

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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Responding to the Crises

In order to provide a forum for YWMC members to share strategies and raise questions regarding the COVID-19 crisis as well as the crisis to address racial and social inequities, we have continued to hold Open Forums via our Zoom platform for members in general and for faculty. Information regarding links to these sessions is sent out via the email lists for YWMC Google Groups. We welcome any members who wish to join the conversation. In addition, we are in the process of creating a list of publications, project descriptions and other related materials that YWMC members have found useful in addressing issues of equity and justice on their campuses, with an emphasis on materials authored by YWMC faculty and staff. If you have references you'd like us to include, please send to Ann Landis, annlandis@gmail.com. Readers may also find previous YWMC publications useful for thinking about these current issues (see: <https://yeswemustcoalition.org/publications-webinars>).

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Williamson College of the Trades



Williamson College of the Trades (Media, PA) is a unique post-secondary institution that educates young men in one of six trades — carpentry, horticulture, machine technology, masonry, paint and coating technology, and power plant technology. Founded in 1888 by

a successful Quaker merchant, the College provides economically challenged young men with full tuition, room and board, as well as scholarship support, for three years of rigorous academic coursework, leadership development, and trades training, drawing on annual endowment revenue and institutional advancement fundraising. After earning their associate degree, students are highly sought by employers. Williamson places an average of 96 percent of its graduates into full-time, good-paying jobs in the trades. The College's alumni have well-earned reputations as respected leaders and productive members of their communities.

To honor its founding mission, the College requires that applicants demonstrate financial need and gives admission preference to those who could not otherwise afford higher education. Fifty-three percent of students are Pell-eligible, the rest falling just outside Pell eligibility criteria. Williamson joined the Yes We Must Coalition in 2020.



Williamson enrolls approximately 260 students, all of whom live on campus in a supportive, highly structured environment. Students begin each morning with daily chapel services, followed by four hours of general academics and four hours of trade shop courses and hands-on training. Math, English and science are structured as foundational pieces within each major as appropriate to that particular skill area. Given the tightly structured nature of the curriculum, the College does not accept transfers.

Students follow a strict coat-and-tie dress code for academic classes and meals, with the College making donated clothing available to students on an as-needed basis through the campus Clothes Closet. When the academic day ends, students participate in extracurricular activities such as varsity and intramural sports, student government, yearbook, musical organizations and religious groups. Students also have regular work assignments that support the College's daily operations.

The College's intensive schedule seeks to develop students' character and leadership abilities. Academics, extracurricular activities and residential life at the College are all grounded in

the core values of integrity, diligence, excellence and service. Whether in the trade shop, the classroom, on the sports field or in the dormitory, faculty and staff hold students accountable for being honest, hard-working, reliable, punctual, and polite. At regular intervals, all Williamson students take part in wilderness-expedition trips and other leadership-training exercises. Third-year students receive formal instruction in foremanship and staff supervision and spend their final year at Williamson mentoring a freshman in the shop.

During the 2020–21 academic year, in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health protocols, the College maintained in-person instruction because of the nature of the hands-on curriculum. As with colleges and universities across the nation, Williamson College of the Trades remains committed to student support and success during this difficult pandemic period and applauds not only the efforts of faculty, staff, and students but also the tireless and dedicated support of so many in the community.

Williamson is proud of its success in helping low-income students break the cycle of generational poverty and continually strives to prepare students for productive and bright careers. In 2020, the College completed a two-year comprehensive Trade Program Assessment. The results of the assessment energized curricular and programmatic changes across the College. As a result, in the fall of 2022 Williamson will introduce a new electrical construction technology program after discontinuing the current paint and coatings technology program. The College will also introduce new curriculum elements in its five remaining trade programs. The changes include a new construction management track for students in the carpentry, electrical, and masonry programs, expansive dual-track options for machine tool technology students, and programmatic changes to the horticulture program, including a program name change to landscape construction and management. Williamson is confident that these changes will continue the College's tradition of preparing graduates to be 21st century leaders in the nation's technical workforce. For more information about Williamson and its unique education model, please visit <https://www.williamson.edu>.

Institutional Resources/Practices

Credit for Prior Learning: Helping Students Understand the Process

Does this sound familiar? You get to know a new student who hangs back in class and seems to lack confidence, only to discover that they are an accomplished artist, community leader, or workplace professional. The student who is nervous about a communication requirement turns out to have done a Ted Talk. The student who is worried because she only has a GED consulted Sesame Street as part of her campaign to reduce lead paint poisoning. The student who needs to fill a leadership requirement runs a homeless shelter. Students not sure about their ability to manage school have been managing the challenges of caring for families, improving communities, supporting organizations, and negotiating workplaces for years, often while also navigating the challenges of being poor and/or BiPOC.

At **College Unbound** (RI), **our first guiding principle** is that “Learners come to CU with prior experiences, knowledge, and abilities which must be recognized, honored, used, and credited.” Guiding students to name and claim the learning they have developed across their life builds their confidence, enables their ability to transfer that learning to new contexts, and can also help them use Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) to complete their degree in less time and for less money than they might otherwise have spent.

Helping students excavate their life learning, however, is no easy task (for more on this, see **Catherine Marienau, “Why the Adult Brain Likes PLA,” (2014)**. First at DePaul University’s

School for New Learning and now at College Unbound, some of us at CU have drawn upon Melissa Peet's **Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process** and **Generative Knowledge Interviewing Methodology** to develop courses that guide students in identifying and documenting learning from their life experiences. These courses, DePaul's **Independent Learning Seminar** and CU's **Learning from Experience**, have served to introduce students to the PLA process at each school and to each college's approach to learning. Most importantly, though, users of this approach have consistently seen its power in transforming learners' views of themselves as exemplified in this quote: "When I first got out of the military and came back to the United States for the first time in nearly 7 years, I had no confidence in myself nor did I think I would have the ability to get a good job. . . . thank you . . . for the experience with the class and giving me my confidence back."

The 3-credit course begins by introducing students to **David Kolb's experiential learning theory** as a way to situate and elevate the work they will do in the class. This introduction can be an important move for students for whom learning about learning can be a revelation and for those who can be too quick to dismiss the value of their informal learning. The course is then organized to lead students twice through a cycle that moves from brainstorming to identifying learning experiences, to focusing on a few learning experiences and finally to documenting learning in a portfolio. In the brainstorming stage, students learn to move inductively from life experiences to learning outcomes, to move deductively from outcomes to experiences, and to solicit feedback from their peers and personal and professional networks. Then, students are put into triads to interview each other about three specific experiences using Peet's Generative Knowledge Interviewing Methodology. In these interviews, peers are trained to listen for key strengths that show up across an individual's stories. The brainstorming and interviews provide students with the data they need to draft portfolios demonstrating their learning for a specific college outcome. They then receive feedback on these portfolios from their peers and instructor before revising for final submission.

For more information contact: Michelle Navarre Cleary, Associate Provost for Learning at michelle.navarre@collegeunbound.org.

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice on their campuses this year. Send brief descriptions to Nia Lane Chester, YWMC Program Manager. niachester@gmail.com.