

# **Carney Strange**

## **A Benedictine Spirituality of Engagement and Community in College Classrooms**

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We are here this morning to consider the question of engagement and community and its importance in our lives as educators. This is an appropriate question for us to ask, as people committed to higher learning. My twenty-five plus years experience as an educator have taught me that community-building is a very important key to our work. My research on college students suggests "and I suspect this applies to most any level of education" that the most powerful environment for the learning, growth, and development of learners is one that exhibits the conditions of community. In a book on educational environments I recently completed with my colleague Jim Banning, I have concluded that the essential task of any educator (whether within or beyond the classroom) is threefold: (1) to invite students to belong to and to secure a safe place within; (2) to engage in significant roles in the service of; and (3) to participate as full members of a learning community, becoming part of the culture and history of the setting such that when they leave, they are missed.

Community-building is paramount in our day-to-day life as faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Consider how we think and speak about our work. When we want to feel best about what we do, we often invoke the language, images, and symbols of community. For instance, faculty refer to the "community of scholars"; administrators may praise the "student community" for its commitment and involvement; and students may rave about the "sense of community" they feel in their residence hall or on their athletic team, to name a few. Clearly, the concept and experience of community is important to us. So, it bears looking into more closely.

And our task this morning--understanding community. How do you recognize it? How do you create it? And how does it serve the purposes of your work as educators?

My own explorations of community have led me in many different directions over the years--to the education literature, the behavioral sciences, and even to the Amish who are well-settled in our part of Ohio. Ultimately though this journey led me backwards to an old but current friend " Harry" as I knew him 35 years ago; "Harry" as I know him today.

"Fr. Harry Hagan, O.S.B., as he is known to many, has lived the life of a Benedictine monk for almost 30 years in a place called St. Meinrad Archabbey, in southern Indiana. It's among the longest standing monastic communities in the U.S. You may recognize it through its principal enterprise--the Abbey Press. Harry and I completed our college degrees together there in 1969 (at the former St. Meinrad College of Liberal Arts). I escaped and

went on eventually to become a professor of higher education and student affairs at Bowling Green State University. Harry didn't. Instead (and perhaps ironically) he found his own freedom through commitments of stability, conversion, and obedience in a monastic community. In addition to his current duties as a professor of Old Testament scriptures at St. Meinrad School of Theology (he often tells me that he gets bored with anything newer than 350 B.C.), Fr. Harry serves the monastic community there as its Novice and Junior Master. In short, it's his job to teach new members about Benedictine monastic life and what it means to live in such a community. I thought, now what better person to consult for insights than someone who has been working at this life called community for almost 30 years, and better yet, someone who has done this within a tradition that is over 1500 years old -- Benedictine monasticism as laid out in the Rule of St. Benedict. There are few other records that equal the success and continuity of Benedictine life in Western culture. There must be something to it, and indeed--there is. So this is what I am here to consider with you this morning, in the form of two questions: First, what is the nature of Benedictine community life? And second, what can we learn from this tradition about engaging and inviting into community the students we teach.

The essence of my search for understanding this form of community began in earnest one day when I asked Fr. Harry a straightforward question: "Harry, just what do you do all day?" I have never known Harry to be anything other than a committed scholar, so it was not a surprise that he immediately handed me a book--a small, red copy of the Rule of St. Benedict--and he said with typical understated simplicity: "This. I do this. I search for God in the presence of others." As I learned, this requires community, in the form of a schola (a school), under an Abba (a teacher, as it were) - in the presence of others who also come to learn.

In the most recent half-dozen years or so that Harry and I have formally carried on this conversation--in person, over the phone, and now by email--we have come to appreciate and articulate the message of the Rule of St. Benedict in terms of what we call the hallmarks of Benedictine community life. There are six. We list them here in the Latin language Benedict would have used in the sixth century when he lived in Subiaco, a village outside of Rome, Italy.

Regula et Traditio, Stabilitas, Conversatio, Obedientia, Ora et Labora, and Hospitalitas.

If Harry were here in person, he would proceed with his "Twenty Minute Novitiate" to give you an overview of the Benedictine way. Let me convey some of his thoughts, in addition to my own reflections, as I think about what this has meant to me being a faculty member who seeks to build a learning community each time I enter the campus where I work, or walk into the classrooms where I teach.

First, there is:

### Regula et Traditio

The Rule of Benedict is a written document, and most communities have a written statement that defines their identity and purpose and order. Nations have constitutions. Religions have scriptures. Colleges and universities have mission statements and handbooks. The written document typically defines the core values and processes for the group. However, one can neither create nor understand a community only by reading its rules or written documents. Every book needs a community of interpreters to understand and live the written text. Those collective interpretations emerge over time in the form of

traditions, representing the living memory of how the written document has been understood and adapted over time to different situations. And tradition is captured by stories.

So, from this first hallmark, we learn that both the written document and the living memory are needed for the ongoing life of any community. Without a text, a community is left to the whim of the present; absent tradition, a community has no roots. So it is, any community in the Benedictine heritage has both a rule that defines itself and a tradition that lives it.

Putting on my faculty hat, I can reflect on my own formal education and remember those few teachers and classes that seem to have stayed with me, in the sense that they were very special experiences. Iâ€™m sure you could produce a list of your own. They werenâ€™t always my favorite courses, but I do recall the way in which they engaged me and challenged me to learn. Each course seemed to be an extension of a memorable and quite large persona whose reputation often preceded the first class through stories of past stars, past survivors, and even past victims. Often these stories recounted rituals of long-standing assignments and standards that seemed to far exceed the capacities of normal human beings. The syllabi were thick and explicit, and conveyed expectations of superhuman dimension with clear warnings at each step to those who might be tempted to stray from the path. As I visualize these course experiences it appears to me that they were each marked by a rule and a tradition in a very distinctive way.

In recent years Iâ€™ve thought more carefully about these aspects of my own teaching and I have tried to identify what characterizes my own classes in the minds of my students. What is my rule and what is my tradition? I now make it my custom, as I distribute a syllabus at the beginning of the term, to also spend significant time discussing with students an article by Parker Palmer, titled â€œCommunity, Conflict, and Ways of Knowingâ€ (Palmer, 1987), and I create with them a few rules of engagement for proceeding in the class. I print them up on a piece of parchment colored paper, identified as a â€œClass Compact,â€ and I ask each student to sign it. I also request that a different student each class be responsible for it and vigilant as to how we might be doing in maintaining our commitments to each other. It becomes a document we revisit often, usually at the beginning of the class when we might focus on one or another of its provisions that we wish to pay particular attention to for that day; or at the end of the class when we recount incidences or moments that were especially productive and consistent that day with the document.

A distinctive culture has also emerged over the years in the classes I teach. There is indeed a tradition that has consistently begun to mark what we do. In addition to the creation and maintenance of the Class Compact, for example, students in my courses always rearrange the furniture to form a circle (for better contact with each other), they know they must sit in a different seat each class (literally to vary their perspective), they know to address me on a first name basis (for I am a learner too), and they expect to find most questions answered by yet another question (a practice meant to encourage them to think on their own). Rules and traditions are important for effecting an attachment of students to the learning experience, whether in the classroom, the department office, or the campus center.

And so the hallmark, *Regula et Traditio*, calls us to reflect on our own lives in this regard, as educators in the classroom.

What are the rules, traditions and customs in a class? What makes it distinctive?  
What do these rules and traditions say about the class?

How are they introduced them to new members?  
What is the relationship between the documented and lived experience in the class?  
Do we do what we say we do?  
How do we maintain these rules and traditions? Reflect on them for new meanings and adaptations? Change and renew them?

Our second hallmark of Benedictine community life is *Stabilitas*.

St. Benedict defines *stabilitas* as the commitment to a particular community. Monasticism is not just a commitment to a way of life, but to a way of life in a particular monastery: to the physical place, to the people, to its community tradition and culture. This hallmark emphasizes the importance of stability in the concrete and literal sense. Stability, and rules and traditions, go hand in hand. A person identifies with a particular community by adhering to its rules and participating in its common life, its traditions and practices: in the case of the monastic tradition, its common prayer, its common table, its community work, its common recreation, and in service to the community. Other common elements can contribute to this identification, such as common dress, a special vocabulary, the delineation of spaces, as well as a schedule and rank (and in the Benedictine tradition rank is determined only by the date one enters the community). The Rule also calls us to certain community virtues such as the precedence of the common good, respect and love for the individual, and care of the sick. There are community sins as well: anger, *murmuratio* (murmuring), and *acedia* (that is, the temptation to abandon the commitment). Finally there is a system for the correction of faults; every community must have some way of acknowledging faults and reconciling members. For individuals to be stable members of a community, they must be able to support with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses.

Once again, thinking of my classroom, the hallmark *Stabilitas* requires the presence and commitment of the whole student--body, spirit, intellect and affect. I like to encourage that commitment, so I make it my custom to spend a little time occasionally at the beginning of class attending to students as whole human beings, asking them how things are going in their lives. "How did you spend your weekend?" is a question that might start the week, and "What was most challenging to you during the week?" is another question that might end the cycle. Hearing their reflections reminds me of the context for their learning and it hopefully invites them, as Parker Palmer suggests (Palmer, 1998), to intersect the big story of the discipline with the small story of their lives. This makes learning real and present; it also reminds me that I don't teach education, I teach students.

So, in terms of your own roles as educators in a classroom:

What is the commitment level in the class?  
By the instructor? Among students?  
What is the sense of responsibility, pride, and stewardship for this class?  
What supports commitment in class? What threatens it?  
How is commitment to the class invoked and nurtured?  
How is it recognized and celebrated?

### Conversatio

*Conversatio*, our next hallmark, is contrasted with *stabilitas*, and emphasizes the sense of change and becoming which lies at the root of the word *convertere*, meaning "to turn

with. If *stabilitas* means standing still, *conversatio* is about movement and change, about becoming, about giving oneself more and more to the life one is called to live. St. Benedict points to humility as the foundation of change, because humility is the ability to acknowledge and face the truth about oneself and the truth about others. By doing so, one is led to the love which casts out fear. The other side of changing oneself is letting others change. Too often we need others to remain as they are, and so we become obstacles to their changing.

In my teaching role, *Conversatio* reminds me just how difficult a balance it is to invite students to take a risk and change in the presence of other learners, their classmates and myself included. Genuine growth entails approaching the unfamiliar, trying the untried, and stepping into uncertainty. It also means letting go of the familiar, resisting the appeal to do what one has always done. I know that I must offer students opportunities to experience what is comfortable for them, but I must also challenge them to do things they've never done before. Somewhere in this balance of challenge and support lies the proper amount of risk that invites change and makes possible learning, growth, and development.

In regards to this hallmark, we might ask ourselves:

How do learners change and grow in the class? How have they changed?

Do we let one another change and grow?

What is the commitment to self renewal and lifelong learning?

What risks are learners willing to take? In what ways do we resist change in self? In others?

What opportunities are available for change and growth? What changes benefit self? The class?

How are change and growth recognized and celebrated?

### Obedientia

*Obedientia* is grounded in listening. This hallmark recognizes that we must listen to know whether we should stand still or change. The relationship between listening and obedience transcends cultures. In Hebrew the word *Áiamac* can mean both "hear" and "obey." In Latin "obedientia" has its root in hearing: *ob+audire*. Obedience is not just passive listening. If one truly listens, then one will know how to respond. To obey is to respond to what one hears. The sense of autonomy in our culture makes this virtue difficult. Yet, there is no real learning without humility and obedience, or listening.

This hallmark reminds me that learning is not just about what is spoken. More importantly, it is about what is heard, received, and understood. As quiet as a classroom can be, particularly on Thursday afternoons for some reason, listening to one another is among the most difficult and persistent challenges of learning. It's not just talking about noise though. Just as sure as a Grateful Dead-filled speaker turned full blast next to our ear might make it difficult to hear, so too do our own opinions and points of view wall in some and wall out others. Our habits of intellectual confirmation often restrict both what we allow ourselves to hear and what we choose to ignore. I think of special significance here are the points of view that are underrepresented, those of the minority, and those that fail the test of popularity. I have become particularly sensitive to such concerns more recently, knowing that, in a multicultural world, I am serving none of my students well if I do not hold them accountable for hearing these differences. If all they learn to listen to is their own voice or those similar to them, we all lose. For the past eight years I've created and incorporated into my classes a teaching technique I call The Voice Project (Strange & Alston, 1998). Accordingly, I ask each of my students to focus on gender, race and ethnicity, sexual

orientation, age, religious belief, disability, or socioeconomic status, to develop a voice different from their own. I ask them to spend the term acquiring their selected voice, informing it through reading, through interviewing those who speak their selected voice, and observing those who live it. I expect them to account for their learning through weekly entries into a Voice Journal and I ask that they bring this voice and intersect it with the content of the course. My hope is that they learn to listen more carefully to voices and points of view they have not heard before. Listening carefully is vital to any learner's journey.

Indeed, listening carefully is a vital component of any successful community. Thus, we must ask ourselves:

How do we listen to and attend to others in class?

What are the barriers to humility? Overvaluing or undervaluing?

What conditions discourage listening? The dangers of anger, murmuring, and complaining.

What encourages listening?

Collectively, these previous three hallmarks--Stabilitas, Conversatio, and Obedientia--form the vows of community life. They are also the very same conditions that make learning possible in any educational setting. In effect, they are the vows of a learner's journey. It's quite obvious to me that we all must be present and alert, physically and mentally (stabilitas), we must be willing to change and grow in our thinking and being (conversatio), and we must be prepared to listen carefully to one another (obedientia) if genuine learning is to take place.

### Ora et Labora

The fifth hallmark, Ora et Labora, serves as the great Benedictine motto; it means "Prayer and Work." We use it to stress the unity of life. The motto does not present two discreet things, but holds prayer and work together. From Benedict we learn that the chapel becomes the place for the Work of God (the *Opus Dei*), but the work of God does not end at the chapel door. God continues to work where we work. The monastic cell is the place of solitude, but it is not a refuge from the common life. There must be time and place for both, prayer and work. For the individual there must be a unity of the inner and outer life.

From my perspective, as an educator, this motto points to the unity of theory and practice in learning. The tensions between the two remind me that practice without theory is blind, and theory without practice is empty. For a learning experience to be whole it must include both. I sometimes think of one of my favorite teachers from childhood who seemed to realize this intuitively. It was none other than Mr. Wizard, of 1950s TV fame. He understood that action and reflection go hand in hand in the process of learning. Week after week Mr. Wizard would feature some sort of experiment that often began in his kitchen laboratory with a flash in a pan, usually witnessed by Tommy or Jane, the neighborhood kids. After a moment of puzzlement and wonder in response to a question to them about what they had seen, Mr. Wizard always rescued the day with a perfectly sensible explanation, after which he then invited one of the kids to try the experiment herself. Whether he knew it or not, Mr. Wizard was engaging viewers in a complete learning cycle, involving doing, observing, thinking, and experimenting, and it really seemed to work. I learned. I sense that Benedict understood these principles as well "leading by word and by deed. As I teach students about colleges and universities, and the paths of learning and growth undergraduates encounter in their developmental journeys, I am more conscious of this holistic paradigm in

my classes. Some days I begin with a case study or an experiential task (a labora, so to speak), while other days I may begin with a theoretical model or a simple idea (an ora, as it were). Integration of the internal and the external dimensions requires a full agenda of teaching and learning strategies, a "shared praxis" in Thomas Groome's (1980) terms, so that we become what we learn, and we learn what we become.

So, with this hallmark in mind, we must ask:

Is there time to reflect? To wonder? To imagine? (Interior Life)

Is there quiet space in which to experience self?

Is there time to do, to act, to complete the work? (Exterior Life)

What are our roles in this class? What is our service?

What aspects of our involvement sustain the class?

How do we maintain a sense of balance between doing and reflecting?

### Hospitalitas

Our final hallmark is *Hospitalitas*. In his Rule, Benedict identifies three groups with Christ: the Abbot, the sick, and guests. According to my friend Fr. Harry, Benedict does this because all three are trouble. Everyone knows that superiors are trouble. So Benedict calls them Christ. Moreover these people must be taken care of. The sick are unable to do for themselves, and so their demands are constant. Guests come at odd hours with their expectations for food and rest. Benedict demands vulnerability to these wayfarers who come as Christ, because they are in need of service. In fact he provides for this in the person of a guest master whose role it is to be attentive to visitors of all kinds. *Hospitalitas* means taking care of others.

However, guests also bring something. They bring the outside world; they bring a different experience and perspective. They bring critique. Inward looking communities, such as monasteries, can insulate themselves from critique. This is the gift of the guests; they bring the possibility of newness. *Hospitalitas* is the opposite of defensiveness. It is openness and vulnerability to those from without.

I find it interesting that Benedict singles out the sick, those who hold authority, and those who come to visit. Perhaps it is through these that we are taught the special lessons of listening (a critical skill in the education profession). Thinking once again about my faculty role in that regard, these special lessons of listening may appear in the person who comes to class unprepared, the one who rarely offers an insight, or the one who disrupts the flow with insistent questions. But then, in doing so, they remind me that if active learning is to occur, educational communities must be designed for those who learn, not so much for those who teach. Benedict's instructions to the Abbot are appropriate, especially to those of us who teach: he says we must be able to serve "a variety of temperaments, coaxing, reproving, and encouraging them as appropriate" (RB 2:31) accommodating and adapting "to each one's character and intelligence" (RB 2:32). This hallmark reminds me that prerequisites to any significant learning experience, as I described above, are a sense of inclusion and safety. This means that learners must recognize the classroom as a place where they belong, and a place where they need not be at risk for reasons of who they are. Inclusion and safety are starting points for involvement and ultimately for the experience of community. When students feel excluded and insecure, they tend not to get involved. Failure to engage them precludes their participation and full membership in the learning community. In short, without a hospitable environment, real learning is never given a chance.

Hospitality speaks to those beyond as well. During an online seminar about teaching and learning, I commented in response to an exchange of ideas Parker Palmer had with one participant. I asked, "Is there a difference between community as justification for truth (the version of which some find oppressive) and community as process for seeking truth (which Parker Palmer extols as liberating and confirming)? Iris Marion Young (1990) talks about the "totalizing impulse" of community that "denies difference," a consequence that renders some members of the community silent. But without community as truth-seeking we would not understand nor be vigilant of this impulse. Perhaps when community justifies truth, it no longer desires to seek truth. Monastic communities in the Benedictine tradition have long lived this form of relational knowing about which Palmer speaks. They talk of "obedience" as listening carefully and being willing to turn oneself over to others in trust (not fear). While this enables a community of truth-seeking, in the long run, it may also insulate it, but for another feature of monastic life—"hospitality, the importance of being open and welcoming to those from without. Hospitality creates the possibility that others will participate in our community, and in doing so, hold up the mirror to our world so that we can understand and be more vigilant of its impulse. Perhaps that's the only antidote to a totalizing that denies difference. When a community ceases to be truth-seeking, it ceases to be open. When a community ceases to be open, it may no longer be capable of seeking truth. Justifying truth ends the exchange; seeking truth encourages it." Thus, hospitality plays a critical role in the essential truth-seeking that forms the heart of the learning enterprise.

And so, let's consider the role of hospitality in our educational classroom community:

Do we invite and welcome others to class? (dangers of insularity and protection)  
Those of different status, culture, power, and means? (dangers of favoritism and inequity)  
What symbols and customs create a sense of welcome?  
What provisions and structures are present for welcoming others? Who is the guest master?  
How are interruptions handled?  
How accessible are we to one another?  
How do we demonstrate a sense of caring to each other?  
What creates distance between the class and those beyond?

At the heart of this understanding of community in the Benedictine tradition is the word Benedict used to introduce his call to community life. This word spoke immediately to me when I began my study of the Rule. Benedict called it a "schola" (a school), a "dominici schola servitii" (a school of the Lord's service).

Now a school is a place I understand, and like Benedict, I have come to conclude, perhaps what he knew from the start, that the most powerful conditions for learning are indeed those we would characterize as community (Strange & Banning, 2001).

These are universal conditions, I believe, for encouraging learning, growth, and development in human beings, and as I have found, these are conditions that Benedict speaks to in the design of monastic community.

As I spoke of earlier, images of community dominate our language and our discussions about what we ought to do in colleges and universities. Indeed, much of my role as an educator evolves around recognizing, building, and repairing community among students and colleagues. I am not always successful, but the goal is very clear to me if not completely attainable. However, the forces working against this are formidable.

There is an irony here that most of us who work in education have been socialized in a culture that is quite the opposite. I for one was raised in an individualist, male-dominated culture, one that encouraged and rewarded independence as a sign of maturity. Like many of you, I was schooled in an individualist educational system that not only honored, but expected me to "do my own work." And now I serve in an individualist institutional environment, an academic department, where a distinctive ethos of autonomy prevails and calls me to stand out above all others as the highest measure of success. But if there's one thing I've discovered in my 54 years on this planet it would be that none of this is true and is at best a perverse distortion for how things really do work. The fact is, as human beings, we all grow and mature, we learn, and we work best in community with others. In that respect, the wisdom of Benedict, instructive of the elements of community, offers an important counterforce in our lives. Such is true of mine, as an educator.

I have discovered that these six Benedictine hallmarks, as Harry and I have distilled them from the Rule, offer powerful antidotes to the misleading forces of our individualist-oriented world of higher education. In fact, much of the research on college students over the past few decades has clearly confirmed the wisdom of what Benedict articulated some 15 centuries ago. So, in completing this overview, let me now focus briefly on how these six hallmarks in our template might inform the design of whole institutions intent on the learning, growth, and development of students.

In considering this last question, it is helpful to think in terms of the many functions and services we provide for in a typical institution. First, as I present here, there are those services and functions whose primary mission is to introduce and to facilitate newcomers (students, faculty, staff, visitors) to the institution (e.g., admissions, orientation, financial aid, student union, bookstore, grounds keeping, physical plant, human resources, information office, first year program). These are services, functions, programs, and places labeled "Entering," to reflect the fact that this is the time period in which they are typically first encountered. Second, there are those I call "Enculturating," whose primary mission is to engage students in the processes of working, living, and learning within an institution. These might include residence life, student activities and organizations, counseling, career planning, discipline, campus ministry, cooperative learning, academic advising, health and wellness, athletics and recreation, multicultural affairs, learning services, and special services. Third are those I label "Exiting," (e.g., placement, alumni/ae and development, commencement, continuing education) which serve primarily to culminate students' experiences and to reorient them toward their next steps beyond the institution.

Although each of these six Benedictine hallmarks is applicable at any point along this sequence of functions and services, this model suggests that there are points where certain aspects of community building can serve to define and focus the primary mission. For example, at the point of entry, it is especially important to emphasize the hospitable features of the institution to newcomers. From the physical plant to the programs and services that orient students to academic and campus life, first impressions are important to the formation of positive attitudes about an institution, and they create a critical foundation for matriculation and retention. This is the time to highlight *Hospitalitas* so that students (and other newcomers) acquire a basic sense of comfort and homeplace in their new setting. In their first few months of campus experience (even long before that, through various media and recruitment materials) students begin to learn about various aspects of campus culture--the artifacts, customs, traditions, values, and assumptions that distinguish an institution, in general, and the immediate living and learning environment, in particular. It is crucial at this time that the *Regula et Traditio* become important sources of information

to be communicated to newcomers with opportunities to explore their meaning and implications.

Toward that end many institutions have initiated successful First Year Experience programs with impressive results. Also the point of entry is an important time to invoke a commitment to being a student or new staff member at a particular institution. Formal occasions such as Convocation and Orientation present key opportunities for communicating the nature of institutional expectations and for exacting a purposeful decision to participate fully in the campus community. Thus, *Stabilitas* also becomes a special focus of institutional efforts at this stage. However, recommitting to "stay the course" is an ongoing challenge, particularly for some students, as bouts of homesickness, unfulfilled expectations, adjustments to unfamiliar experiences and circumstances, disappointments of academic performance, and confusion about goals and purposes can jeopardize their sense of stability and direction. For many, the end of the first six weeks is a critical turning point, as are the conclusions of the first term and the first year. The decision to remain at an institution, in other words, *Stabilitas* needs to be purposefully recognized and nurtured throughout this phase.

Enculturating functions, services, and programs move students beyond the novice phase of institutional life to consider more carefully and deeply the import of having chosen to become a student at a particular institution. Thus these features engage students in the core processes of living and learning in a college or university. From a Benedictine perspective, three defining aspects shape these processes for students: (a) their openness to change and growth (*Conversatio*); (b) their willingness to listen and to give themselves over to others in trust (*Obedientia*); and (c) their integration and balance of the interior and exterior life, their actions and reflections (*Ora et Labora*). Failure to acquire the fundamentals of any of these can be detrimental to an individual's experience as well as to the overall fabric of community. University success seminars, mentoring systems, wellness programs, and basic attending skills workshops are all examples of initiatives that can be implemented to serve such ends.

Finally, at the point of exiting an institution, it becomes important to reinforce once again graduates' continuing commitment to growth and change as a lifelong process (*Conversatio*); to remind them of the reasons why they chose a particular institution as their place to live and learn, encouraging them, especially, to remain loyal alums and lifelong friends (*Stabilitas*); and to let them know that they are always welcome to return to a place that has meant so much to them (*Hospitalitas*). Rather than terminating relationships, the mission of these exiting functions, services, and programs is to renew and sustain relationships with those who have become part of the institution's communal history.

## Conclusion

In effect, what I have discovered in this ancient text and tradition of Benedictine monasticism is a compelling ecology for the learning, growth, and development of students. It helps me understand better what I am called to do — build community. And so, it's with a certain amount of confidence that I conclude:

Any institution where expectations are clear and the culture is distinctive; where members are committed to being; and remain open to changing and growing; where participants are present to each other in a web of truth-seeking; and pursue a balanced, whole learning agenda; in a milieu of welcome and belonging, such is a powerful learning environment, a

place where individuals will thrive - a community that makes a difference in the lives of its members.

So, today Benedict is challenging us across the centuries to rise to the challenge, to create communities wherever we can in education—in the classrooms, department offices, student residences, friendship groups, and even in distance learning contacts. In a world that is understood, it seems, more so in terms of its divisions than its connections, now more than ever is indeed the time for building community.

#### Handout - Hallmarks of Benedictine Community

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Regula et Traditio The importance of documented and lived experience. Stabilitas The importance of commitment—to a community, a people, a place. Conversatio The importance of openness to change and growth, becoming more and more what we are called to be. Obedientia The importance of listening to others and giving over of self to others in trust. Ora et Labora The importance of the interior and exterior dimensions of life, their integration and balance. Hospitalitas The importance of being open to and caring for those from without.

Source: Strange and Hagan (1998). Questions and Concerns of Community in the Classroom

Defining rules and living traditions (Regula et Traditio) What are the rules, traditions and customs in a class? What makes it distinctive? What do these rules and traditions say about the class? How are they introduced them to new members? What is the relationship between the documented and lived experience in the class? Do we do what we say we do? How do we maintain these rules and traditions? Reflect on them for new meanings and adaptations? Change and renew them? Staying the course through commitment (Stabilitas) What is the commitment level in the class? By the instructor? Among students? What is the sense of responsibility, pride, and stewardship for this class? What supports commitment in class? What threatens it? How is commitment to the class invoked and nurtured? How is it recognized and celebrated? Changing and becoming ourselves (Conversatio) How do learners change and grow in the class? How have they changed? Do we let one another change and grow? What is the commitment to self renewal and lifelong learning? What risks are learners willing to take? In what ways do we resist change in self? In others? What opportunities are available for change and growth? What changes benefit self? The class? How are change and growth recognized and celebrated? Being present to others (Obedientia) How do we listen to and attend to others in class? What are the barriers to humility? Overvaluing or undervaluing? What conditions discourage listening? The dangers of anger, murmuring, and complaining. What encourages listening? Doing and reflecting (Ora et Labora) Is there time to reflect? To wonder? To imagine? (Interior Life) Is there quiet space in which to experience self? Is there time to do, to act, to complete the work? (Exterior Life) What are our roles in this class? What is our service? What aspects of our involvement sustain the class? How do we maintain a sense of balance between doing and reflecting? Offering hospitality and care (Hospitalitas) Do we invite and welcome others to class? (dangers of insularity and protection) Those of different status, culture, power, and means? (dangers of favoritism and inequity) What symbols and customs create a sense of welcome? What provisions and structures are present for welcoming others? Who is the guest master? How are interruptions handled? How accessible are we to one another? How do we demonstrate a sense of caring to each other? What creates distance between the class and those beyond?

Institutional

#### Functions and Benedictine Values

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Entering: The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and places is to introduce and to facilitate newcomers (students, faculty, staff, visitors) to the institution (e.g., admissions, orientation, financial aid, student union, bookstore, grounds keeping, physical plant, human

resources, information office, first year program).  
• Hospitalitas  
• Regula et Traditio  
• Stabilitas Enculturating: The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and places is to engage students in the processes of living, learning, and working within the institution (e.g., residence life, student activities and organizations, counseling, career planning, discipline, campus ministry, academic advising, health and wellness, athletics and recreation, student employment, multicultural affairs, learning services, special services)  
• Conversatio  
• Ora et Labora  
• Obedientia Exiting: The primary mission of these services, functions, programs, and places is to culminate and reorient students toward their next step beyond the institution (e.g., placement, alumni/ae and development, commencement, continuing education)  
• Conversatio  
• Stabilitas  
• Hospitalitas

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Source: Strange and Hagan (1998). Conclusion An institution, a learning community, a classroom: • where expectations are clear and the culture is distinctive, (Regula et Traditio) • where members are committed to being (Stabilitas) • and remain open to changing and growing, (Conversatio) • where participants are present to each other in a web of truth-seeking (Obedientia) • and pursue a balanced, whole learning agenda (Ora et Labora) • in a milieu of welcome and belonging (Hospitalitas) Such are the characteristics of a powerful learning environment, a place where individuals will thrive--a learning community that makes a difference in the lives of its members. References Strange, C., & Hagan, H. (2000). Reading the signs of the times: A Benedictine pedagogy for building community in higher education. Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the American Benedictine Academy. St. Meinrad Archabbey, IN. Strange, C., & Hagan, H. (1998). Benedictine values and building campus community. The Cresset: A Review of Literature, Arts, and Public Affairs, Special Lilly Issue, pp. 5-12.