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A "Quiet Crisis" Addressed Locally and Nationally

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Alumna and Holland Middle School Principal Nerieda Garcia works with COE students at the Winter Alumni Roundtables.

Heather M. (Barnes) Braspeninx, B.S., 2002, is employed as an early childhood teacher of the hearing impaired at Grand Rapids Oral Deaf Program.

Daniel D. Scripsema, B.S., 1973, M.Ed., 1982, was named the Jenison school district's Teacher of the Year for his passionate work as a history teacher and swim coach.

Gerald D. Verwey, B.S., 2002, is a science teacher at Creative Technologies Academy in Cedar Springs.

Bonnie L. Myers, B.S., 1972, celebrated her retirement after 30 years of teaching Kindergarten in Sparta.

Jami (Posthumus) Hoeksema, B.S., 1988, M.Ed., 1997, became the first teacher at DeVos Children's Hospital.

Paul R. Kunde, M.Ed., 2002, was hired as principal of Grand Haven Central High School. He most recently served as the assistant principal at Hamilton High School.

Susan L. O'Donnell, M.Ed, 1996, is the principal of Woodland Elementary School in Portage.

Julie K. (Alderson) Malenich, B.S., 1993, is an assistant principal at Davison High School, where she taught math for six years prior to her new position.

Jerry A. Phillips, B.S., 1972, was named superintendent of Caledonia Schools.

Troy L. Stahl, M.Ed., 2003, was appointed principal of Holland Christian High School.

Sharon K. Alexander, B.S., 1996, is principal of St. James Catholic School in Montague.

James R. Crites, B.S., 1996, M.Ed., 2004, is the assistant principal at Caledonia High School.

David M. Richards, M.Ed., 1996, is the principal of Fraser High School. Previously he was the Director of Educational Technology for Rochester Community Schools.

Tammy A. Hatfield, B.S. 1997, M.Ed., 2003, is the principal at Waukazoo Elementary School in West Ottawa Public Schools.

Jason M. Surian, B.A., 1998, is the assistant principal at Delton Kellogg Elementary School.

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A "Quiet Crisis"



Addressed Nationally and Locally

by Stephen J. Worst



The voices in the current conversation about higher education have spoken either with gentle eloquence or with dramatic intensity over the past decade. Peter Smith's recent work, *The Quiet Crisis*, adds to this conversation about the state of higher education in the U.S., signaling change through breaking down traditionalist models in higher education and introducing service learning and community partnerships into the university agenda. These values reflect those of our own College of Education at Grand Valley State University, which is stepping into collaborative arrangements with community institutions.

It is immediately apparent that Smith comes into the discussion with a colorful life experience. He has been an educator, policymaker, Lieutenant Governor and State Senator for Vermont, member of the Carnegie Forum on Education and Economic Development, founding president of two community colleges, former vice president of advancement at Norwich University, and Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University.

The broad life-experience of this author provides a rich framework from which to thoughtfully consider the current challenges that face educational institutions. While one may be tempted to initially react to Smith's first section of the book as another observer whining about the same old issues surrounding institutional change, a more creative voice surfaces throughout *The Quiet Crisis*. Upon reading, it becomes apparent that Smith has not been living life in academe's "ivory towers," only to emerge with a solitary word about the smoldering crisis that threatens U.S. higher education.

Smith is unshakable about the current situation in higher education, with "its strengths, its pitfalls, and its implication for the future." But then he probes with specificity into why a more socially responsive institution is likely never to materialize—higher education today is bound by traditional models of organization; it is exclusive, outdated, and ineffective.

The argument in the book goes beyond the assertion that "colleges are difficult

organizations to change." Smith provides some unconventional approaches to consider, approaches like the formal recognition of personal learning, using learning projects as the basis for college credit that leads to degrees, and developing the diversity within our society as an asset rather than as a deficit to remediate.

While it is no secret that colleges have gotten more unwieldy in the last century, the traditional university has not adopted a new mindset that "life is the source and repository of learning; a printed syllabus is not....The community harbors vast learning resources and opportunities...[in which] we learn best." Ironically, today's universities have missed the key to change, which is learning. "Everything around your organization is changing: your markets, your customers, your labor pools, your competitor's products and advertising strategies....The only way to survive in this constantly changing context...is to learn more than others do, faster than they do."

In regard to the College of Education at GVSU, an institution with a relatively brief 44 year history, one might think that "organizational orthodoxy" is hardly existent. After all, the university was still in its infancy when the call for change during the sixties and early seventies was sounded. Grand Valley was an example of how quickly the roots of tradition bind even a young institution, as students and faculty were forced to abandon the dream that the university would play a major role in reconstructing society. Thirty years ago it seemed as if students and activist faculty members would never move an institution, even a young institution, to see itself as a major player in local and global social change. "Even within small institutions...the weight of tradition is leveraged against every appeal for change."

But the College of Education has been boldly stepping into collaborative arrangements with community institutions and shows signs of identifying itself as a key agent in providing local educational resources. The visible initiatives into the community have not simply happened because grant money became available. This comes after much discussion and numerous

attempts to be an active player serving the community as a significant educational resource. Smith would regard this quality in the College of Education as an example of his second major theme—higher education institutions need to promptly operationalize the new knowledge about the way people learn. Service learning is taken seriously in the College of Education.

While there will still be campuses and faculty and an organized curricula, "how the students are doing their learning, where they do it, and how that learning is supported will be dramatically different," according to Smith. Particularly interesting is how the scope of higher education will be redefined in terms "of responsibility and authority in higher education, including other locations like the workplace, the home, the learning cooperative, and the community as equal partners in the learning society of the future." It is in the third section of *The Quiet Crisis* where Smith puts himself on the cutting edge of real change. He defines the scope of higher education as embracing every facet of community life, and having the university regard itself as an equal community partner in shaping the future both locally and globally.

Even though there is currently a major crisis in higher education, Smith, along with other educators, students, and the visionary team of colleagues in the College of Education at GVSU still strive for change. As learning expands, the surrounding world changes. Recognizing the positive results of challenging rules that restrict growth and creativity brings one back to that earlier crisis in higher education in the sixties and seventies. Something has influenced firmly-established higher education models to evolve. This can be seen in the College of Education, with its willingness to be molded by the needs of the community beyond the university campus. It is this boldness, as Smith suggests, that allows the College of Education to change the rules as the world changes. ☺

Information in this article was taken from *The Quiet Crisis: How Higher Education is Failing America*, by Peter Smith, Anker Publishing Company, Inc.