- Ongoing critical study and reflection about identities—my own and others—and how messages seep into our belief systems about who we are, our relative worth, and what we can/can't and should/shouldn't do;
- Faith in the value of sometimes uncomfortable, awkward or scary, yet interesting and meaningful choices; in short, trying new and different things.
- The deep importance of pursuing all of this in relationships with others, including a broad collection of friendships and collegial networks, but also with appreciation that those to whom I have negative reactions must be here to teach me something (that one is really hard and doesn't always work...at least not in the short term). I believe that the most significant human growth happens in the context of relationships.
- Appreciation for humor, satire, ambiguity, irony and not taking myself too seriously (another hard one...ego is a mischievous sprite). Almost all of the worst things that have happened in my life were made better or meaningful through laughter.

So, this brings me back to my earlier call for SCOPE members to begin 2013 with a renewed sense of urgency, but also a contemplative patience. These two things are not in conflict at all, but rather in relation with each other. Renewal assumes the value and legitimacy of our experiences, capabilities and worth (which is why we renew rather than replace it). Renewed urgency, by extension, calls on these inner resources to generate a reinvigorated alertness to notice opportunities to make a difference for our students, colleagues, and in our own lives; and a commitment to seize them. “Contemplative” is both an adjective and a noun. In this view, our patience is not defeatist or naïve, but rather underwritten by a fundamental belief in hidden gifts that with time will manifest if we cultivate a standing invitation to them. Both of these ideas hold an understanding—even an appreciation—that what we are pursuing might not come in the timeline or form we first hoped for.

This should not be confused with being a doormat, an intentionally provocative word and topic I plan to discuss in a later article. Suffice it to say that I have often found myself in discussions—both personal and professional—about ways to change something that we wish to change, in which a prospective course of action is being debated. Invariably, the conversation would get stuck over the question of whether the proposed approach would work, and what evidence is there to support that proposition. I always found that puzzling. How can we know whether something will work if we haven’t done it yet? More importantly, and how I would reply, “we have all the evidence we need to know that what we ARE doing ISN’T working, yet this argument seems to be about whether to continue doing it just because this new idea hasn’t yet been proven.” Where this logic didn’t work, I had the privilege of being a Dean or Vice President and could insist on (and fund) a pilot of the new approach, but I also got better at unlocking and unfurling people along the way without needing to rely on such authority.

SCOPE’s mission statement boldly asserts that it (and thus we as members) “embrace[s] an ecological, inclusive, holistic, feminist, public health, evidence-based and multi-disciplinary vision of prevention...To effectively promote the aims of the prevention community, SCOPE members deeply examine the causes of violence, health and safety risks within society — including hate, intolerance, apathy, gender bias, racism, homophobia, stigmatization of mental health, objectification of the human body, ignorance, predation and discrimination — to foster effective, interconnected, strategic prevention.”

So, my wish for all of us is to begin 2013 with a renewed sense of urgency, but also a contemplative patience to illuminate and pursue approaches not yet tried, in solidarity through our hesitations and fears, and with the tenacity, good humor, and thoughtfulness to recognize that, as the colloquial expression goes, one does not grow a flower by pulling on it.

I look forward to connecting with you this year, and wish you great boldness and success!

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SCOPE Inaugural Visiting Scholar

More information about Jason can be found online:  
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