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Current Research Topic: Teaching Students how to Encounter Suffering

Over the last five to six years, Drs. Barb Braband (School of Nursing), Rebecca Gaudino (Dept. of Theology), and Anissa Rogers (Dept. of Sociology and Social Work) have been involved in interdisciplinary research around teaching students about suffering. This collaboration began in a course entitled Theological Dimensions of Suffering and Death, anchored by Rebecca Gaudino. In this upper-division course, students heading into fields like nursing and social work learn about encountering suffering from the perspectives of both practical theology and caregiving.

Preparing students for these and other caregiving fields is a challenge. Students are stepping into work that not only draws on new clinical skills and knowledge but also, if done well, calls for sensitivity and compassion. At the same time, students need to learn how to acknowledge and deal with their own discomfort and pain, past and present, as they reach out to help others.

Key to this course is an interview project first developed by Barb Braband, a project that invites students to encounter suffering and to reflect on its meaning in their own lives as well as in the lives of their interviewees. In studying the effectiveness of this project and students' response to this project, these three UP researchers developed a model of teaching and learning about suffering that they have entitled the Pedagogy of Suffering. They have also rooted this model in a spirituality that they believe encourages students to begin to embody spiritual practices of compassionate presence.

So far, these researchers have completed two stages of their research, first, evaluating the efficacy of the interview project and learning from this evaluation how students are learning about suffering. Their second stage of research involved testing the value of Photovoice methodology to the interview project. The three have published two papers on their work with a third paper just accepted for publication, and they have shared their work at conferences around the country. They have also used their findings and their pedagogical model to shape and strengthen the courses that they teach.

In October 2017, these three collaborators won a national award for Innovative Teaching in Social Work Education from from SAGE Publishing and the Council on Social Work Education. They were also were invited to present a workshop at CSWE's national conference in Dallas, TX. Granting this award, SAGE representative Josh Perigo stated that this team's interview project is showing educators how to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world of encountering suffering as a caregiver.

For more information, please see a UP article about this trio's work at

<https://www.up.edu/news/2017/12/teaching-empathy-through-photovoice.html>