



Origins

THE FIRST-YEAR PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

Instructor Spotlight: Chuck Suchar

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Editor's Note: As most of you know, LAS Dean Chuck Suchar is retiring this month after half a century of study and service at DePaul. One of his greatest accomplishments is creating the First-Year Program and its components, Chicago Quarter and the Focal Point Seminar. During Autumn Quarter, he spoke at an event celebrating the twentieth year of Discover Chicago. In his honor and with his permission, we share some of those comments here.



Let me first say, how remarkable it is that 20 years after the creation and offering of the pilot version of Discover in 1995 that it not only still exists but that it, along with its sister program, Explore Chicago – the Chicago Quarter – are vibrant and extremely healthy with about 106 offerings this present year. As those of you who are aware of general education curricula know, the usual shelf-life of such programs is about 8 to 10 years. How or why this program has well outlasted that, I believe, is due to a number of very important characteristics, some of which are unique to DePaul, some unique to the program, but most of all, they're unique to the dedication of so many individuals who have, together, made this program a signature program for DePaul and for whom the program holds a special place in their hearts and in their sense of professional selves and professional identity.

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Many of you have already heard the story of how Discover came about, so I won't repeat that story. The more important points concern why it has been so successful. I'd like to address that since I've been thinking a good deal about it, especially of late, now that I'm coming to the end of my 43+ year career here at DePaul...

At the time we were planning Discover Chicago, one of the dominant topics in higher education was the importance and efficacy of "experiential learning," and what was called "student-centered" learning. In addition, we wanted to find a place for "service-learning" and it was because of Discover Chicago that freshmen service-learning day, at the tail end of Discover Chicago's Immersion Week, was planned and it was the first time so many of our freshmen engaged in such a wide-ranging service-learning experience.

Discover Chicago, and the immersion week in particular, was intended to be our students' first

engagement with such experiential learning on so wide a scale. And importantly, it was to be DePaul's first systematic, programmatic entry into experiential learning out in the city – using the city as a classroom. I'll return to that concept in a second.

Most importantly, experiential learning brought for me and for literally dozens upon dozens of faculty, a whole new joy in teaching. There

were doubters at first, but I believe history has borne out the efficacy, the joy and excitement of experiential learning and teaching.

What is there about experiential teaching that makes it so enjoyable and so effective? Well, my sense is that first-hand experience – inductive learning – the form of learning that characterizes Discover Chicago courses and the Immersion Week in particular, for example, when combined with more traditional abstract "book learning," is a powerful vehicle for transferring and acquiring knowledge. It gives students an appreciation for the particular, what some have called the contextual determination of meaning – in other words, the importance of situated knowledge and its relationship to the general and generalization. Importantly, it gives them a sense of place, an appreciation of place.

But, principally, there's an excitement in "first-hand experience," a rush, a joy, an enthusiasm, an emotional side to learning, that you need to experience yourself to really know and understand. In the Discover Chicago course, I believe, the first-hand experience led to students finding out about their own sense of the city, their own sense of interest, their own critical and evaluative voice, their own perspective and "point of view" – in other words, their own "Chicago." It's that very personal identification with learning that had the reciprocal effect of a much more personal connection to the teaching of the course itself and, hence, its popularity among faculty, staff and students alike, and a major reason for its success, I believe.

My own personal view of the efficacy of the experiential learning that I stressed when teaching "Seeing Neighborhood Change," my Discover Chicago course, was on the "seeing" part. Students were asked to develop photographic projects and I would stress the difference between "looking" and "seeing" – "seeing" being the ability to see patterns in the observations they were making about various neighborhoods we visited – that they

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were observing and photographing. Being able to discern patterns through on-site observations was a form of “field data” collection that could be associated and compared with the readings they were doing about Chicago neighborhoods.

What also needs mentioning is that Discover Chicago and Explore Chicago courses were DePaul’s major exploration of broadening the concept of the City as Classroom – Chicago as a Classroom. I believe this was revolutionary in many ways. The joy of being out in the city, seeing for oneself the people, neighborhoods, organizations, characteristics, needs, problems, advantages and accomplishments of the “Urban” and urban residents and communities gave DePaul and its instructors and students, and me personally, the fundamental sense of an education that was “of the city,” “of Chicago” as well as being “for Chicago” and an education “for our students.”

Twenty years is a long time and the program has certainly gone through its own evolution.

My hope is that the program will continue to evolve and exist. It is testimony to the dedication of so many people who have worked hard, together, to make it successful. I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for continuing the exciting effort that has gone into making for this success.

Teamwork, in each Discover and Explore course, teamwork in making the program work well for so many are testimony to

the overall successful effect that this program has had on now generations of DePaul students.

While we’re on the topic of teamwork, I have to take this auspicious occasion to mention the significant innovation we made at the very beginning of planning Discover Chicago by assembling teams of faculty, staff, and student mentors or leaders for every Discover class – at the time we did this, this was a significant innovation. I want to personally thank Peggy Burke, who worked with me and the pilot program and subsequent iterations to solidify and operationalize this concept of the teaching teams. I can say without qualification that this has had a lasting effect on staff, on the faculty who came to appreciate the benefit of working with staff and students, and on the students themselves who used their roles as student mentors or leaders to establish a leadership career in the university and beyond.

DePaul, for a long while, used the declaration “WE ARE DEPAUL” to announce itself and its identity to the community. Well, Discover and Explore Chicago helped put the “WE” into WE ARE DEPAUL and helped put the WE also into “WE ARE CHICAGO’S UNIVERSITY.”

Thank you one and all for all that you have done to make Discover and Explore Chicago what they are today and what they will be into the future.

—Chuck Suchar
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

From the Director

Thanks to all who attended the Focal Point Seminar Best Practices conference in the Lincoln Park Student Center on Nov. 21. We enjoyed two panels and shared both lunch and ideas at round tables. Special thanks to those who served as panelists: Beth Ann Bryant-Richards, Bro. Mark Elder, Nathan Fink, Scott Paeth, and Justin Staley, as well as David Akbar Gilliam, who moderated a panel.

For those considering proposing a new Focal Point topic (or who have a talented colleague who might want to), a reminder

that the annual deadline is Feb. 1. For information and the online application, visit the [proposing a course](#) section on the Liberal Studies Program webpage.

Reminder to the Winter Quarter Focal Point faculty: Your syllabus should include the Focal Point Learning Outcomes, an indication that revision is required (not optional) on a piece of formal writing, and some articulation of the multidisciplinary nature and seminar format of the class.

Many of you probably saw the recent report from Enrollment Management confirming what we already knew about the current first-year class: it’s big (over 2500)! This [link](#) shows you some information about our current group of first-year students. A whopping 42% come from the Chicago suburbs, with another 18% coming from the City of Chicago. Also, about a third, 34%, are first-generation college students.

It’s always a pleasure to see the work of Chicago Quarter students. Here is a link to a website created by Prof. Barrie Jean Borich, her teaching team, and their students for the “The Death and Rebirth of This Great American City” Discover Chicago class. The students wrote blog entries, complete with pictures, about areas

of the city where urban decay has been and is being reclaimed for exciting new projects. This blog was created in association with the MoLI office, which is available to all CQ classes. Click through and enjoy: thisgreatgreencity.wordpress.com

We in the First-Year Program hope you have a restful, well-deserved break and enjoy happy holidays.

—Doug Long



Justin Staley and Nathan Fink, both from WRD, served on the panel *Planning & Moderating a Successful Seminar Discussion* at the Focal Point Seminar Best Practices conference on Nov. 21.

Important Dates!

- Monday, January 5: First day of Winter Quarter
- Sunday, February 1: [Focal Point Seminar proposal](#) deadline
- Friday, February 13: Focal Point Seminar Faculty Chat, 10:30 a.m. – noon, place TBD.

Important Link!

Everything you ever wanted to know about teaching a Focal Point Seminar, and then some:

- [Focal Point Faculty Handbook 2015](#)