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A Note From Your Coordinator

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Welcome to the *Communitas*, the official publication of the Association of Faculty for Advancement of Community College Teaching (AFACCT). I would like to extend my greetings on behalf of the AFACCT Board of Directors. The Maryland Association of Community Colleges estimates over 2400 faculty in Maryland's 16 community colleges will be engaging over 147,000 students in the fall semester. The challenges facing faculty in the classroom are ever changing as our student population becomes more diverse related to experience, age, culture, educational level and technological expertise.

AFACCT offers the perfect forum for sharing your expertise and ideas with other faculty, as well as networking with colleagues. For those of you who are new to community college teaching, AFACCT was founded in 1983 and provides professional development for community college faculty through a two-day state-wide conference held just before the start of the spring/winter semester each year. This past January, the 21st Annual AFACCT Conference entitled "A Global and International Perspective for Maryland Community College Faculty" was held at CCBC—Essex. Over 80 presenters offered their expertise and ideas to 377 attendees, demonstrating how every course we teach can have a global perspective. The keynote speakers gave excellent examples of educational outreach, leadership, and the development of curricula with a global influence



Dr. Coleen Weil

while sharing their experiences abroad.

This year's conference will be held at Montgomery College—Rockville on January 5th and 6th, 2012. Bill Coe has been busy reserving rooms, arranging food and making campus arrangements for our visit. This year's topic, "Engaging the New Community College Student Demographic: The Challenges Faculty Face," is something everyone has had experience with over the years. One of this year's keynote speakers will be Dr. DeRionne Pollard, President of Montgomery College. Dr. Pollard received her Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy studies in higher education from Loyola University, Chicago. She is an inspiring speaker and serves on several boards and commissions related to student development, persistence, and completion. Her biography is available at <http://cms.montgomerycollege.edu/EDU/Department.aspx?id=13322>.

Our second keynote speaker is Dr. Rebecca (Becky) Cox. Dr. Cox received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley's School of Education, in the Policy, Organization, Measurement and Evaluation program. She

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We invite you to submit articles on your classroom teaching/learning successes, current educational topics that you want to share, and your professional achievements. Send photos related to your article and one of yourself for publication. We invite articles from all disciplines.

has taught at the high school, community college, and graduate level. She is currently teaching graduate students in Education Leadership at Seton Hall University. Dr. Cox is the author of *The College Fear Factor: How Students and Professors Misunderstand One Another*.

The Call for Proposals for the AFACCT 2012 Conference is on the AFACCT website now, <<http://www.afacct.csm.edu/>>. Please submit your proposal today to share your wonderful ideas and experiences with other faculty. We learn the most from the successes of others. Please mark your calendars for January 5th and 6th, 2012 to attend the 22nd Annual Conference at Montgomery College in Rockville.

Currently, AFACCT is looking for someone from one of our community colleges willing to manage the AFACCT website. If your college is interested, please contact me at <cweil@worwic.edu>.

If you have any questions about AFACCT, each community college has a representative listed on the AFACCT website, <<http://www.afacct.csm.edu/>>. Or you may contact me at the address above.



Montgomery College Invites You to Its Rockville Campus

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View of Macklin Tower

Montgomery College at Rockville will host the 22nd annual AFACCT conference in 2012. MC-Rockville, located in central Montgomery County, is a reasonably short drive from most of the community colleges in Maryland. Montgomery College is represented on the AFACCT Board by Bill Coe for Rockville and Jon Kreissig for Germantown.

Founded in 1946, Montgomery College is a public, open-admissions community college in Montgomery County, Maryland, with campuses in Germantown, Rockville, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring, as well as off-site centers around the county.

Montgomery College has grown from a small college offering night classes to returning World War II veterans at a local

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Montgomery College–Rockville

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high school to a multi-campus institution serving more than 60,000 students annually through both credit and non-credit programs in more than 130 areas of study.

The College has achieved a national reputation for its programs in the sciences, business, arts, health sciences, liberal arts, and skilled trades, and for its distinctive, selective honors programs for high-achieving students in the liberal arts and business. Montgomery College is also recognized for its excellent faculty. In the past seven years, four Montgomery College professors have been named Maryland Professor of the Year by two national organizations.

The College transfers more students to four-year institutions than any other community college in the state of Maryland. A *New York Times* article named Montgomery College as one of the best community colleges in the nation for its ability to prepare students for successful transfer.

More than 175 countries are represented among the student body, making Montgomery College one of the most culturally diverse institutions of higher education in the nation.

Montgomery College meets workforce demands through its innovative facilities. A new Science Center is set to open at the Rockville Campus in fall 2011, providing state-of-the-art labs and classroom space for the College's growing programs in the sciences, engineering, and mathematics at the campus. The College just broke ground on a new Bioscience Education Center at the Germantown Campus, a facility that will train the next generation of scientists, advance new discoveries and cures, and help to create and retain jobs in the Montgomery County's booming biosciences industry. The Takoma Park/



View of the new Science Building

Silver Spring Campus, home to the College's signature programs in the health sciences, features a state-of-the-art Health Sciences Center that trains the next generation of health care professionals, a new visual arts center, and a new performing arts center.

Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard became the ninth president of Montgomery College in August 2010, after serving as president of Las Positas College in Livermore, California. Dr. Pollard believes that community colleges are among the most transformative institutions in the United States, providing access to higher education for millions of people. Her goal is for Montgomery College to become the most relevant community college in the nation by meeting the needs of the county's students and by proving essential to the success of the community.

So come to the AFACCT conference on January 5 and 6, 2012 and listen to the experiences of your colleagues from around the state or, better yet, consider presenting some of your own unique teaching ideas.



Truth and Validity

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Recall for a moment how many times your teachers told you (and how many times you have told your students) that truth is good and assumption bad. It is ironic that in education, where so much time is spent pursuing truth and debunking assumptions, truth may obstruct learning and assumption promote it. Such is often the case, however, especially in the very province where you might think it would be least likely—logic, and by extension, critical thinking.

Logic is often defined as the study of methods for evaluating whether the premises of arguments adequately support their conclusions. Although by no means limited to logic, critical thinking is closely aligned with it because logic's methods for evaluating whether the premises of arguments support their conclusions are themselves paradigmatic instances of critical thinking. Logic's methods of evaluation foundationally inform much of critical thinking for this very reason.

One notable exception in teaching critical thinking in such a manner is that the truth of a passage is emphasized at the expense of its validity. Although not all the critical thinking passages we present to our students are arguments, many are, and in such cases we must ensure that logic's methods of evaluation are properly employed. Doing so requires fluency in logic no less than

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Truth and Validity

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Dr. Nicholas Plants

in critical thinking.

One of the most significant distinctions in logic that we must be conversant with to ensure that our students are thinking critically is the distinction between truth and validity. Logic's method for evaluating whether the premises of an argument support their conclusion is not limited to assessing whether they are true. For the premises of an argument to support its conclusion adequately, the reasoning process by which these premises are linked to their conclusion must be valid, that is, follow necessarily. If in addition to being valid an argument's premises are all true, then it is termed a sound argument.

Because this distinction between truth and validity is not at all an intuitive one, however, the tendency among teachers and students alike is to focus on the more readily apparent of the two: truth. Doing so leads to passages being assessed on the basis of whether their content is true. So if the content of a statement is capable of being evaluated in terms of truth, and is determined to in fact be true, we happily move onto the next statement. If it is likewise true, we tend to believe this second statement must combine with the first into a passage which, having

thus been critically assessed, we are eager to identify it as wholly true. During such an assessment critical thinking regarding truth occurs, as we must rightly identify whether the content of all the statements within a passage is true.

But content alone does not and cannot determine the validity of arguments. For it is fully possible for a passage to consist of premises and a conclusion that are all true and for it to still be invalid. So critical thinking regarding validity and not only truth is required in order for critical thinking to be properly informed by logic. Validity matters because true premises by themselves do not make good arguments. And so the question of whether the premises of an argument are all true is clearly distinct from that of whether an argument is valid. Even if its premises and conclusion are both true, an argument may well be invalid, as surely as an argument with false premises and a false conclusion may well be valid. Validity also matters, therefore, insofar as it preserves truth; if you begin with true premises and reason validly, you will secure a true conclusion.

If critical thinking is taught in such a way that truth plays a dominant role, however, it is likely that passages identified as true will ironically be complicit in the advancement of invalid reasoning. Such is a case in which truth ironically obstructs learning rather than promoting it. As teachers, we must not countenance any such advancement of invalid reasoning, even in the name of critical thinking regarding truth. The best way to avoid doing so is, ironically enough, to turn to the power of assumption for help in promoting critical thinking regarding not only truth but truth together with validity.

The method of logic for evaluating whether or not the premises of an argument adequately support their conclusion is first to assume its premises are true

For teachers, working against the tendency to focus on truth more than upon validity is no less crucial a task than it is for our students. Given that we are their teachers, it is even more crucial a task for us.

and then determine whether the conclusion necessarily follows. If it follows from the premises necessarily, regardless of whether the premises are true, the argument is valid. If the conclusion does not follow necessarily, even if the premises are all true, then the argument is invalid.

Once the validity of an argument has been evaluated on the basis of assuming its premises to be true, then the question of whether its premises are in fact true can be assessed. If the premises are true and the argument is valid, then the argument is sound. If the premises are false then even if the argument is valid, it is not sound. If the premises are true but the argument is not valid, then the argument is not sound. Regardless of which of these permutations is the case, it is the initial assumption that its premises are true that enables us to determine whether the argument is valid. Thus assumption ironically promotes learning in that it enables us to teach and students to learn that critical thinking regarding validity is no less crucial than regarding truth and is only at its best when it regards both.

For teachers, working against the tendency to focus on truth more than upon validity is no less crucial a task than it is for our students. Given that we are their teachers, it is even more crucial

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a task for us. One way to promote the accomplishment of this task is, as we have seen, to turn to assumption so that we might first evaluate whether an argument is valid before we determine whether its premises are true. As noted the tendency to do the reverse, and determine its premises to be true first, only to then disregard the question of its validity altogether, is related to the tendency to focus on content more than form. One way to counteract this related tendency is to stress that form must first be isolated in order for content to be properly assessed. Isolating the form of arguments is difficult because it requires students to transpose content into symbols and therefore requires a degree of abstract reasoning akin to mathematics. Here lies another barrier to evaluating whether the process of reasoning whereby premises are validly linked to conclusions, as students must if they are to determine whether arguments are sound. Unlike assessing the content of passages, which is a decidedly concrete procedure, evaluating their form is much more abstract an affair, one that students commonly avoid, even though they do so at their own peril. To inspire them to reverse their tendencies by our beginning with abstract form and only then moving to concrete content is a transformative reversal we teachers discount at our peril.

Similarly, unlike the content of arguments which are unique to specific disciplines, their forms underlie all content and so are notably flexible. It is often objected against logic that it is unique to philosophical inquiry and correspondingly much too rigorous to inform critical thinking, which requires flexibility above all else. It is true that critical thinking must be flexible enough to accommodate all disciplines, not just

“Teaching to the test” is likely the most noted example of this tendency, though it can be evidenced by phrases as common as “covering” the material or “following” the syllabus.

logic. But it is equally true that critical thinking will best accommodate all disciplines when it is informed by logic, and more specifically, by its insistence that form must be isolated before content is assessed as the best way to establish both truth and validity.

Once a valid argument form has been isolated, it is possible consistently to substitute any content, regardless of its specific discipline, and thus secure a sound argument. Just as validity is more difficult to evaluate than truth, isolating argument forms is more difficult than assessing the truth of the content they contain. The benefit of first isolating an argument’s form, just like that of first evaluating its validity, pays immediate dividends, as the validity of a form is much easier to evaluate if the form has already been isolated, which it will be, provided that validity is emphasized prior to truth.

A final distinction, which is uniquely significant for teachers of critical thinking, is analogous to that between truth and validity and content and form: the result and process distinction. No less than our students, we teachers tend to focus on truth more than validity, and thus on content more than form. We do so because of an even stronger tendency that is often unique to teachers—the tendency to focus on the results, more than the process, of teaching. “Teaching to the test” is likely the most noted example of this tendency, though it can

be evidenced by phrases as common as “covering” the material or “following” the syllabus. Regardless of the specific phraseology, the truth is that it is not only possible, but quite common, for teachers to emphasize the result of successfully conveying a given body of knowledge at the expense of the process whereby students learn. It is remarkably easy to be so fixated on achieving the result of a group of students who are “where they should be” at the semester’s end that teachers may ironically lessen the process that they, and we, participate in so as to perhaps get them there.

Just as it is possible ironically to enable invalid reasoning by being overly focused on the truth, it is possible ironically to lessen the process whereby we teach by being overly focused on its results. What is crucial ultimately is not simply the content of what we convey anymore than it is the result of having done so. Rather it is our having engaged, together with our students in the formal process of valid reasoning whereby any result, especially including the truth, is secured. Such reasoning is not properly result-driven, though it boasts positive results, nor is it content-driven, although it clearly requires content. It is a formal process that is both flexible and rigorous enough properly to evaluate the conclusions through which all disciplines express their various truths. As teachers, it is not simply our charge to make sure that our students can assess these claims but, more importantly, that they might first evaluate whether they are valid so that, when true, such claims will be neither true alone nor valid alone but rather both true and valid, that is, sound. The only result we must aspire to is engaging our students in this process.



Are Our Students Being Prepared for Success or Reverse Brain Drain?

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The trio of Dr. Robin Spaid, Dr. Michael Parsons and myself, Dr. R. Lee Viar IV, had the opportunity to focus on the theme of the 21st Annual AFACCT Conference “A Global and International Perspective for Maryland Community College Faculty.” The title of our presentation was “Global Culture: Hegemony or Plurality” which addressed a variety of issues ranging from business, educational, and sociological insights. Each one of these areas of concern poses potential obstacles not only on how our students learn but also on how faculty teach. Are the faculty receiving the necessary infrastructural support from the curriculum and administration to achieve this emerging task adequately and effectively? My portion of the presentation focused on the area of educational preparedness for our students to achieve and enjoy a modicum of success on the global stage with their contemporaries.

The Seed Has Been Planted.... Will It Grow?

A summary of my portion of our presentation focused on educational preparedness. The majority of faculty at the community college levels have a set of aspirations for our students to take the seeds of knowledge that we have planted and continue their educational

journey towards their undergraduate and graduate levels. In this instance, this is not necessarily the case. Are our students being prepared to exit our community colleges to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees? Or rather are these same students being prepared for our global environment and culture in order to prosper and survive? Is the seed being planted in our students for the future for growth and prosperity, or will our students be relegated to seeking their opportunities on the global stage, thus depriving us of innovative and brilliant minds? Globalization is obviously surrounding us. The issues of embracing diversity and cultural awareness are well known. Yet, in many instances, the impact of globalization is not surrounding our classrooms; it is crushing our students who are unprepared to face and deal with these new issues and challenges. The question then surfaces: are we as faculty acting as stewards of growth and embracing these changing global issues at the times and opportunities as they present themselves within our classrooms, thus nurturing the growth of our students? Or, are we agents of stagnant growth, unwilling or unsupported to facilitate these changes in the thought process of our students? Whom do we want to influence our students, the college professor or social media outlets and unreliable sources of information?

Social Media Influences

Walk across any campus, look into many classrooms and unfortunately into many vehicles being driven, and you will see individuals on their Smartphones texting, emailing, and logging onto their Facebook or MySpace sites. The increased availability to these outlets has radically increased the exposure and patronage to these sites. Using these sites, our student are losing the ability to write correctly in English versus textese and

the ability to communicate verbally to improve social skills—both of which are significant in their development. Within their own perspective, a new and emerging diversion is rapidly growing in its ability to influence our students. The social media outlets such as Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn are creating a blending of cultures and the level of global interaction is establishing in essence a new culture. This culture is rapidly evolving into a phenomenon that has not been realized before. With this being said, are our students being prepared to function adequately in this new environment, not on a social level, but more importantly, on a professional and academic level? Are they being equipped with adequate knowledge to be able to understand these various cultural differences and diversities while at the same time? Are they being able to decipher inaccurate information from accurate information regarding certain cultural situations? If this is not the case, are seeds of inaccuracies being planted to act as a deterrent to success and understanding by academia ignoring the influence of this potential obstacle or asset if utilized properly?

Here is a breakdown of active users for the primary social media outlets: Facebook has 500 million active users, MySpace has 110 million active users, and LinkedIn has 35 million active users. Furthermore, the average number of times that the Facebook site is visited by a user is over 30 times per day. What is the average number of times students log in to inquire about their grades on the colleges website? What is being viewed as important or what is taking precedence in the mind’s eye of the student? What does this mean for the

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Are Our Students Being Prepared?

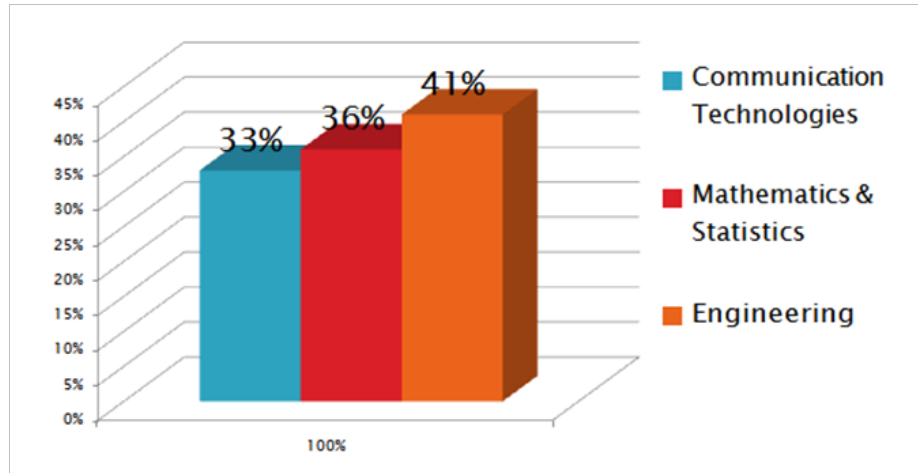
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educator? How can this newly found portable friend/distraction be harnessed to benefit the student academically? Students are utilizing these and other sites to research their instructors. Not only the sites previously mentioned but also from those like RateMyProfessors.com, students are deciding which particular courses to take and which to avoid. The number of colleges and universities listed are both national and international; again, this level of social interaction is extending across a number of facets of society and education. The level of global interaction has reached proportions never before experienced. In other words, the world just got smaller and the job of educator just got a little more challenging.

The Departing Graduate Students

Failing to identify the global culture as a living, breathing entity, not something static on our behalf, could eventually result in the diminishment of our own contributions to the global culture as a whole. But it does not stop there. Due to external factors and influences, the United States is losing some of its best and brightest newly-minted graduate students to other countries. Take for example the following three degree fields for master's degrees conferred in 2007 and 2008. According to the Department of Education, respectively, students from outside the United States earned their master's degrees in communication and technology, mathematics and statistics, and engineering and have been returning to their home countries, taking their newly acquired knowledge and potential with them and depriving our country and economy of their talents at ever increasing numbers. These numbers also include United States citizens who are obtaining their degrees and moving in

Percentage of Master's Degrees Conferred to Students Leaving the United States, 2007—2008



U. S. Department of Education, June 2009

increasing numbers overseas as well. Granted, we as a country will be able to utilize their talents and abilities, just at a much higher cost and not in the most effective and efficient manner. The price tag will result in our decreased buying power as well as our loss of future contributions from these talented individuals. A variety of contributing factors could be tuition costs, accreditation issues, employment tuition agreements, better employment opportunities overseas, and standards of living, to name a few.

Reverse Brain Drain

The United States is experiencing “reverse brain drain” at levels never before experienced nor expected. On the surface, this can be discounted as a short-term situation. Actually, the implications are far-reaching and affect all facets of American society, including education. The loss of their talent, drive, motivation, and initiative is just the beginning. From a historical aspect, these types of events tend not to be isolated

occurrences. Rather, they tend to be the beginning of a trend that cannot be halted unless a major deterring factor is presented. Contemplate for one moment. Recall ten of your colleagues whom you consider to be highly talented and contribute to society and academia. Now imagine four of those ten are gone and operating in another country. Camaraderie aside, visualize the loss of their contributions just within your own sphere of influence. Next magnify this loss across the entire nation and over an extended period of time. Previously, the United States was accused of brain drain from other countries, and now just the opposite is true. Instead of welcoming talent and potential at our shores with open arms, we are left on the shore's edge, waving goodbye to some of the most precious commodities, intelligence and talent.

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Are Our Students Being Prepared?

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Conclusion

We as faculty need to capitalize on the strengths of curriculums, inspire critical thinking about topics outside the box to help introduce our students to new ideas. Components of these new ideas are embracing and understanding various global cultures to capitalize on this knowledge to enable our students to be more competitive on the professional level, maximize their academic opportunities, and encourage change. The administrations of higher education institutions need to ensure the faculty are up to speed on the Big Global Picture realizing that the boundaries of the campus are not acting as insulators anymore. Instead, they are more of a springboard onto the global stage. In too many instances, tenure is viewed by administration as a status in which the faculty have completed their learning and are fully prepared for the duration. Nothing could be further from the truth, or if it is, the problems are encompassing more issues than embracing global cultural issues. Faculty and administration alike expect that our students are willing to step out of their comfort zones and at least consider new ideas and concepts. Should the faculty and administration be exempt from this concept? It is important to realize that curriculum is not limited to the campus setting, rather the entire global stage. Global issues and scenarios should be applied to all courses of study, not just political science or international business. We as faculty have been charged with a great responsibility to prepare our students to excel, not just in our own courses, but also on a broader academic stage. That includes stretching the boundaries of knowledge to envelop the comprehension of global implications.

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Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery at Chesapeake College



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Every summer for the past nine years the Peake Players have presented a full-scale dinner theatre murder mystery for three weekends in July. It began as a fund-raising event and has been very successful in that regard. But it has also become a community crowd-pleaser, attracting a far larger audience than any of our “straight” productions during the academic year. We have people who have been to all nine productions and are eagerly looking forward to the tenth. And, of course, it is great enjoyment for the performers, who interact with the audience and play some outrageous characters.

We started out using scripts that we obtained from Samuel French Inc. and paid royalties for. After several years, a friend who happens to be an author volunteered to help write our own scripts. Since then, he and I have created our own scripts from scratch to final product.

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Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

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Cast of *Murder Aboard the Mayhem*, Summer 2011

In 2002, we began with *Dedicated to the End*, a murder mystery that takes place at a celebration dinner for a gubernatorial candidate on election day. Since then we have produced *Death Suite*, which involves Russian spies posing as inept ballet dancers; *The Hilarious Hillbilly Massacre*, a down-home family reunion; *Demise of the Down-home Dealers*, which deals with an ill-fated country western band; *Murder Most Shakespeare*, a spoof of American Idol; *Murder in Crab Claw County*, which takes place at a bicentennial celebration in a small Maryland town; *Murder on Wall Street*, set at a stockholders' annual meeting; *Murder at Mamma Morelli's*, which takes place in an Italian restaurant. This past summer we presented *Murder Aboard the Mayhem*, set aboard a cruise ship.

The show begins by welcoming the audience to the "event" and giving them an envelope which contains a humorous name, an "identity" which they play through the evening (the ex-wife of one of the characters, a former boss, the local police chief, etc.). When all the guests have arrived, we begin the show and

proceed for an hour or so, at which point someone is shot, poisoned, bludgeoned, or some such. One of the characters announces that he is actually a detective. While he "examines the body," we stop for dinner. During dinner, the characters mingle at the tables and chat with the guests, looking for those people that they know. After dinner, the show resumes until another murder occurs. We stop for dessert and then the detective conducts his Parade of Suspects, in which all the characters are questioned by the detective and by the audience members. The audience is given an opportunity to solve the crimes by submitting a suspect and a motive. Finally, the murderer is revealed and apprehended, the show is wrapped up, and a prize is given to the audience member who came closest to solving the crime and to the audience member whose response is the most off-the-wall.

Dinner as part of the event is prepared entirely by volunteer chefs and by the actors in the college's training kitchen. It is a tremendous amount of work, but it is the most economical way to do it; and we actually have a great deal of fun

in the kitchen.

We do not have large number of students involved; only a few are willing to give up their summer vacation. But we have a great response from the community. We have some actors who return every year and others who perform for the first time. We also wash our own kitchens and do all the clean-up every night. Audiences are phenomenal. We average 600–700 people per production, which is an excellent showing for us, far greater than for our regular shows.

We have raised a tremendous amount of money, most of which is used for scholarships for theatre students who appear in our productions during the academic year. This past summer we showed a profit of more than \$12,000. That amount provides many scholarships.

We have not yet decided on the premise for next year's show. Someone has suggested a show that takes place at Santa's workshop; another suggested a community college locale, and yet another a wine-tasting event. Whatever we decide, we know that it will be good.

