



management *Monthly*

NEWSLETTER FOR EDUCATORS

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This newsletter is for all instructors using one of McGraw-Hill's six management textbooks.

The intention of this newsletter is to provide you with tools and resources necessary to stay on the cutting-edge in the classroom.

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In the Trenches with: Sister Karen Elliott, C.P.P.S.

Dr. Karen M. Elliott is an ardent advocate for service learning as a core element of any academic program that directly supports and demonstrates institutional learning outcomes. She is the Chair of the Religious Studies Department and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Mercy College of Ohio and holds a doctor of ministry degree from Barry University, Miami Shores, FL, and an MA in theology from St. Michael's College in Vermont (1). She is also known to have a mean long putt (2), and earned eight varsity letters at Wright State playing softball, basketball, and volleyball during her undergraduate years (3).

Elliott is the recipient of the 2011 Mercy College 'Mind, Heart and Hand Award,' presented by the President of the College to a member of the Mercy family whose thoughts, attitudes, and presence serves as a positive influence on others. "Both inside and outside the classroom, Dr. Elliott exhibits an extraordinary commitment to her students in their academic and personal lives. ... She is a person who is true to her word and speaks with integrity. She has a keen sense of justice and is persistent in addressing concerns until a resolution is reached." Sister Karen's passion for teaching and life is rooted in her faith, which is integral to her leadership both at Mercy College and within her religious congregation (4).



In weekly evaluations Dr. Elliott's students frequently comment on the passion and enthusiasm she brings to her teaching. Students note that she engages them not only intellectually, but also emotionally, connecting mind and heart. Embodied learning comes through service. One illustration is a course taught by Elliott that requires participation in a week-long service learning experience at Santo Hermano Pedro long-term care facility for severely disabled persons (infants to seniors) in Antigua, Guatemala. At the core of this learning experience is the concept that students and instructors serve the needs of the residents first and foremost.



Nurses at the facility comment that the volunteers from Mercy College don't wait to be told what to do. They observe and "dig in," whether the task is mopping floors, feeding the residents, or folding laundry. Students don't stand around talking with



one another; rather they engage the residents and embrace the menial tasks that need to be done in order to serve.

Sister Karen believes that the core element of service learning is "service." The student must be client focused – that is, they are to identify the need of those being served and "just do it." Too often, students will go into a service learning project with a "me" attitude. What am I going to directly learn from this activity? It is the "for you" attitude that creates the deepest learning

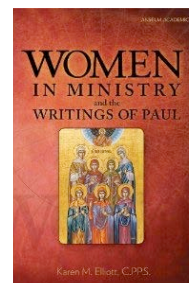
for students. This can help students from any degree program develop the skills and competencies for career success; particularly, when it comes to translating an internship into a job – or getting a job promotion. After a true service learning experience, a student will be more inclined to take initiative with an observed need not being filled. When that happens, leaders notice and want that person to remain with the team and be promoted. The only way to teach such initiative is through experiencing it.

Sometimes such initiative requires literally digging in: Elliott recalls a time as volunteer at Camp Andrew Jackson in McKee, Kentucky. While she might have preferred to teach to the children, she rolled up her sleeves and dug a pit for an outhouse that needed to be excavated. Elliott is a Sister of the Precious Blood [C.P.P.S. from Latin: *Congregatio Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis* (5)], who dedicate themselves to education and pastoral ministry in various settings including prisons and health care facilities; as counselors, spiritual directors and in outreach to the poor (6).



Resource Link: Learn more about the [Sisters of the Precious Blood](#) (6)

She has also been at the forefront of efforts for women in leadership. Much like management tradition, Christian tradition has used a male perspective toward its tasks and responsibilities, a viewpoint that privileges male leaders and minimizes the role of women. In her book, *Women in Ministry and the Writings of Paul*, Elliott challenges this view, providing solid evidence for women's important and vibrant role in leadership (7).



Resource Link: For more on the book click [here](#) (8)



Thought Leader Interview

with **Sister Karen Elliott**

from an interview with C. Theodor Stiegler (17)



C. Theodor Stiegler [CTS]: How did you come to live your passion in your work and why do you continue?

Dr. Karen Elliott [KE]: As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher. I have been blessed to have opportunities and have made choices that led to my passion. As a student in the eighth grade, I volunteered to assist a teacher in my parish's religious education program. Religion was always my favorite subject in school. Throughout my educational career, I have had the privilege of teaching theology at the middle school, high school, and collegiate levels.

I continue to live my passion for several reasons. When people are engaged with the sacred, the holy, with mystery – all of which are part of the study of theology – there is a natural holistic integration that occurs within each person. I find that people are open, receptive, and even hungry for the sacred, a deepened awareness of the presence of God in their lives. They are open to the fullness of their being – heart, vision, hopes, dreams, love of family – things that really matter in life.

[CTS]: What challenges do you see for our world? How might these be turned into possibilities?

[KE]: One of my great sadness is when I observe or hear of people who distort and/or pervert religion and their understanding of God to harm others. They use religion as a destructive power to advance political and/or economic agendas. Another challenge, I believe, is the growing gap between “liberals” and “conservatives.” The intensity of the debates and the rejection of one another by both groups are contrary to St. Paul's exhortations to unity, rooted within the Christian tradition. Such extremism harms all faith traditions and all relationships. In the midst of this reality, I have a great deal of hope. I see students who believe in the inherent goodness in each person and know that there is a spark of the Divine in each person. These students want to make a difference in the world through selfless service and a desire to relieve suffering.

[CTS]: You have experienced some amazing human beings in your work. What is the common thread that threads or connects them? How are you different from knowing them? Share a story that captures the essence of the experience for you.

[KE]: The common thread that I experience in working with some very amazing students is the desire to use one's God-given talents to make the world a better place. They want to alleviate suffering in the world; they believe in and embrace the goodness in others and in doing so they come to experience their own goodness. Furthermore they have the determination and dedication to “roll up their sleeves” to do what is necessary to achieve their dreams.



A quote from St. Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582) sums up the attitude and beliefs that I am inspired by as I observe my students when they are engaged in service, “Christ has no hands on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.”

I am inspired to continue what I’m doing because of the amazing people I have met in my life. Knowing that my teaching helps others to deepen their relationship with God provides an on-going impetus for me to strive for excellence in my teaching, to encourage my students to be servant-leaders and to use their God-given gifts and talents to make the world a better place.

Each semester I assign my students to participate in a required community based service learning project which is equivalent to a test grade. The fifteen minute verbal assessment for this assignment includes: a signed documentation form, written notes or a written narrative of their responses to all of the required information, reflection on the experience, and integration of the experience with their professional development. I am always deeply moved and inspired by the depth and integrity of the students’ reflections and am honored to listen to what is for many of them a conversion experience. Many of them share how the experience has changed them and their views about the poor and suffering in our area. Many students are so inspired by those whom they witness working with these populations that they continue to participate in serving long after their required assignment has been completed. I believe the experience was best summed up by a student who shared, “Before this experience, I felt that people who were severely handicapped would be better off dead. I agreed to assist with their care but I wasn’t happy about it. After working with the residents, I began to feel connected with them. I went there to help them, but in the end, they helped me! They helped me to see and experience that regardless of our handicaps, we all have great dignity and an ability to love and to share love.”

[CTS]: What are you seeing in college graduates today that encourages you and what concerns you? What advice do you have for faculty teaching students today?

[KE]: I am encouraged by college graduates who have often made great sacrifices to achieve their dream of completing a degree program. That dream for most of them is not solely self-serving, simply to earn a good salary, but an opportunity for them to live their vocation, their calling in life. These graduates have a deep desire and commitment to make a difference in the world by compassionately serving others.

I have several concerns about our educational system. Beyond deficiencies in both written and verbal English skills, I see students who struggle to make connections in the learning process. Often our educational system emphasizes rote memorization, stresses those things that will be on the “test” whether it be standardized tests, proficiency tests, or tests for licensure/ accreditation. Our students often are not encouraged to think more broadly, to make applications of what they have learned to systems and/ or institutions. Education and knowledge is so much more than the questions on a test; it involves divergent thinking skills and making connections.

My advice for faculty is to develop assignments and assessments that require the students to make connections beyond the rote memorization of facts and/or data. Use humor in the classroom. Something is only funny if the hearer gets the point, makes the connection. Believe in the goodness of students and encourage their dreams. Lastly, know yourself – know when it’s time to quit teaching because you have lost the passion for teaching and no longer enjoy it.



[CTS]: Describe a favorite learning activity or tool that you have seen, experienced, or used yourself?

[KE]: In my Death, Dying and Bereavement course, I have developed a culminating project which students research, and then present in small groups. Throughout the course, we study the rituals utilized by various cultures related to death. Groups choose a particular culture they wish to study in more detail. Individuals research the history of the culture with a focus on the culture's understanding of life and death. Each group then creates a PowerPoint presentation reflecting their learning as well as the integration of the culture, the history, and the religious practices of the group they have studied. Additionally, students incorporate music, food, and various works of art related to the culture they have chosen. This activity requires students to work collaboratively, to think creatively, and to utilize the skills required in giving an effective oral presentation.

[CTS]: Tell us about a real “zinger” of a moment you faced in leadership with your work. How did you handle it and what were the results?

[KE]: When I taught the Death, Dying, and Bereavement course for the first time, I planned to utilize multiple choice tests. I created numerous questions and with revisions, also used some of the suggested questions for the tests which were provided by the textbook publisher. The average grade for the first test was 78%, and I thought, “Wow, they didn't study!” Then the average for the second test was 76%, and I thought, “Wow, I've done something wrong!” Initially, I became defensive when students complained about the test and thought to myself that they just hadn't prepared adequately for the test. Upon further reflection, it occurred to me that the multiple choice test format was not in alignment with my teaching style. Both in my lecture and in class discussions, I had stressed the integration of knowledge with real world experiences. The tests focused on memorization of details rather than broader concepts.

Consequently, I changed the assessments to a “take home” test format where students were required to reflect on the concepts and make application/connections to real life. Students were much more successful in completing the take home tests. My most recent class average on the first test was an 86%!

[CTS]: What are your hopes and dreams for the future of higher education and its role in our world?

[KE]: I believe it is the responsibility of those engaged in higher education to nurture and encourage students' ability to integrate knowledge/data with real-life experiences; inspire them to make ethical decisions that will impact human flourishing; embrace their God-given talents to alleviate suffering in the world; recognize the rights and responsibilities that are associated with earning a college degree; understand that learning is life-long; as well as to have a reverence and respect for the sacred in their own lives and in the lives of others.



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