

September 2000

**WEAVING 'BAILEY'S LARGER PURPOSE'  
INTO THE BAILEY CORE COURSES  
(ANR 210, 310, 311, and 410)**

Now that we have offered all of the Bailey core courses at least once, an obvious question is: "What are we learning from our experience?" One answer (among many) is that we need to better connect the core courses to Bailey's 'larger purpose.'

Some background is in order.... None of us expected to be stretched so significantly by the collaborative learning approach. But we soon discovered--individually and collectively--that we were 'over our heads.' Perhaps we should have expected this; prior to Bailey, few of us had much experience with collaborative learning. Almost all of us, on the other hand, were adept at organizing and offering courses conventionally. Consequently, we had to 'let go' of the known and familiar, and learn anew. These circumstances compelled most of us to spend time building our collaborative learning skills. The result--we tended to approach each course more as a self-contained learning experience than as a learning experience connected with a 'larger purpose.' The irony is that the Bailey core courses form the foundation of our undergraduate specialization in 'connected learning.' It is time to be more explicit and intentional about answering the question, 'Connected to what?'

Beginning in the Summer of 1999, the issue of connecting to Bailey's larger purpose began drawing learners to the table. Here are several examples. Faculty members gathered to discuss the possibility of expanding the Bailey '5 questions.' The outcome of that conversation--we should consider expanding the focus of these questions from 'self' (e.g., What are my values?) to 'other' (How do I serve society?) The subject of 'spirituality and Bailey' surfaced in follow-up conversations. During Spring Semester 2000, ANR 410 learners posed a related 'larger purpose' question, "Is it time to recreate the Declaration of Bailey?"

As we often do in Bailey, we let these (and related) conversations 'sit and settle' without rushing and 'doing something.' That approach gives steeping time to the intellectual process--desirable when a group seeks to engage and remain 'outside of the box.'

Another conversation stream has emerged recently, involving many persons who were not part of prior discussions. This implies that interest in the issue of 'larger purpose' is spreading. The most recent conversation was stimulated by dialogue associated with the July 2000 retreat in Williamston. Through a series of conversations--face-to-face and virtual--a variety of ideas, suggestions, perspectives emerged. The purpose here is to share that thinking--ideas that were introduced formally at the August 2000 retreat at The Leaven Center in Portland, and revised and refined based on the conversation that took place that day.

## ASSERTIONS

- Words that capture the essence of Bailey are 'discovering (re-discovering) our passion(s),' 'seeking identity with integrity,' 'living a meaningful life,' 'bringing that which is deep inside us to the surface,' 'our struggle,' and 'sharing of struggles.'
- The Declaration of Bailey and the Bailey '5 questions' represent the central tenants of our program. The Declaration expresses the core features associated with our covenant community in the form of obligations we have to self and others. The '5 questions' offer a platform for moral reflection. Together, they inform all about the importance of learning and growing throughout a lifetime; the centrality of individuality within the context of learning together; and the importance of self-criticality—posing and answering provocative questions that sustain a lifetime of learning AND growing.
- The concept of 'the learning journey' connects all learners in Bailey. Each of us—irrespective of age, experience, professional interests, and professional aspirations—is on a journey. It is this 'sameness' that binds us.
- Bailey learning experiences—curricular and co-curricular—are expressions of our shared learning interests. We know that different learners come to the table for different reasons, and assume that each learning experience influences where each learner 'goes next' in her or his Bailey (and lifelong) quest for 'wholeness.'

## IMPLICATIONS

Bailey has evolved intellectually over time but has not proceeded in a linear fashion with pre-determined outcomes. Because of that, it is not always apparent when we should retain or 'let go' of ideas that emerged earlier in the development process. Consequently, it is necessary from time to time to take stock of our journey—looking back in order to move forward.

With this in mind, we conclude that

- The Declaration of Bailey and The 5 Questions serve a fundamental, enduring purpose in Bailey. Rather than revise the Declaration, we invite all Bailey Scholars to interpret, re-interpret, and explore the Declaration in ways that speak to them personally. Similarly, rather than expand the list of core questions in Bailey, we invite each Bailey Scholar to pose additional questions that are personally meaningful.
- At the beginning of all Bailey core courses, each Bailey Scholar (students AND faculty) should have the opportunity to share with others the issues, aspirations, struggles, breakthroughs, dilemmas, etc. that are fundamental to their respective

learning journey. The guiding question might be, "Where am I in my lifelong quest for personal-professional meaning and purpose?"

- Toward the end of each Bailey core course, students and faculty should have the opportunity to share with others how the class experience is influencing their journey in Bailey and beyond. Some possible questions for exploration include: 'What ways of thinking have been reinforced?' 'What new ways of thinking have emerged?' 'What issues are now prominent?' 'What was murky before that now seems clear?' 'What was clear before that now seems murky?' 'What comes next for me?'
- ANR 410 enrollees--students who will be exiting Bailey--should have an opportunity to frame these questions in terms of their overall Bailey experience. They should be invited to share their thoughts in a public session, as a valedictory, to which all in Bailey will be invited.

---

\*Sharing about the learning journey at the beginning and end of each Bailey core course lies outside the boundaries of learning assessment and grading process. It is not our purpose to evaluate and grade learning journeys. What comes 'in between' these sharings will be assessed and graded.

**LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND GRADING  
IN THE BAILEY CORE COURSES  
(ANR 210, 310, 311, and 410)**

We have gained valuable experience experimenting with approaches to learning assessment and grading. With that experience, we are now ready to adopt a general approach in the Bailey core courses.

The approach is specific enough to guide the assessment-grading process AND general enough to encourage creative expression. This approach is consistent with our ethos—seeking to be accountable AND creative learners.

**Preamble**

*'Learning the Bailey way' represents a distinctive experience at Michigan State University.*

- Each Bailey Scholar—student and faculty member, alike—takes responsibility for her or his own learning.
- All Bailey Scholars recognize the power of collaborative learning—learning with, through, and from others.
- All Bailey courses are designed 'from the ground up.' Each learner proposes learning ideas. Then, through respectful conversation, the group decides what to learn, when, how, and why. What emerges is the unique creation of those who have gathered around the learning table.

*Bailey Scholars honor our connection to Michigan State University.*

- 'Learning the Bailey way' is not a superior way of learning. It is simply different from the conventional approach to learning.
- Although Bailey Scholars design courses differently, we respect and affirm MSU's existing course policies. What applies to all, applies to us.
- Bailey Scholars know that it is possible to abide by MSU course policies without compromising 'learning the Bailey way.'

## Process

### **AT THE BEGINNING ... TO BE INCLUDED IN THE COURSE SYLLABUS AND DISCUSSED DURING THE FIRST CLASS**

A section on 'learning accountability' will be included in the course syllabus. The statement will declare:

- We--enrolled students and course conveners--shall co-design the assessment and grading system in this course.
- We shall follow the system we design collaboratively.
- Per University policy, faculty members (alone) will assign the final course grades.

Course conveners will be responsible for pointing out that this approach is a fundamental part of 'learning the Bailey way.'

### **BEFORE MID-SEMESTER ... LAUNCHING THE DISCUSSION OF ASSESSMENT AND GRADING DESIGN PROCESS**

At a point midway between the start of the class and mid-semester, course conveners will be responsible for reminding enrolled students about the need to design the assessment and grading system. A good way to start the conversation is to simply ask, "How do we want to proceed?" Posing the question this way encourages divergent expression (prompting all kinds of ideas), including emotional reactions to 'doing this.'

The art is when to pose the question. If it is posed too early, student response may be 'flat.' Especially in ANR 210, there needs to be sufficient experience with collaborative learning (deciding what to learn, when, where, how) BEFORE the issue of assessment and grading is discussed. Even in later core courses, those around the table need time getting accustomed to working together collaboratively (this may be the first time the learners will have worked together).

If the question is posed 'too late,' experience suggests that enrolled students may be overly nervous about grades or the process may be 'rushed.' Grades are important! Because of that, waiting until the end of the semester to initiate discussion makes it difficult to engage in an open, creative conversation about assessment and grading. Overall, it's a good idea to give the discussion 'breathing room,' meaning that it's better to spread out the conversation rather than to 'hammer out' the system all at once.

Course conveners should view their role as enabling learners to take charge (and control) of the emerging assessment and grading design. The challenge in enacting this role is encouraging creative expression while simultaneously taking advantage of past experience. These are not necessarily compatible goals. Students enrolled in ANR 210 may ask how the assessment and grading system was designed in previous 210 classes, and students in 310, 311, and 410 may want to adopt a system developed in an earlier Bailey core course. Conveners need to encourage creative expression without losing the advantage of past experience. Here are two suggestions for balancing these potentially incompatible interests:

- "Past groups have found that it's important to have a clear understanding of 'assessment' and 'grading,' and how the two connect." (without defining assessment or saying how assessment and grading connect)
- "Most classes design a system that makes it possible to engage in self, peer, convener, and class assessment." (without describing how to create a multi-focused system)

A good practice is to keep a written record of the evolving assessment and grading discussion. This way, all involved will be able to see how their ideas have changed over time.

#### **JUST BEFORE MID-SEMESTER ... ENGAGING IN FORMATIVE COURSE ASSESSMENT**

Just before mid-semester (often during the week just before the middle of the semester, and before Spring Break during second semester), course conveners should pose a formative (in-stream) assessment question. Example questions include: "What learning is happening for you?" "How is this course going?" All course conveners need to do is pose a question or two to stimulate conversation. It is up to those around the table to pick the question they want to answer.

In some courses, learners have decided to encourage each person to pose and answer a question that is personally meaningful. Some of the best experiences in Bailey occur when everybody around the table has the freedom to decide how they want to share their responses. Responses can be used to improve course management and directions during the second half of the course.

#### **AFTER MID-SEMESTER ... CONTINUING THE ASSESSMENT AND GRADING DISCUSSION**

Soon after mid-semester, the assessment and grading design needs to mature and 'grow legs.' At this point, divergent ideas are sifted and culled, and convergence (consensus building) needs to begin in earnest.

Once the complete design has been created in draft form, it's a good idea to give all around the table at least a week to 'think about' the draft. Invariably, that leads to making final adjustments so that the system 'feels comfortable' to learners. Rarely will all learners feel completely comfortable with the final draft. Course conveners should encourage everyone to articulate and share their issues and concerns.

... Is it possible to discover common ground? Sometimes differences of opinion persist. If that happens, the goal should be to respect divergent voices while simultaneously moving forward with a plan that is endorsed by most learners. For the good of the whole, a final decision will need to be made in a timely manner (that is, before the system needs to be put into practice).

The weekly and bi-weekly (depending on the course) meeting of section conveners has proven to be an invaluable tool for developing Bailey assessment and grading systems. Sharing ideas and experiences with colleagues, and asking colleagues to help you think through an issue or approach, enhances the learning for all involved. It is a powerful way of putting into practice a Bailey tenant—learning with, through, and from others.

#### **PUTTING THE ASSESSMENT AND GRADING SYSTEM INTO PRACTICE**

At a point no later than 2 or 3 weeks before the end of the class—with sufficient time for all involved to put the system into practice—the assessment and grading system needs to be adopted. Time will need to be built into the course schedule to accommodate the design. In the past, course participants have often felt rushed at the end of the course—not only rushed in sharing their learning with others, but about having time to 'lift up and reframe' their thinking about the course experience.

Sometimes, the last hour of the last day comes and—'boom!'—it's over. Course conveners need to give as much attention to the last class day as they routinely give to the first class day.

#### **ATTACHMENTS: EXAMPLES OF BAILEY ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING SYSTEMS**

---

---

## Practice Ethic for Faculty and Student Learning Convenors In the Bailey Scholars Program

Working Draft 12-16-99

In the belief that we have learned something from our experiences "convening learning" in a collaborative, emergent class setting over the past two years, the academic affairs working group has facilitated several community-wide sessions designed to elicit reflections on the convening experience. The insights gleaned during this collective sense-making process have helped us characterize "what it means to be a learning convenor." Our reflections have shown that "convening learning" can be an immensely rewarding and an equally challenging experience that should not be entered into lightly.

With a better understanding of the nature of "convening learning," the academic affairs working group invites you to consider the significant differences between the role of a teacher/faculty in a traditional classroom and the role of a learning convenor in a collaborative, emergent learning setting. Even though all learners around the table share responsibility for organizing learning, learning convenors play a critical role in collaborative learning environments. Learning convenors are *responsible for creating and safeguarding the safe, hospitable environment that makes collaborative learning possible.*

The practice ethic detailed below describes how learning convenors contribute to creating and safeguarding the safe, hospitable environment. We have phrased the practice ethic as questions that prospective convenors might want to consider as they seek to understand the subtleties of their role and to evaluate their readiness to practice the art of "convening learning."

### Responsibilities

At the minimum, learning convenors need to be responsible members of their collaborative learning communities.

- Because collaborative, emergent learning happens "around the table," it is important that learning convenors are committed to being an active participant within class. Similarly, because Bailey courses are typically small courses, your absence from class is magnified. *Given your other responsibilities and commitments during the semester (work and personal), are you available to participate in all class sessions?* Through our experiences, we have learned that convening these courses requires "after-the-fact" reflection. *Given your other responsibilities, are you committed to regularly attending the learning convenor meetings (weekly-ANR 210, 410 or biweekly ANR 310, 311)?*



- 
- 
- Learning convenors must be fully aware of their ethical responsibilities and legal liabilities, particularly with off-campus learning experiences and issues related to traveling, alcohol, and minors. In addition to the evolving context of their classes, learning convenors must also keep the broader context of the Bailey community, the university climate, and societal norms in mind, and if need be, must remind student learners of this broader context when planning learning activities. *Are you willing to assume the meta-responsibilities of learning convenors?*

### **Additional Expectations/Considerations**

In addition to evaluating their responsibilities, learning convenors should broadly consider why they are interested in convening the class, what contributions they hope to make to their class, and how they hope to learn from the experience. In assessing their own fit to the convening role, prospective convenors should consider how they might respond to the unique characteristics and associated with collaborative, emergent learning settings. Gleaned from community experience, the following seven expectations/considerations are offered for your reflection and self-assessment:

- In the role as a learning convenor, a learning convenor enters the classroom as a co-learner and not necessarily as an expert. Just like student learners, learning convenors are expected to engage in "stretch learning;" that is, to learn new things in new ways. *How might you approach this learning experience with humility and an openness to learning? How open are you to being changed by your experiences in this class?*
- Collaborative, emergent learning requires attentiveness, focus, and concentration on the matters that emerge around the table, as learners gather as equals dedicated to one another's learning and to their own individual learning. Such concentration and dedication demands an environment uninterrupted by weariness, false assumptions, and malaise. *How might you plan to enter the classroom with fresh eyes and enthusiasm, leaving behind preconceptions, preoccupations, and frustrations at the door? How might you prepare yourself to be open and engaged during the class session with other learners?*
- Learning convenors sometimes have to "hold back" during a class in order to create the space necessary for student learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Learning convenors must be willing to sit in the awkward silences that can occur; and, in the extreme, they must be willing to allow a learning activity to fail or fall flat or emerge late. Often more learning comes from the failures than from the successes. Finally, learning convenors must not give in to the student learners' tendency to "default to the convenors;" that is, turn to the convenors to organize learning on their behalf. Responsible convenors must be patient, firm, and

---

supportive at these times, while refusing to take charge of the situation. *How might you approach learning in a way that is not "preemptive;" that is, taking developmental learning opportunities away from student scholars for the sake of ease and efficiency? How might you prepare yourself for inevitable frustrations that accompany emergent learning?*

- We have found that engaging in judgmental and unnecessarily negative conversations creates an inhospitable atmosphere for learning. Making judgements or comparisons of previous year's classes with current year's classes, or current sections with one another, or Bailey classes with non-Bailey classes etc. undermines the essential spirit of openness and developmental learning. In addition, gossiping about students or faculty also undermines the required sense of safety in our classrooms. *How might you dedicate yourself to taking a non-judgmental view of your class, its learners, and its learning experiences?*
- Unlike typical classrooms where facts and figures are the central focus, collaborative emergent classes in Bailey tend to focus more on issues of whole-person development, including the emotional and relational aspects of learning. As a result, emotionally sensitive and often divisive issues come to the fore for discussion. *How might you commit yourself to emotionally mature self-awareness and self-management? How might you further develop your ability to not take such situations personally? How might you develop the persistence and sensitivity to overcome the natural discomfort created by such situations in order to "put the difficult issue in the center" for dialogue and resolution? During such difficult situations or times of class conflict, how might you lift up and re-frame these moments, so that they become learning opportunities for all concerned?*
- Small classes encountered in Bailey are frequently a mixed blessing. The small setting facilitates getting to know one another intimately, but sometimes magnifies significant individual differences in perspective or worldview. Small classes support envisioning of creative, "out of the box" learning experiences (such as field trips to distant places), which may unfortunately be impossible for some student or faculty learners to experience. Smaller classes also mean that there may be fewer diverse perspectives presented, therefore leading to an uninspired group think situation. *How might you seek inclusiveness in your class, even if individuals hold worldviews that differ from the other learners in the class? How might you accommodate an individual learner who is not able to participate in extraordinary experiences that many in the class view as essential to their class experience? How might you seek to incorporate requisite variety in your small class?*
- While collaborative learning experiences are often organized around learning interests or topics, recent educational research reveals the importance of also organizing around learning styles or learning preferences, the individual's more

---

natural way of learning. . Finding the balance between accommodating individual learners preferences and promoting stretch learning can be challenging. (Some examples of learning styles or preferences include learning by doing; through reading and writing; by relating to others; through dialogue; by reflection, from nature, etc.) . Unfortunately, for learning convenors who fail to strike this balance, they may find that they have "stretched the learners beyond their comfort zones." By espousing the developmental philosophy of "starting where the learner is," learning convenors commit themselves to understanding the preferences of the learners in their classes *How might you foster an awareness of different learning style preferences? How might you stretch beyond your preferred teaching and learning styles to accommodate the variety of learning styles in your in your classroom? How might you convene learning in a setting where several different student learning styles or preferences are present?*

On behalf of the community, the academic affairs working group offers these questions for your thoughtful reflection as you evaluate your fit with the responsibilities and as you examine the challenges associated with the role of learning convenor in a collaborative, emergent setting. Obviously, no one exhibits all of these characteristics or has honed all of the above-mentioned skills; however, each of us might consider "who we are" in relation to the role of learning convenor and identify areas for our own stretch learning and further self-development during our convening experience..