NURTURING AND INSPIRING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN STUDENTS

From all aspects of the university, we should openly express our intent to design elements of nurturing into the fabric of the institution.

Nurturing and Inspiring – a culture in which supportive people and valued programs, encourage human beings to move forward and become what they choose to be.

The Center for Leadership Development sponsored a six part conversation series during the 2008-2009 academic year as an opportunity to investigate ways in which the university community might nurture, inspire and challenge students to find their potential for the “extraordinary.” Dr. Larry Roper, Vice Provost for Student Affairs, and Dr. Cary Green, Assistant Dean for the College of Agricultural Sciences facilitated the six conversations. Staff, faculty and students were invited to attend and, in fact, provided the environment for an exceptional level of conversation which consistently opened new avenues of thinking.

Jennifer Russell, graduating senior in Apparel Design – “Ultimately, I think the most important task is to provide spaces and resources necessary for the development of relationships and communities, because nearly every student will find some sort of niche, it just takes some acclimation to their surroundings and, of course, time.”

The nature of the conversations focused on a deliberate effort to investigate the concept of “nurturing and inspiring” from many perspectives while participants offered theory, examples and new knowledge. Early conversations focused on defining a nurturing environment and then led toward a better understanding of existing and new programs which might enhance environments in which students can develop their potential. As is the intent and history of such conversations, investigation often leads to greater perspectives. This report will begin with a summary of final conclusions, followed by a review of the six conversations.
NURTURING AND INSPIRING STUDENTS – SUMMARY

NURTURING - a culture in which supportive people and valued programs encourage human beings to move forward and become what they choose to be

Oregon State University is an environment in which many nurturing and inspiring environments currently exist. Many staff and faculty find passion in nurturing students to a better understanding of passions and interests. Staff and faculty who nurture students toward fulfillment of their goals and challenge them to reach for extraordinary efforts, are passionate about their work. Nurturing and inspiring students currently exists at significant levels in laboratories, academic advising, mentoring, and in unexpected relationships in unexpected locations as students go about being students and growing as human beings. If there is a down side to this scenario, it is the fact that nurturing relationships typically occur on the periphery of the university mission and are not openly identified as integral elements of the educational process.

CULTURE – a collective way of acting

Nurturing and inspiring students is not a program, but a culture in which supportive programs might be most successful. Oregon State University currently maintains a student-focused culture from a multitude of perspectives. One conclusion from this conversation series might suggest – the university community can serve students at an even greater level by openly supporting and encouraging staff and faculty to nurture student development through individual relationships as well as in program development – in concert with the academic and research mission.

In a similar conversation series conducted in 2003-04 and facilitated by President Emeritus John Byrne, the conclusion arrived by Student Affairs colleagues stated: “The quality of the college experience is based on relationships and environment.” While approached from different directions, both conversations concluded with an acknowledgement of the profound value gained when people care in positive environments.

Parallel to this current conversation series, a group of seven students met to discuss the concept of nurturing and inspiring from their perspective. The following includes comments and concepts from those discussions.

- Students find most of their nurturing comes from staff and faculty within their major and from their cohort.
- “I feel most nurtured when people seem concerned in my health and class progress.”
- “Personal conversations mean a lot.”
- “Nurturing seems to happen best in small groups.”
- “We do not feel like we are challenged enough. Being challenged is a form of being nurtured.”
- “When folks help me make connections to my life after college, I feel like I am being nurtured.”
“A great amount of peer nurturing occurs in studio classes as students work late into the night.”

The connections between nurturing and post-college were very prominent in their comments.

- “We would like people to be interested in what we want to do and how we can get there.”
- “The university ought to focus more on placing graduates.”
- “Maybe we could maintain student standing for the summer after graduation so we have a base to work from as we look for a place to start our career.”

**POTENTIAL ACTIONS – acts of leadership**

Those in leadership positions ought to consider placing a high level of significance on creating a culture in which staff and faculty feel supported in designing ways to enhance the opportunities for nurturing students.

1. Schedule regular departmental conversations in order to continuously assess and design actions which nurture the entire college experience.
2. Create intentional opportunities in which students will nurture as peers, much like the laboratory, studio settings, student groups and clubs and working environments.
3. From the context of departments, programs, classrooms, advising, impromptu conversations or through the daily exchange of services, we should encourage students to make connections between their current activity and post-college.
4. From all aspects of the university, we should openly define our intent to design elements of nurturing into the fabric of the institution.

Nurturing and Inspiring Students to be extraordinary is a culture. This culture is most productive when allowed to grow and develop from the context of the environment from which it comes. In the Center for Leadership Development we believe leadership is “doing something that matters.” Nurturing students to find their passions, better understand their identity, and develop a sense of happiness, is doing something that matters and will ultimately prepare them to make even greater contributions in the evolution of our society. Leaders are encouraged to do something that matters.

The remainder of this report consists of notes taken during the six conversations. These notes contain the foundation for the summary of this report. Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Don Johnson, 737.1577 Don.Johnson@oregonstate.edu

Thank you to Larry Roper and Cary Green for providing exceptional leadership throughout the conversation series.
The following are notes from the six conversations which took place during the 2008-09 academic year at Oregon State University.

**Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students**

October 16, 2008

Thank you for attending the first in our series of conversations on “Nurturing and Inspiring.” The conversation was rich, full of passion and clearly a continued step toward enhancing the development of young human beings. Below are comments recorded during the conversation along with a few general thoughts around themes uncovered. Shortly Larry Roper, Cary Green and I will review the conversations and set a focus for the next conversation on November 20. The remainder of the conversations will take place in the Powell Leadership Center in the Memorial Union. We hope you will be able to join us and we encourage you to invite a student.

If you have any comments, ideas or thoughts for our future conversations, please forward to me and I will be sure they are included in our movement forward.

**Summary**

Four themes appeared to surface throughout the conversation:

- **Being mindful**
  - There is no such thing as a throw away comment.
  - Carefully consider the context in which students are hearing.
  - Have the strength to point out weak areas and help the student set a new plan.
  - Helping students gain confidence

- **Relationship to those guiding**
  - Students also inspire us.
  - Are we a showdown or a light?
  - Students can bring out our passions
  - Can we acknowledge when we learn from students.

- **Structure**
  - A collection of intergenerational individuals bring a wide array of perspectives for students to consider.
  - The physical and emotional environment in which we bring students clearly affects their development.
  - Can the core-curriculum intentionally include a sense of nourishing and inspiring through attention given to the significance of values and integrity?
  - In creating physical time to focus on the valuable aspects of nurturing and inspiring, is it a matter of redefining our available time?

- **Caring**
  - Opening doors without needing credit
  - Helping to uncover skills and talents
  - “Making that call” without being asked.
Recorded comments:

1. We should be mindful of the impact our words have on students.

2. We should recognize students also inspire us.

3. There is no such thing as a throw away comment. Students hear and remember what we share, when shared in a mentoring way.

4. Often the nurturing and inspiration happens when we do the extra piece to move students forward: like making “that” call without being asked.

5. We can help students uncover their greatest skills and talents.

6. We can nurture and inspire when we have the strength to point out weak areas and help the student set a new plan.

7. Nurturing comes in many different forms. Diversity in our observations is an advantage to students.

8. Institutional leadership is a manifestation of the collective.

9. We benefit ourselves and the students when we carefully consider the context in which they are hearing.

10. Nourishing and inspiring benefits from a diverse group if intergenerational individuals.

11. The work of Paul Axtell (conversation and listening skills) has been proven to be appreciated and valuable to students.

12. “Melissa Yamamoto pointed out my strengths” (consider the impact of identifying strengths – this offers direction and shows listening and caring.)

13. “James Cassidy inspires students to want to learn.”

14. When we take time to listen and care, it is noticed and appreciated.

15. Students work harder with more interest for people who show great passion.

16. Helping students gain confidence is an enormous development opportunity.

17. When we create inspiring environments the impact of our work is enhanced.

18. We should consider opening doors for students without feeling the need take credit.

19. Possibly our greatest impact can be on first and second year students.
20. Parker Palmer talks about shadow and light. (are we a burden as a shadow or a value as a guiding light?)

21. What role can the Core Curriculum play in the nurturing and inspiration of students? Could be a place to imbed the significance of values and integrity?

22. We ought to learn about the value of inspiration from peers.

23. We should be aware of those times when students teach us and let them know when it happens.

24. How do we make more time to do all this? (Maybe it is a matter of redefining our available time)

Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students

November 20. 08

The following are notes from the second of a six part conversation series designed to investigate ways in which we might nurture, inspire and challenge students to find their potential for the “extraordinary.” This has been a rich experience in which we hope to build on each conversation and conclude the series with new knowledge and potential actions which will benefit our students and society.

The conversation opened with a consideration of obstacles we might experience as we strive to nurture and inspire students:

Obstacles for nurturing and inspiring

- A need for a developed relationship
  - Within our daily schedules, we need to have the ability to develop some sort of relationship with a student if we hope to have the ability to nurture and inspire.
- Available time
  - Assuming we currently have full schedules, how might we adjust our schedule – which may mean eliminating some elements – to free time for the development of a relationship and the opportunity to nurture and inspire.

The following are comments which generated additional comments and/or concepts for thinking.
Creative Thinking

- We can cultivate relationships during brief moments of interaction.
  - As staff and faculty, we need to consciously note opportunities during the course of the day in which we can support the intellectual and emotional development of our students.
- We would benefit from viewing students as human beings and allow their true humanity to show.
  - Nurturing occurs when true passion for another person’s well being is acknowledged and appreciated.
- We can focus on not letting our “stuff” to get caught up with their “stuff.”
  - On occasion our personal journeys become entangled with the message we are sharing.
- While with students, we can intentionally be present and authentic.
  - Students are well prepared to see a lack of authenticity and are less likely to feel nurtured when authenticity is not present.
- Our greatest tool in teaching is to display respect.
  - Few traits possess more value than that of being respectful and being respected. When we act with a high level of respect, students are very likely to listen.
- Our relationships typically reflect our last five conversations with an individual.
  - If we consider the nature and content of recent conversations with any student, we will have a significant understanding of our relationship with that student.
- Focus on listening.
  - Listening allows the student to be heard. Given the opportunity to be heard, the student will often find guidance and direction in their own words.
- Ask – how can I be helpful?
  - NURTURING
- We can offer more possibilities for students to pose questions.
  - INSPIRING
- We can intentionally challenge students.
  - INSPIRING

The conversation moved to a new area of thinking with the acknowledgement of the influence of organizational culture. The group began to consider the potential value in a change of culture.

Culture Change

- We must be an example of character – a way of being.
- Personal success plan
  - Could we help students create such a document?
  - Can staff/faculty create a personal success plan?
- In response to the posed question: “what would you like to share with people older than you,” a student recently replied: “Treat us as if we are going to replace you.”
  - Nurturing and inspiring students to replace us and grow on the work we have done, is clearly a culture change.
- In the area of nurturing and inspiring – who can actually do the work?
  - Everyone. Typically front line people have a very significant impact.
**Summary thoughts**

Nurturing and inspiring the extraordinary in students will certainly benefit the student as well as those doing the nurturing. Nurturing and inspiring is not just a soft effortless skill, but an expression of having the ability to listen and offer creative connections for students to consider and act upon.

Through a process of nurturing and inspiring we can create an environment in which students can prepare to further the evolutionary process in a positive way and grow on the efforts of those who precede them.

*Please join us January 22, at 9:00a.m. in the Powell Leadership Center in the Memorial Union for the third conversation in this series*

**Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students**

January 22, 2009

The following are notes from the third of a six part conversation series designed to investigate ways in which we might nurture, inspire and challenge students to find their potential for the “extraordinary.” This has been a rich experience in which we hope to build on each conversation and conclude the series with new knowledge and potential actions which will benefit our students and society.

This conversation opened with consideration of quotes taken from students in the Last Year Experience class, reflecting on strengths and concerns they have experienced in their college career.

**Strengths:**

“Live everyday to the fullest.”

“Always be open-minded when meeting new people.”

**Concerns:**

“I am going to graduate this spring and I have no idea what I want to do.”

“I don’t really want to do what I have learned to do.”

The following comments were made by the conversation participants while considering “intentional” ways in which the University culture might assist students in their development.

- We do not change culture. Following a number of changes in the way we act, the culture changes.
• Identity
  o Some students define their identity by their major, which poses the question, when you change your major, do you change your identity?
  o For some students, their identity is in fact the identity their parents place on them.
• Do students have an actual intention that might guide them through the college experience?
• In some ethnic cultures the intention is defined by their parents.
• Could there be a way in which students can begin to define their “intent” during their first year?
• One of our goals as staff and faculty might be to create opportunities and environments for students to “think.”
• Can we focus on helping students define their skills and seek a rich college experience?
• Students might benefit by being “challenged” early in their college career.
• Could we develop ways in which all students would be encouraged to explore and investigate opportunities during the first year?
• We need to let students know they have permission to think.

A suggestion was made to create a location in which we might store:

• Student Development Thinking
• Documents on student development
• Links to valuable resources

Summary

The general theme of this conversation focused around:

• There is value in creating opportunities for students to intentionally investigate their individual goals and desires in a university environment which encourages and challenges students to consider their skills and passions.
• Investigation of goals and passions should be woven into most of the university experience.
• There is great value in creating opportunities for students to align their career choices with an understanding of their identity.
• Students will benefit from an awareness that staff and faculty believe this investigation is of great value.
  (a clear example of nurturing and inspiring)

The first three conversations on Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary have identified:

• Being mindful of a focused intention to nurture and inspire students through a structure that is woven into the fabric of the university.
• Acknowledge the value of developing creative thinking, quality relationships with students, and an eventual adjustment in university culture focused toward nurturing and inspiring.
• Intentionally encourage and facilitate student’s to investigate skills, passions and identity.

Please join us for the next conversation – February 19, 9:00-10:00am in the Powell Leadership Center.
Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students

February 19, 2009

The following are notes from the fourth of a six part conversation series designed to investigate ways in which we might nurture, inspire and challenge students to find their potential for the “extraordinary.” This has been a rich experience in which we hope to build on each conversation and conclude the series with new knowledge and potential actions which will benefit our students and society.

The conversation opened with a question posed by Larry Roper: “How might we help guide students through and examination of their life – an exploration of the landscape of their lives - psychological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. This could help students enhance their awareness of how to create the relationships and commitments needed for their preferred future.”

The following comments were offered by participants:

- We would benefit from encouraging students to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- We might ask students to define what vision of their future is worthy of their energy.
- Students ought to consider and visualize what it means to be “me”
- Students develop a personal journey and an academic journey. Making connections between the two would be beneficial.
- Students create coping behaviors – some good, some not so good. How can we help students become conscious of their coping behaviors?
- We might encourage and guide students in the development of strong bonds with their cohort.
- As a university, we can enhance the college experience by articulating our intent with students and parents when they are accepted to the university.
- We should try and facilitate success for students without creating our personal agenda for their outcome.
- We ought to consider the significance of peer wisdom shared among students.
- As educators, we should ask ourselves if we adhere to the same expectation we place on students.

Summary

Through the first four conversations on Nurturing and Inspiring Students, it has become apparent our ability to nurture and inspire can be most beneficial by guiding students through an examination of their identity by encouraging and helping them to develop a better understanding of their beliefs, skills and life questions. This examination varies with each student and the process should reflect their individual style of learning. Given this, the student’s examination might be best supported with a “mentor” type relationship, in which thoughts and ideas can be considered and discussed in order to support the student’s personal investigation. A “mentor” type relationship does not necessarily need to be a traditional mentor/mentee relationship, but a relationship based on examination.
In the next conversation, we will begin to consider practical applications in which we might nurture and inspire students in examination – most likely from a variety of perspectives and resources.

Please join us for the next conversation - April 23, 9:00 - 10:00am in the Powell Leadership Center.

Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students

April 23, 2009

Eudaimonia (Greek: εὐδαιμονία) is a classical Greek word commonly translated as 'happiness'

1. What constitutes the good life – passion or acquisition?
2. What role might we fill in helping students develop an understanding of “happiness.”?
3. We ought to show our support by honoring their goals.
4. There is a certain fluidity in the evolution of life. We can assist students as mentors during their evolution.
5. We have a tendency to design life in a linear format, but life is not always linear.
6. We can support student development by helping to connect the academic world with personal development.
7. Should our support be the product of a program or the product of an enriched culture?
8. The work of the University should always address the concept of nurturing.
9. The systems we design should have built-in time for reflection and relationships.
10. We can ask students to consider, “am I becoming what I want to become?”
11. We ought to create ways for new students to understand how they can relate to us and help them gain a fresh vision for their development.
12. A question – are university colleagues comfortable with the concept of nurturing students?
13. The mentorship concept is clearly a powerful experience.
14. Mentor relationships create opportunities for investigation.
15. One’s major or career does not define life alone.
16. We have a tendency to fragment student’s lives in the name of ‘structure.’ How can we help students experience fluidity in the system?
17. Much of one development is a product of intense personal relationships.
18. We ought to create opportunities for students who are developing at a faster pace than others.
19. Some students feel they have to be lucky to experience a nurturing space.
20. Good programs = skill and people who care.
Nurturing and Inspiring the Extraordinary in Students

May 21, 2009

Cary Green on how to affect a culture change:

- Culture changes when individual’s actions change
- Changing’s one’s actions create new behaviors
- New behaviors allow people to see new connections
- New culture happens

Question to attending students:

*What do you consider nurturing environments to be?*

- Support toward the post college life
- An environment that nurtures in the context of the students world
- Being the kind of people you are nurturing others to be

Do we consider these things in the hiring process?

Behavior changes inside out:

- People need to understand their own behavior
- Individuals need to understand how they benefit from culture change
- We need to create space for people to be nurtures

Leaders create space for people to be what they are:

- Do you want to be a nurturer and if so, how?
- Are you willing to put in the effort?

Nurturing Faculty

- Some are there and some are not
- I expect faculty to listen and care
- Students have to be proactive to find nurturers
- Sometimes I need to step out of my box and act more holistic
- How do we make ourselves present to students?
- There are no unimportant conversations
- What happens when we turn down a student’s desire to talk?
Nurturing = Caring

- What path do you want to see your life take and how can we help?
- Larry – “Each of us need to find a community for nurturing to happen. If we don’t have it, we need to find it. Your circle should reflect your desires.
- Cary – “We need to be fully engaged with our students. We don’t need to know the answer to be engaged.”