

# PRACTICES EXCHANGE

## NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

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*This year the Practices Exchange Newsletter is dedicated with appreciation and admiration to the memory of Dr. Nia Lane Chester, the newsletter's founding editor and program manager of the Yes We Must Coalition.*

### Higher Education in These Times

In order to provide a forum for YWMC members to share strategies and raise questions with one another during these uncertain times, the Yes We Must Coalition will continue the Open Forums begun last year. Each month we will offer both a general session, open to anyone at a member school, and a faculty session for all faculty at member schools. Information regarding links to these sessions is sent out via the email lists for YWMC Google Groups. We welcome all members who wish to join the conversation.

### Growing the Coalition

If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at [glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org).

### YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: Point University



**Point University** (West Point, GA) is a Christian institution that exists to educate students for Christ-centered service and leadership throughout the world. It currently offers majors in areas of study ranging from biblical studies to biology. Point is one of the newest members of the Yes We Must Coalition, joining in February 2021.

Founded in 1937 as Atlanta Christian College, Point University was originally located in East Point, GA, and primarily devoted attention to the education of ministers, missionaries and other church-related workers. In 1990 the college was accredited to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. The school changed its name in 2012 to Point University and that same year moved to West Point, GA, a small town on the Georgia-Alabama border one hour southwest of Atlanta. Once the home to many textile mills along the Chattahoochee River, West Point welcomed Point to the heart of its downtown area, where the University has played a vital role in the renewal of the downtown after the decline and exodus of the textile mills.

Although Point's main campus is in West Point, GA, the University serves students in a variety of locations throughout the state including education sites in Peachtree City, Columbus, and Savannah. It also offers a thriving collection of fully-online programs and provides a dual credit program that operates in both public and private high schools throughout the state of Georgia.



Point's student body is diverse — 49% white and 51% minority or unknown ethnicity. Additionally, more than 65% of Point's first-year students are Pell-eligible, and 41% have zero expected family contribution. With marching band included, 85% of Point's residential students are student-athletes. The result of these student-body characteristics is that most of Point's students do not have the luxury of devoting all of their attention to coursework. Many balance working multiple jobs, caring for family members, and being an athlete with being a student.

Over the last decade, Point has undergone numerous large-scale transitions that include launching an adult degree completion program and launching its fully-online programs. These transitions have made Point an agile and adaptable university. The combination of this agility

and adaptability — together with attention to the needs of the student body—has helped the University chart a course for the future. Specifically, we are aware that the students we seek to serve often cannot afford to attend a four-year residential program with all the attendant costs. To address this situation, Point is in the process of developing partnerships with employers so their employees can work on a college degree while still maintaining employment. Because these partnerships help the employers with workforce retention, they often offer scholarships or subsidize the programs. The ability to pursue a degree at a reduced cost while working alleviates some of the financial burdens on students and greatly reduces the amount of debt that students may accumulate during their time at Point University. For more information, please contact Valarie Williams, Dean of Academic Support Services, at [valarie.williams@point.edu](mailto:valarie.williams@point.edu).

## Institutional Resources/Practices

### Using Transparent Assignments

During the spring semester of 2017, faculty at **Saint Elizabeth University** engaged in an interactive professional education workshop, *The Unwritten Rules of College: Creating Transparent Assignments that Increase Underserved College Students Success*. The training was presented by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, inaugural executive director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brandeis University and founder and director of TILTHigherEd (Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Project). The focus of the workshop was to understand the principles, practices and value of the transparent assignment methodology.

The transparent assignment format requires clearly communicating the purpose, task and criteria for each assignment. For each assignment faculty describe why students are completing the assignment and what knowledge and skills they will gain from this experience. Additionally, for each assignment faculty explain how this knowledge and skill set are relevant and will help the students find success in the program and ultimately in their career.

For the task section, each assignment includes steps that the students need to complete. This description is very detailed and might include examples of what to do and what not to do. For the criteria section each assignment includes exactly what is required to be included. This description might be a list of elements required for the assignment, or a checklist, or a rubric so the students can ensure they have completed everything that is required and been informed upfront about what is required for success.

Saint Elizabeth University administration and faculty embraced the format, and the Business and Health Administration (BSHA) programs committed to re-writing all assignments and training adjuncts in the transparent design over the coming semesters. Concurrently, the BSHA department was engaged in Teagle Foundation/Yes We Must Coalition grant work to implement infusing liberal arts learning into the undergraduate business curriculum. There was agreement that it made sense to ensure that the work of the grant and the transition to transparent assignments occurred in tandem. For the grant work, we determined the best way to overtly infuse liberal arts learning assignments and outcomes into the undergraduate business curriculum was to select five courses scaffolded throughout the curriculum. We engaged in an in-depth review of the assignments and outcomes with liberal arts faculty and revised and/or re-wrote the assignments for those classes in the transparent format.

Students have given us positive feedback about the transparent assignment format. They find it easy to use and are appreciative of the details. The method can be used at all levels of coursework and creates a standardized approach to understanding assignments and expectations. Additionally, faculty do not find adhering to this format onerous in any way.

Actually, faculty feel the format helps them think about the deliverables more deeply and makes the assignments more meaningful for the students overall because of the additional forethought that has gone into creating the assignment.

For examples of our assignments, please contact us at [whahn@steu.edu](mailto:whahn@steu.edu) or [rriccioni@steu.edu](mailto:rriccioni@steu.edu). For more information about our trainers and the transparent assignment model, please see their website at: <https://tilthighered.com>.

## 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. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, [barbara@yeswemustcoalition.org](mailto:barbara@yeswemustcoalition.org).