SBS Compassion Project

The goal of the NAU SBS Compassion Project is to explore the concept, development, and application of compassion into our everyday lives. The project has four sub-committees that involve faculty, staff, and students from across campus: curriculum, research, community, and conference planning.

Conference Planning

LIVING COMPASSION CONFERENCE: A series of compassion-related conferences are being planned for late October or early November 2012. The "Living Compassion" Conference will be held at the High Country Conference Center. The goal of this conference is to provide a venue for people from many walks of life to think and learn about the different ways compassion is realized in everyday life. The conference will consist of basic and applied research symposia, workshops, and real-world project demonstrations. Our goal is for participants to learn about the evolutionary and philosophical roots of compassion, skills training programs for fostering and strengthening compassion, and community-based projects and programs that incorporate a compassionate stance. This conference is being designed to appeal to a broad academic and community audience. We are still working on a keynote speaker and firming up the exact dates of the conference. The committee is keeping a list of symposia ideas and will be starting to generate a schedule beginning January 2012. If you are interested in presenting, please send a brief description of presentation idea to Heidi at Heidi.Wayment@nau.edu. The committee will begin (in January 2012) to work on the conference schedule and presenter details. WE WILL HAVE A CONFERENCE PLANNING MEETING ON TUESDAY, NOV. 15, 10-12 SBS 233!

OTHER MINI-CONFERENCES: We are also investigating the feasibility of holding a Quiet Ego II mini-conference (research presentations related to “the less defended self in everyday life”) is a smaller conference for academic psychologists at the Colton House and NAU’s new Native American Cultural Center. This conference is a follow-up to a similar conference held at NAU in 2005. A second mini-conference is also being discussed on Compassionate Caregiving. This conference would explore the many issues related to end of life care and will be of interest to many professionals from a variety of disciplines, as well as the general public.

Many thanks to Zoe Lonetti (Assistant to Dean Stevenson) for help with securing the conference venues!
Curriculum Projects

Faculty Community of Practice

After much planning and discussion by members of the curriculum committee, the decision was made to go forward with a series of activities that would enable faculty to better understand a compassionate and mindful stance within themselves in order to more carefully consider how it could influence curriculum. With the help of Linda Shadiow (Director of Faculty Development), our committee established a Faculty Community of Practice: Pedagogy of Human Dignity. In October, two meetings of the faculty-initiated learning community “Mindfulness in the Curriculum” were held at the DuBois Center. The first meeting of the Learning Community, held on October 3, was led by Mr. Brian Lesage, an expert in the development of mindfulness practice. Mr. Lesage first led the faculty in a discussion of the relevance of mindfulness to teaching practices. Next, faculty were given the opportunity to experience a type of mindful meditation. Finally, more discussion ensued about the relevance of a mindful stance to teaching concerns. The second meeting, held on October 24, was led by Dr. Alan Atkins (Fronke School of Business) and focused on mindful meditation practice and discussion of the implications for teaching. The third and final meeting for Fall 2011 will be held on November 28. Brian Lesage will be leading the group with hands-on experience with mindful meditative practices. In addition, the topic will be “Mindful Speech.” The meeting will be held in DuBois Center at 4:30 p.m. There will be four more meetings scheduled for the Spring 2012 semester.

Student Activity Project

October also brought the opportunity for the Curriculum Committee to meet Mr. Hariharan Krishnan, Director of the L.V. Prasad Film & TV Academy in Chennai where he also heads the department of direction. Mr. Krishnan will be joining the curriculum group in designing one or more projects that can help develop compassion through practice. The committee will be exploring ideas through the end of the Fall 2011 semester with the goal of further implementing a plan for Spring 2012.

Research Projects

What is Compassion?

The Compassion Project research group met early in the semester and, to date, have discussed a few ideas for research projects and participated in a discussion of a review of the topic by Goetz et al (2010). Many people conceptualize compassion as a desire to alleviate human suffering — and as Goetz et al. (2010) elaborate, such a stance is predicated on having witnessed suffering, making determinations about the worthiness of the sufferer to receive help, a cost-benefit analysis of one’s ability to help, and helping behavior as the final result. Instead, our project seeks to foster a broader type compassion that is a consequence of the recognition of the arbitrary and self-defensive creation of “self” and “other.” The sense of interconnection and interdependence, fueled by our ability to be mindfully present and resist the tendency to judge ourselves or others, renders the need for separation less important, and compassionate thoughts, feelings, and behavior are the result. One goal of the group is to develop a working definition of compassion as we move forward with the “Living Compassion” conference and specific symposia topics on compassion (notably from colleagues in the Philosophy Department).

Heidi Wayment gave a relevant presentation at the 2011 Science Writers Conference entitled “The Quiet Ego: Empirical Evidence for the Value of Compassion” where she made the distinction between acts of compassion and a compassionate stance, and discussed the characteristics that are associated with, as Schopenhauer described, blurring the distinction between “self” and “other.” She detailed findings from several of her research studies on a new measure of “Quiet Ego” characteristics.

Two different groups of NAU faculty have submitted research proposals to three different funding sources for studies that would examine the compassionate stance as reflected in Native American cultural practices (Navajo and Hopi cultural traditions). The faculty involved these different study proposals are (in alphabetical order): Alison Adams, Melissa Birkett, Suzanne Daiss, Jill Dubish, Fernando Monroy, Larry Stevens, Bob Trotter, Heidi Wayment, and Bill Wiist.
**Community Projects**

The community group has been working on several projects that will bring the importance of compassion to our community lives. First and foremost is the creation and implementation of “Hot Topics”, a series of student-oriented, public discussions about important and controversial topics that provide an opportunity for learning and experiencing the practice of civil discourse. The ability to see others’ perspectives and engage in active listening are just two of the skills we hope that these projects foster. The first “Hot Topics” discussion was on the Occupy Wall Street movement and was held in the new Health Center “Green Scene Cafe” on October 26. Andrea Houchard and Wendy Bustamonte (Philosophy in the Public Interest) spearheaded, organized, and publicized the event. The event was not only well attended (over 130 students, faculty, staff, and community members), but drew people with many diverse viewpoints. Three faculty (Joel Olsen, Politics and International Affairs, Luis Hernandez, Comparative Cultural Studies and Heidi Wayment, Psychology) set the ground rules for a respectful discussion and facilitated the discussion. The discussion was thoughtful and considered. Results of a post-event evaluation found that attendees found the discussion worthwhile. All in all, the event was extremely well-received.

The next Hot Topics discussion will be on the topic of women’s reproductive freedoms on November 15 at 7:30 p.m. This event will be co-sponsored by the Commission for the Status of Women.

The community planning group has also been working on some ideas to bring Karen Armstrong’s Compassion Charter to the attention of individuals at NAU, as well as the Flagstaff and Sedona communities. We are at the beginning stages of working with both cities on an introduction to the Charter and exploring their involvement and commitment to the charter. Those interested in learning more about the Compassion Charter (and sign!), can go to this [website](#).
Last, but not least, please check out Lisa Doskocil’s facebook page for the SBS Compassion Project. PEACE of Northern Arizona! She has put up some wonderful links and updates the page frequently. Kudos to Lisa for this wonderful project!