EXCELLENCE and JUSTICE through NETWORKING
Last year, I participated in a conference on Jesuit International Networking. The meeting’s purpose was to strengthen alliances among Jesuit institutions from across the globe. One of the presenters was Fr. Orobator, the provincial of Eastern Africa. In his talk, the eminent Nigerian theologian shared a saying from his part of the world: “Mountains don’t meet, people do.”

The proverb points to the centrality of relationships. As networks are systems of interconnected nodes, the relationships between the actors provide them with unique opportunities to experience and understand the context and characteristics of people, communities, and cultures. Based on shared values such as equity, reciprocity, and mutual learning, mission-driven networking is neither merely social networking nor business networking.

While it is of great value to befriend people along the way or get a balanced scorecard that excites potential investors, the goal of networking in the social work universe is to strengthen the pursuit of justice for all. As the Graduate School of Social Work is an environment “Where Transformation Happens” and where long-term and empowering ties with external partners are formed, networking has to be one of the essential transformative tools.

This issue of BC Social Work Magazine showcases a series of new networking initiatives, launched by BC faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends. Whether it is immigrant integration or establishing partnerships with local agencies to promote child welfare or building a community with Latino constituencies to increase the cultural awareness and language capacity of our students, the goal of networking is to create “a space where multiple interactions, encounters, and participations happen” (Fr. Orobator).

Thanks to our network with Jesuit universities, we have been able to launch an International PhD Program in Social Welfare. We are also engaged in capacity-building projects with the International Federation of Fe y Alegria, one of the leading NGOs in Latin America focused on public education and empowerment of vulnerable children and communities. Moreover, our students and alumni have been contributing to groundbreaking educational programs in African refugee camps by becoming part of a worldwide network of Jesuit institutions.

Networking brings people and ideas together. But not every loose connection of nodes is a network. As Fr. Dani Villanueva pointed out at the conference mentioned above, networks “require investments of energy, creativity, personnel, financial and infrastructure resources.” Networks that transform peoples’ lives and environments are based on interpersonal relations and on agreements between institutions. Institutions carry the critical mass of resources necessary for game-changing outcomes.

The good news for the GSSW is that networking has always been a deeply Jesuit activity. To be part of Boston College made it, therefore, relatively easy for the School to become a networking hub, building bridges with people and communities towards a humane, just, and sustainable world. So while I have always been a huge fan of mountains, it is good to be a person who can go out and meet other people.
NETWORKING CREATES A SPACE WHERE MULTIPLE INTERACTIONS, ENCOUNTERS, AND PARTICIPATIONS HAPPEN. EVERYBODY IS A PLAYER OR A NETWORKER; EVERYBODY GIVES AND EVERYBODY GETS.
A Conversation With

AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR, SJ
Provincial of the Eastern African Province of the Society of Jesus

The title of Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator’s presentation at a Boston College conference in April 2012 may have been playful, but “The Man in Google Glasses: A Reflection on the Ethics of Networking and Governance in the Society of Jesus” resonated deeply with Alberto Godenzi, dean of the BC Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW), who was in the audience that day. In Orobator’s articulation of the value of networking to address global social problems, Godenzi recognized a link between the social justice mission of the Jesuits and of the GSSW that could be enhanced by the power of a principled network.

Thus did Orobator’s speech at the International Networking in the Society of Jesus Conference become the inspiration for this issue of the Boston College Social Work Magazine, which has as its theme “Excellence and Justice Through Networking.” Quotes from Orobator’s address appear throughout these pages. They express, as does the interview that follows, a fresh and encompassing view of interconnectedness, of the promising patterns that can emerge among peoples and institutions, and of the deeply human character of a thoughtfully conceived network.

The accompanying stories exemplify how the GSSW is interpreting this inspired vision of networking in a variety of settings at home and abroad.

The Nigerian-born Orobator is the Provincial of the Eastern African Province of the Society of Jesus, a lecturer at Hekima College Jesuit School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya, and the author of several books, most recently Theology Brewed in an African Pot.

INTERVIEW BY VICKI SANDERS
How do you define networking from the Jesuit perspective? My definition comes right out of the Jesuits’ spiritual exercises, that is, to see the reality around me as not isolated but actually connected in many ways. As a Jesuit, which is to be someone for and with others, networking takes me farther than I ordinarily would go—to seeing a bigger reality and reaching out to it.

For networks to be meaningful, they need content and purpose. What are the characteristics of the content that the Ignatian vision provides? We come out of Christian tradition. We enter into a network for a purpose and not simply for the fun of it. We do it to make a difference in the world.

In our present global reality, there are many instances where human dignity is undermined. Anything that distorts human dignity—it could be in situations of conflict, displacement, oppression, denial of rights, or failure to protect the environment, to respect human ecology—would be instances where I would be invited and, in fact, mandated to make an effort to make things just a little better.

What is the impact of imagination on a network’s capacity to address global social ills? Imagination gives us the ability to see the world as God sees it, that is, to hold everything together, to see the joy but also the pain, to see the despair but also the hope. Imagination is not about fantasy. It is seeing the concreteness of the human reality and engaging with that and discovering it is possible to do things differently.

That’s been very true in our Jesuit history as partners and friends in the education sector, for example. Look at different models of education even here in the US—the Cristo Rey schools, the Nativity schools. They are the fruits of an imagination that comes upon a situation and sees the challenges but is able to generate prospects and opportunities.

For me as a Jesuit, imagination is key. If I couldn’t imagine a world that is different from what I’m faced with, that would be death. It would be the equivalent of despair, to surrender. But with that grace of imagination, I know that the world I see could be other than the way I experience it.

What is the importance of collaboration? The Father General of our Society said at a recent meeting in Nairobi, “Our mission is big, global, but the Jesuit is small.” Here is a challenge to my imagination. Imagination is nothing if it doesn’t connect with, doesn’t expand our horizon, bring in and reach out to other people. We think of ourselves as this minimal Society, but that’s really an invitation to realize that whatever we can achieve, we almost always have to do it “in collaboration with.”

The maxim used to be that a Jesuit was “a man for others.” But our last Superior General reminded us that it’s not just for, it is with others. It’s key to realize that when we use the word collaborators, we are the collaborators, we’re not just asking people to join us. No. We’re engaging with people. There is a level of mutuality there, the realization that we’re all in this together. Whatever Jesuits have done across the centuries, we’ve been at our best when we’ve been collaborating as partners with others.

I look at my province in eastern Africa. The region itself is so vast, with a population of 250 million people. I mean, how much can you do on your own in such a situation? We run a few schools. Or you look at the Jesuit Refugee Service in the region, or at the apostolate of the mission promoting Ignatian spirituality. In all of these sectors, we now realize we are at our best when we are in partnership with others. And that’s not because we have the answers, it’s because we recognize ourselves as fellow travelers and fellow seekers. The most competent interpreters of Ignatian spirituality are not necessarily Jesuit. That isn’t just humbling, it is exciting, because it is a learning experience for me as a Jesuit.

Where I come from in Africa, there is a proverb: “You can see the sun from so many different locations.” From the backyard of your father’s house, from the farm of your aunt, it is the one sun. If you’re able to recognize how other people are gazing on and savoring that sight, there’s a connection. It is not about me having all the vision of what the sun is; it is our sharing that vision from our different locations, perspectives, and contexts that enriches our vision of reality. Innovation comes out of that.

Collaboration or network is not just talk or a theory you throw around in a lab or at a conference. You have to do something. It is a road that we must walk. And we have been doing this.

At a recent conference, there was a richness of examples: the Fe y Alegria models, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the networking of social centers in Latin America and South Asia. We are supposed to carry out our missions in partnership. That mutuality should always define what we do, how we do. It’s critical.

The BC Graduate School of Social Work is devising opportunities that model, or test, the strengths of networking with a variety of groups and organizations. What role does such an entrepreneurial approach play in creating systems that achieve social justice? Entrepreneurial spirit is the ability to do things differently. If it
is education, well, educate people to be inventors and creators of businesses, not just job seekers. If it is traditional apostolates of Ignatian spirituality, it is not just a question of taming peoples’ emotions and passions but actually liberating those in new contexts, taking spiritual exercise beyond its traditional retreat-house context onto the road, into the streets, into the schools, businesses, political arenas, and leadership. Even in intellectual apostolate—the writing, the research—it is writing in such a way that I can have impact on what’s going on around me.

There is something I liken to entrepreneurship. I call it “action scholarship.” If I’m writing about refugees and I do not even have that minimal contact with a refugee to understand his or her reality and perspective, how can I write effectively about migration, about displacement? My writing should take me to the ground. I cannot simply describe, lament, and analyze. I must also go beyond all that to envisage new ways of transforming that situation.

When you look at the problems we have to face on the continent, it’s very easy to throw up your hands and say we can’t do this. Take the refugee situation. You close down projects in one country because you think that the situation is stabilizing, then Mali explodes. But the spirit that is able to take the longer view—you realize that there are things changing, there is progress.

Please explain the importance to networks of changeability, flexibility, and adaptability.

Sometimes when we think “networking,” we think “structure,” we think parts that fit together. We almost build rigidity into our thinking—this part fits here, this part fits there, and once we have all the parts together, we say we have a network. But the moment you do that, you lose the sense of networking. The idea for me is that, as the network develops, it is almost like a spiral, it continues to transform because the situations in which the network is being created are not static. We have to build flexibility when we think networking structure.

Rigidity of thinking about networking can be depersonalizing—at an extreme, dehumanizing—because all we see are the parts that fit together, the machines that work. But it is not about the parts of the machines or the fun of saying we are connected. It is what we can do as individuals, as communities, that matters. How are we connected, what’s the quality of our relationships?

We have a proverb in my country: “Mountains don’t meet, people do.” So we can do all the networking, create all the structures, but at the end of the day, it is about real people.

A spiral is constantly open to transformation, a deepening of the roots, the connections, the contacts. We could have had this conversation on Skype, but there is something about this interaction that I can’t describe—it is human. I hope we don’t get lost in this frenzy of connecting through the wires.

The emerging networking paradigm can be seen as a force for democratization. What impact will this have on top-down or otherwise authoritative structures of governance?
The Arab Spring is the fruit of a form of networking. Institutions are being rebuilt across the whole of northern Africa. The changes are enabling democratic processes to emerge across different contexts or sectors, but we don’t know what that’s going to generate yet.

But what I find exciting is the very idea of change. The world as we know it on the continent is not going to remain the same. The structure that is pyramidal, where authority devolves only from the head to the rest of the body, that structure, one way or the other, will have to change. As a networked society, community, or world we have such potential looking horizontally that it is impossible to remain beholden to a sole authority.

For the kind of world we live in and the context in which we carry out our mission as Jesuits, leadership also has to be adaptable to this context. Solidarity takes on a whole new meaning. We realize that it doesn’t have to all come from the top, that if we look sideways, we are able to invest in local situations and trust the local wisdom to devise new ways of realizing our mission.

What role do universities play in a networked world? And what particular contribution can a school of social work make?

One role is what I call “facilitated conversations.” Universities can become self-sufficient, insular. We have to talk not just across disciplines but also across contexts—be they cultural, social, political, economic—so that whatever you are doing at the Graduate School of Social Work, you are also able to identify conversational partners in those other contexts. There is a mutually enriching process there, a sharing of knowledge, resources, ideas, even down to a sharing of personnel. There’s also a sharing of expertise. I benefit in the global south from a graduate of your school who works there, from his training and the social work intellectual tradition he comes out of. In turn, he benefits by connecting with us. If that intellectual tradition can be made more open to conversations, networking and conferencing, that would be a huge contribution.
PARTNERS IN SOCIAL WELFARE

A New International PhD Program

Throughout Latin America, a critical shortage of doctoral programs in social work and social welfare hinders the development of social work as a profession and of effective welfare services. In partnership with Jesuit universities in Latin American countries, and with financial support from Banco Santander, the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) has launched an international PhD program in Social Welfare. The long-term goal is to strengthen social welfare education in Latin American countries by providing training that fosters students’ connections with their home countries, rather than contributing to a northward-flowing exodus of talent.

BY JANE WHITEHEAD

In September 2012, Pablo Gaitán and Ana María Vasquez embarked on a five-year program leading to a doctorate in international social welfare. Like the other six beginning graduate students in the GSSW PhD program, they are taking online foundational courses in research methods. With one difference: For their first year, Gaitán and Vasquez will be based in Mexico, Gaitán at Universidad Iberoamericana-Ciudad de México in Mexico City and Vasquez at Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente (ITESO) in the western city of Guadalajara.

Gaitán, 30, and Vasquez, 37, are pioneers in an innovative low-residence international doctoral program in social welfare at Boston College for graduates of Jesuit universities in Latin America. Their enrollment at the GSSW marks a waypoint in a collaborative effort to mobilize the resources of the global Jesuit education network to build capacity for social welfare.

Throughout Latin America, says James Lubben, Louise McMahon Ahearn Professor of Social Work and director of the initiative, a dearth of doctoral programs in social work and social welfare impedes the development of social work as a profession and of effective welfare services. The new PhD program aims to strengthen social welfare education in Latin America by providing training that preserves students’ connections to their home countries, rather than contributing to a northward-flowing brain drain, Lubben explains.

As a Fulbright Senior Specialist at Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago, Chile, in the summer of 2008, Lubben realized the pressing need to develop social welfare education in Latin America. In many Latin American countries, he says, social work remains “a para-professional kind of career,” with faculty teaching in social work departments who either have practical experience in social work but no research degree, or doctorates in other fields, such as sociology and political science, but no social work training.

Admitting more international students into BC’s traditional doctoral program was not the answer, says Lubben. “We bring the best and brightest to Boston, expect them to stay five to six years, socialize them into research as conducted in the US, and create a divorce between them and social ties in their home country.” Not surprisingly, many find the easiest career path is to stay in the US.

So the challenge was to design a program that would cut down time away from home and encourage students to focus on research relevant to their own countries by building on their existing social ties and social capital.

“Success has many parents” is a favorite axiom of Lubben, and many institutions and individuals
NETWORKING NEEDS A HUB OR A FACILITATOR. IF UNDERSTOOD AS A COMMUNITY OF INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS, NETWORKING PRESUPPOSES A HUB.
contributed to shaping the new program. In April 2010, Jesuit Superior General Father Adolfo Nicolás called on all Jesuit universities to develop closer ties and share their resources more fully. He did so in his keynote address to an international conference in Mexico City on “Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe.” His admonition provided a catalyst and context for exploratory contacts between BC and a select group of Jesuit institutions in Mexico and South America.

BC Jesuit Institute Director T. Frank Kennedy, SJ, played a key role in identifying potential partner universities, thanks to his extensive travel experience in South America, says Lubben. With Kennedy’s advice, and that of GSSW Assistant Professor Rocio Calvo, he and GSSW Dean Alberto Godenzi identified a handful of candidates among universities with existing social work programs or strong social science faculties. Representatives from all the schools met at Boston College in November 2010 to explore needs, possibilities, and logistics. In addition to Iberoamericana and ITESO, the group included Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia), Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), and Universidad Alberto Hurtado (Chile).

The fact that the initial business meetings could be conducted entirely in Spanish, with Calvo, Godenzi, and Kennedy, all fluent Spanish speakers, on the BC side of negotiations, made for a freer and more lively exchange of ideas than would have been the case had the guests been obliged to speak English, Lubben observes. (The one Brazilian participant was fluent enough in Spanish to participate.) And to “convey symbolically that students from Latin American countries would be comfortable here,” Lubben invited bilingual students currently in the doctoral program to the social gatherings.

After the initial round of meetings, follow-up email exchanges, telephone calls, and campus visits resulted in a proposal for a new doctoral program in social welfare that would be run as a partnership between BC and participating Latin American universities. Key features would be joint enrollment at BC and the partner university; division of time between BC and the home university, so that students spend two years in residence in the US, rather than the usual five; the appointment of a faculty coordinator at all universities; and the identification of mentors at BC and the home university.

Converting enthusiasm for the project into binding bilateral institutional agreements proved challenging. “It was not easy for us, because it was the first double-degree program we would have with a foreign university,” wrote Agustín Basave, then the director of graduate studies at Iberoamericana, and now dean for external relations tasked with promoting new partnerships and international projects in an email. Basave, the former Mexican ambassador to Ireland, mobilized his diplomatic skills to meet both internal and external resistance, deploying personal connections in the Education Department to overcome logistical and legal obstacles. BC also forged an agreement with ITESO, and Lubben is optimistic that ties with at least some of the other schools represented at the November 2010 meeting will be finalized in 2013.

Basave sees benefits to both institutions. “Ibero will have a partnership with a first-class American university that may open doors of future academic cooperation in other areas,” he wrote, “and through it Mexico will get the know-how of social welfare from the best source available.” In the other direction, “Students from Mexico will enrich the BC program, and the School will have the possibility to deal first-hand with the problems of underdevelopment—Latin America, after all, is a region that has a long way to go in terms of social welfare.”

Start-up costs for the program’s first three years are covered by a grant from the Spanish international bank, Banco Santander, through its US subsidiary, Sovereign Bank. Santander Chairman Emilio Botín established Santander Universities Global Division in 1996 to provide financial support for university projects that promote global dissemination of knowledge and experience. “Supporting education is the best investment we can make,” said the Jesuit-educated Botín at the ceremony marking the program’s official launch at BC on June 30, 2011.
The grant covered the cost of hiring a Spanish-speaking program coordinator, Alexandria Burk, PhD ’08, a part-time instructor in the Romance Languages Program, who has been in the post since April 2012. It funded instructional design support for the development of the online course component, under the supervision of Elizabeth A. Clark, director of Boston College’s Instructional Design and eTeaching Services. Travel costs for students and faculty and stipends for the international students while they are in Boston were also covered. As in the case of all doctoral students, BC will waive their tuition costs.

As Pablo Gaitán and Ana María Vasquez logged into the “Welcome” sessions of SW951: “Survey of Research Methods in Social and Behavioral Science” and SW954: “Models for Social Work Intervention Research,” what laid before them? In addition to the two online BC courses, which their Boston-based peers also took, they enrolled in two or three foundation courses at their home universities. The second year brings them to BC for an intensive dose of statistics and further training in social and behavioral science research. As they work on their first independent scholarly research project in year three, they will be home based, but making visits to BC for the oral defense of their dissertation proposal and the final defense.

Gaitán, a native of Mexico City with a master’s in sociology, says he values the program’s “solid methodological and statistical emphasis” and the “research-intervention approach to social problems.” The low residence requirement was attractive in that it reduces living expenses and makes it possible for him to continue working. He heads a team of five advisors at Iberoamericana’s counseling service for undergraduates.

“Everything is new for me,” says Gaitán, as this is his first taste of graduate work in the US, and his first online learning experience. He admits to being slightly apprehensive about building relationships with classmates and professors. Vasquez shares his concern, but hopes that mutual curiosity between them and their Boston-based peers “may lead us to share more and work more closely.”

Vasquez holds master’s degrees both in International Relations (from Sussex University in the UK) and Communications (from ITESO). She is Convenor for the BA in International Relations at ITESO and teaches a course in International Relations Theory. She was not considering doctoral studies in the near future until the BC/ITESO agreement opened up the possibility. The new program drew her attention with its international and interdisciplinary focus, and “a very attractive and challenging mix of qualitative and quantitative work.” The low-residence requirement factored into her final decision to go ahead, she says, as “it will allow me to continue working with my colleagues and students at ITESO, and nourish my work with the BC group.”

“We are just about to take the first step in a very promising venture,” says Iberoamericana’s Agustín Basave. For his part, Lubben is confident that the presence of such experienced professionals as Gaitán and Vasquez in the doctoral program will “enrich our traditional doctoral students, who will now have a view of the world that they probably hadn’t envisioned—and it’s the real world in which they’re going to pursue their careers.”

And if all goes according to plan, in four years’ time the program’s first graduates will start the work of fostering Mexico’s new generation of informed and skilled social welfare officials. ☀
THIS WORLD FUNCTIONS BY CREATING EVER-EXPANDING, LOOSELY CIRCUMSCRIBED WEBS OF CONTACTS AND CONNECTIONS TO MAXIMIZE THE SHARING OF INFORMATION, RESOURCES, AND SERVICES.
NEW HOPE FOR URBAN REFUGEES

Evaluating Jesuit Refugee Service in South Africa

More than half the world’s 10.5 million refugees now live in urban areas rather than in camps, a dramatic shift from 10 years ago, when the figure was around 13 percent, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As humanitarian agencies scramble to find new models for aiding displaced people in complex urban settings, a collaborative effort by Jesuit Refugee Service South Africa and researchers and practitioners from the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work to evaluate and redirect one struggling program may provide a blueprint for best practices in a field critically in need of guidance.

By Jane Whitehead

South Africa has the world’s highest rates of asylum seekers. Refugees fleeing violence and political and economic turmoil in Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and other African countries have inundated government and non-governmental agencies in its major cities, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

With an estimated 450,000 forced migrants living in Johannesburg and Pretoria, Fr. David Holdcroft, SJ, former country director for Jesuit Relief Service (JRS) South Africa and now regional director for JRS Southern Africa, saw an urgent need to reshape JRS efforts to assist this population. Realizing that traditional camp-based models for the care of refugees required radical revision, JRS in the mid-2000s started the Livelihoods Programme to help refugees to economic self-sufficiency.

By 2011, the program had an annual budget of around $300,000 and four full-time workers providing services directly to some 1,500 refugees, and through them supporting their families. But as Holdcroft admitted frankly, the program was stretched to the limit and its staff was “overwhelmed by needs” and lacked the expertise to find a way forward.

To rescue the faltering program and help steer its future direction, Holdcroft, in February 2011, reached out to Dr. Maryanne Loughry, associate director of JRS Australia and research professor at the BC Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) and the BC Center for Human Rights and International Justice (CHRIJ), with whom he had worked in Australia. Through Loughry, Holdcroft was familiar with BC and its resources and support for the work of JRS. He had also met CHRIJ Director Professor David Hollenbach, SJ, and GSSW Dean Alberto Godenzi. All agreed that a thorough evaluation of the program’s current state would be a logical first step towards improving its performance, and they enlisted the research expertise of GSSW Associate Professor Thomas M. Crea. In close collaboration with JRS staff in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and with social work intern Guerdine Louis, GSSW ’12, who spent three months doing fieldwork with JRS in early 2012, Loughry and Crea set up a process that will, Crea hopes, build the program’s capacity by strengthening, systematizing, and measuring its progress.

This is the first time Loughry and Crea have collaborated. “What we’ve done is put our two capacities together,” says Loughry, an expert in refugees and forced migration, who recently evaluated an urban refugee program for Iraqi refugees living in Syria. “I had the refugee experience, and I helped Tom, who had the academic evaluation experience, apply that in South Africa.” She notes that Crea,
who specializes in program evaluations, already had experience in Africa, having worked with colleagues from Imperial College London on the evaluation of a project to provide cash transfers to the families of children with HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Loughry and Crea visited Johannesburg in August 2011 for 10 days to get a sense of the program’s scope and activities. After shadowing program workers and supervisors in Johannesburg and Pretoria, interviewing them, and visiting some program beneficiaries in their homes, Crea came away with the overall impression of the huge scale of the task and the refugees’ daunting level of need. He met families of five or six people crammed into one room of an English-style bungalow, theoretically entitled to work permits and freedom of movement, but facing the reality of learning new languages, finding schools for their children, and processing their refugee claims, while dealing with hostility and sometimes violence from a local population frustrated by poverty and unemployment. This picture is confirmed by a Women’s Refugee Commission report: No Place to Go But Up: Urban Refugees in Johannesburg, S. A., October 2011, part of a year-long study of urban refugee livelihoods. It also highlights the particular hardships of refugee women, lacking childcare and often facing gender-based violence.

Loughry and Crea found that the JRS Livelihoods Programme offers four paths to assist urban refugees to generate income, according to their background and skills. To help integrate refugees and defuse tensions with local people, Arrupe House provides training in arts, crafts, sewing, and English language skills to both local South Africans and displaced women. Refugees with some experience of business, or skills such as hairdressing or videography, can apply for Small Business Grants (SBG) to cover the start-up costs of a new enterprise. Vocational Skills Training (VST) grants for courses up to six months long aim to help clients learn marketable skills, and professionally qualified refugees, including doctors, pharmacists, engineers, and teachers, can receive financial and administrative help with applications to the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), the body that verifies foreign qualifications.

Livelihoods Coordinator Kanabo Skhosana cites a couple of examples to show the program’s impact. Laura Kashika Lula was 10 years old when her family fled from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to South Africa in 2004. At age 18, Lula received a VST grant to train as a receptionist, and though she is currently working as a nanny, she hopes to use her new skills to find work in a hotel or guesthouse and help her elder brother support their four siblings. Shuga Chibalonza, 33, also fled from the DRC, where rebels targeted his father, a government worker. When rebels attacked his home in 2009, Chibalonza escaped through a window and made his way to South Africa. He has not heard from any family members since. A photographer and videographer, in 2011 he received a SBG from JRS Livelihoods to put towards the cost of a state-of-the-art video camera that he has used to build a home-based recording business.

Yet in spite of hopeful progress by some beneficiaries like Lula and Chibalonza, Holdcroft wrote in an email that before Loughry and Crea became involved, “we weren’t consistent in our practices, we weren’t sure if we were reaching the people we really wanted to reach, and even though a number of refugees would return after a while to thank us, we honestly did not know what was happening to the vast majority.” Loughry says that she and Crea found “a very compassionate staff—all local, all South Africans—who had a good rapport with the refugees,” but inadequate systems for ensuring fair, effective allocation of resources and for collecting data on which an evaluation could be based. “A large number of applications were not filed or responded to, and there was no system for recording interviews or who had got a grant,” says Loughry.

After their initial fact-finding phase, Loughry and Crea recommended ten immediate action steps to stabilize the program and lay the groundwork for a thorough evaluation. These included setting up a filing system to track aid applications and the JRS response, basic budget planning, and consistent follow-up of beneficiaries. They also began a process of reframing the program’s aim, from its original lofty—and hard to measure—goal of fostering “self-reliance,” towards a concept of “income generation” based on a number of prescribed steps and specific program activities.

Following Loughry and Crea’s first intervention,
there were a number of staff changes in the program, and new systems for staff supervision were put in place. Loughry, who visited the Women’s Refugee Commission in New York to compare notes about the program, says that colleagues there told her that in relation to urban refugee aid, “there’s no agency that really knows what is best practice, because it’s such a new field. So everybody was struggling, and we were just one of the strugglers.” Crea also acknowledged the importance of cultural humility on the part of outsiders providing support to the program. “I am mindful about not coming in as an expert, coming in to solve the problem. I’m coming in to learn about the problem.”

In January 2012, Master’s Student Guerdine Louis began a three-month placement with the Livelihoods Programme as a BC intern concentrating in global practice. Working alongside the local staff, Louis interviewed applicants and assessed their needs in relation to the program’s offerings. She found “a lot of room for interpretation” in the documentation and a lack of standardization in vital areas such as assessment of applicants’ English language skills. Her first-hand information was critical, says Crea, in informing an intensive week of strategic discussion with program supervisors and staff members in April 2012.

In that week, says Crea, from the time he entered the Johannesburg office straight from the plane on Monday morning, to the time he left on Saturday evening, the work involved “getting everything out on the table and putting the pieces together.” Working long hours, Skhosana, Louis, and Crea developed a strategy for assessing strengths and vulnerabilities for all JRS Livelihoods clients. They hammered out a Logic Model—a programmatic framework setting out measurable goals and objectives for each program area, and formulated a Decision Tree, a flow chart to help staff steer new clients to appropriate help—by providing a systematic triage process to determine English skills, business skills, and level of need. They also developed an evaluation and data collection plan for each of the program areas. When they presented their proposals at a staff meeting at the end of the week, Crea says, “there was a lot of enthusiasm because it gave people a road map where there wasn’t one before.”

JRS staff used a revised version of the proposal to obtain a substantial grant from UNHCR in June 2012, and Crea was awarded a sub-grant by JRS South Africa to start Phase I of the Livelihoods Programme evaluation. This project included development of a new administrative database, using the new systematic forms of data collection now in place, and interviews and focus groups with previous beneficiaries beginning in the spring of 2013 with help from former MSW intern Christine O’Halloran. “Now we’re in much better shape to really begin an evaluation,” says Loughry, “and with our documentation we’ve also regained the confidence of some donors who were showing some concern.”

Holdcroft credits the BC team with “invaluable work.” They “guided us from a kind of unreflective crisis phase, put us in touch with academic thinking, and then began to put systems in place, thus building our capacity,” he wrote.

Crea and Loughry are optimistic that lessons learned from the Livelihoods Programme may have wider application. As Crea puts it: “Given the rapidly evolving situation of urban refugees, and the relative lack of literature on the topic, I believe this partnership has strong potential to contribute useful and pragmatic guidance on best practices for this population.”

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ADVANCING COMMON GOALS
The Mutual Benefits of Collaborating With a High School That Serves Low-Income Students

Schools and social service agencies that work with communities in need often accomplish great things with few resources. The best of them are self-reflective and strive for constant improvement. They are often held back, however, by practical realities. They have limited staff and access to expertise, and their day-to-day responsibilities leave little time for taking stock and developing new approaches. The Boston College Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) can provide what these organizations need: time and resources to research, study, and analyze their issues, and to propose solutions that will further uplift the people they serve. Equally, by engaging with their communities and the real-world challenges that they face, the GSSW can deepen teaching and scholarship and advance the mission of social work as a force for social justice.

The GSSW has entered into formal agreements with three major Boston-area social service agencies: Cristo Rey Boston High School, Catholic Charities Boston, and the Home for Little Wanderers. Through these agreements, the GSSW is not only helping to improve social service practice and outcomes, it is learning lessons directly from vulnerable communities that will enhance the training of social workers and enrich the discipline of social work itself.

BY JERI ZEDER

For years, the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work had been sending its students for field placements at Cristo Rey Boston, a Catholic college preparatory high school serving academically struggling, low-income students. Recently, Ruth G. McRoy, Donahue and DiFelice Professor of Social Work, took a closer look at the school and saw this: a vulnerable and diverse population of 350 students of mostly African-American, Haitian/Caribbean, and Southeast Asian descent—and a 100 percent acceptance rate into two- and four-year colleges. “Given the characteristics of the population and the success of the school,” McRoy says, “I was really intrigued to find out: What type of model are they using? What’s making a difference? What can we learn from this? What can we extract? How can we partner with them? How can we use the diversity of the population to really give our students an opportunity to become engaged, to go into a community, serve a community, learn from a community, and give back to the community?”

The importance of learning from high schools like Cristo Rey—high schools that close the achievement gap and make the prospect of higher education a reality for vulnerable children—is enormous. A recent report from the Brookings Institute reveals that low-income students benefit from attending high-scoring high schools, but they typically attend schools that score in the 42nd percentile on state exams. In contrast, the high
NETWORKING OFFERS US THE POSSIBILITY OF AN EXPANSIVE, HORIZONTAL WORLDVIEW. THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THIS WORLDVIEW DEPENDS ON THE RELATIVE DEPTH OF ITS CORE VALUES.
school of the average middle- and high-income student scores in the 61st percentile. A report to Congress by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance found that college enrollment for low-income students was 40 percent in 2004, down from 54 percent in 1992. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ranks the US at 14th in the world in the percentage of young adults who have attained college degrees, and reports that students whose parents have not gone to college have only a 29 percent chance of attending college themselves. Understanding what makes schools like Cristo Rey successful is clearly a key piece of improving the life prospects of vulnerable students.

McRoy reached out to Cristo Rey, and after a series of meetings, the high school and the graduate school entered into a formal Memorandum of Understanding. Both entities have committed to expanding their collaborations beyond field placements. The GSSW will boost Cristo Rey by assisting with professional and program development, research, and evaluation. Cristo Rey, in turn, will broaden the research, teaching, and learning opportunities of GSSW faculty and students.

Through these partnerships, GSSW is laying the groundwork for establishing a Center for Vulnerable Children and Families at Boston College. McRoy describes these partnerships as mutually beneficial. “We are building social work skills, we are building excellence, we are involved in promoting social justice, and it all comes about through connections,” McRoy says. “We can impact the community, and the community most importantly can impact those from Boston College who go work there.”

The problem wasn’t parent indifference: parents at Cristo Rey could be counted on to attend school-sponsored events like back-to-school night or report-card night. It was more a matter of fostering parent initiative. Elizabeth Degnan, Cristo Rey’s director of counseling, explains: “What I think was missing was an opportunity for our families to have a voice of their own. We hadn’t had a PTA or any parent organization in which our families could really feel that they had a voice in the decision-making of our school.” She continues, “Many of our students are going to be the first in their families to go to college. Many of our parents are immigrants to the United States, and I think that the educational system here can be intimidating to parents in that it is something foreign to them.”

To create an effective parent engagement program, Cristo Rey turned to the GSSW for support. In the spring of 2010, nine graduate students enrolled in an independent research project with Associate Professor Thomas M. Crea to tackle the issue of parent engagement. The social work students reviewed the academic literature on parental engagement practices in schools that serve low-income, ethnically diverse, and urban populations. They prepared and administered surveys translated into the languages of Cristo Rey’s families. They ran focus groups and conducted interviews with parents and teachers, collected and analyzed all their data, and ultimately crafted a proposal with several options for parent engagement programs at Cristo Rey.

At the end of the semester, Crea and his students presented their work to Degnan and to Cristo Rey’s then principal, Fr. José Medina. One of their findings revealed a gap in perception between teachers
and parents: Teachers didn’t see parents as being as involved as the parents saw themselves. Another key take-away: Parent engagement is the product of better, not more, school-home communication. “We learned that the quantity of communication and contact with our families did not equal positive engagement,” says Degnan. “We had quite a bit of communication, but we really needed to improve quality.”

With findings and proposals in hand, Medina decided to incorporate a parent engagement piece into the school’s new counseling and advising program. That program places a teacher or staff member at the center of an advisory group consisting of 12 students per group. The plan is to assign parents to each group, and to develop a parent leadership program connected to the advisories. The GSSW will assist Cristo Rey further with program implementation and fine-tuning.

Degnan is pleased with what was accomplished. “With the resources we have, trying to do that ourselves would have been impossible,” she says.

Crea sees many benefits for the GSSW: “We have data now on a population in a setting that has not been studied that much in the field, so we can contribute to a body of knowledge about social work in the schools in an urban setting among low-income high schoolers who are being prepared to go to college,” he says.

“I’d like to do another class like that,” Crea says. “You have to learn by doing, and this provided our graduate students an opportunity to interact with teachers, with parents, and develop some skills in terms of research and in understanding how an abstract concept like parent engagement plays out in the real world.”

The GSSW’s impact may be wide-reaching. “We intend to share what we learn with the other 25 schools in the Cristo Rey network,” says Thielman, the school’s president. “We have a tradition of sharing best practices with each other, often through our conferences.”

Cristo Rey Boston is already thinking of the next project: connecting with social service agencies associated with the GSSW for the benefit of its high schoolers. “As a small school, we understand that we’re not going to be the ones who are going to be able to provide all of the resources to our families,” Degnan says. “So what we really want to strengthen is our capacity to connect our families with the resources in the community that already exist. We don’t need to reinvent the wheel if there’s somebody else who’s already doing it well. What we need to do is be able to know who out there is doing it well so we can connect our families.”

To that end, and with the GSSW’s help, Cristo Rey is already reaching out to a community service center of Catholic Charities Boston that will be able to provide supportive social services to Cristo Rey’s families—and help Cristo Rey keep getting its kids into college.
IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION LAB
A Pioneering Effort to Ensure That Newcomers Succeed

The world is migrating; 215 million people live outside their country of origin. In the United States, that translates to 40.5 million foreign born residents; in Massachusetts, to nearly 1 million. How well society responds not only to this population's settlement but also to its inclusion in all aspects of civic life has far-reaching implications for the nation's future. Immigrant integration, a relatively new term in the American mainstream, is defined by the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) as the dynamic two-way process by which both the receiving society and the immigrant find their way into a new, cohesive, and collective effort. Believing that the network of immigrants, social workers, and the communities they live in and serve could benefit from the participation of a research center focused on their issues, the GSSW established the Immigrant Integration Lab (IIL). It is focusing on inclusion through consulting, organizing, researching, and educating at the intersection of social work, social policy, and immigrant integration.

BY VICKI SANDERS

Westy Egmont, research professor and head of the Immigrant Integration Lab (IIL) at GSSW, sees immigrant integration as one of the most complexly intriguing issues of the 21st century. “Whether we’re talking about a local neighborhood health center, national eldercare policy for Japan, human trafficking across the Mediterranean, or who will begin stores in neighborhoods that need renewal, they all have to do with the phenomena of migration,” he says. “We can’t be engaged with the wellbeing of humans without appreciating that we need to know where they’re coming from, where they’re headed, and what the journey involves by way of risk, trauma, challenges, and opportunities.”

The concept of immigrant integration is only now becoming part of the bigger conversation about immigration in the United States. It is consequently capturing the increased attention of the social work professionals, scholars, community leaders, policy makers, and the organizations and practitioners who serve newcomers. Egmont, a leader in the field for more than 20 years, says it is imperative that America seize the moment to better understand and assist the process of inclusion. Without informed thinking and adequate systems, this growing cohort of Americans, so full of promise, could be hindered in realizing their full potential—to the detriment of both the newcomers and their new country.

“When you look at the American classroom and see that 1 of 4 children has an immigrant parent and 1 of 5 is foreign born, you realize that the next generation coming up through the system needs good education and good social work,” Egmont explains. “It needs folks who can help in the navigation of a complicated society so the individual doesn’t become lost, disenfranchised, forgotten, or alienated. On the other side, it needs community agents who are working for social cohesion, community well-being, and security and who are find-
NETWORKING IN A LARGE SENSE CREATES COMMUNITIES, ENABLES SHARING AND CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH INTENTIONALITY, INTERESTS, AND BENEFITS.
ing the connectors that enable people to overcome their difficulties.”

Because social workers are on the frontline of addressing human need, they are going to be experiencing first-hand the increasing complexities of cultural diversity in their workplace, be it a government policy office, an early childhood education center, or a geriatric care facility, Egmont says. Almost every student will be dealing with immigrants as part of their target population because immigrants everywhere have a distinct set of human needs.

The way in which the GSSW has chosen to focus on immigrant integration is pioneering, Egmont says. “While we work with government on the broad issue, our efforts are to raise consciousness in our own field of social work. What is the role of social work in immigrant integration? Who are the agents of immigrant integration who need training, support, research, and tools? How do the major systems provide for the individual who lacks general cultural familiarity and needs orientation and assistance to navigate in a new arena? We are mobilizing future social workers to play an active role in immigrant inclusion.”

Egmont is motivated by the belief that the future of the country rests on the continued flow of humankind across our borders and into our neighborhoods: “We are committing ourselves to be active agents, where our teaching, research, consulting, and staff training is empowering the community to provide good social services and to build far healthier communities than happen when there’s no intentionality and where communities suffer living in past paradigms.

America has an immigration policy and not an immigrant integration policy. Social workers as advocates bring to policy development a perspective of human need rather than just legal precedent,” Egmont adds.

Combine the social justice mission of immigrant integration with the social worker’s central part in achieving it, and you have BC’s rationale for housing a research laboratory in its school of social work. “Applied research is connecting, it’s putting students into real dialogue in real time with real leaders about real needs,” says Egmont. From community policing to open housing, from parent engagement in education to accessible healthcare, the IIL is focused on inclusive policy and practice.

“I commend the BC Graduate School of Social Work on this remarkable achievement in establishing the Immigrant Integration Lab. It’s like no other that we know of at a major US research university,” says Eva Millona, executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition and an advisor to the IIL.

Her 25-year-old, 140-member organization appreciates that the resources of a university can support agencies such as hers through research and the expertise of interns and graduates trained in immigration issues. “Universities are built to do the kind of in-depth research that most nonprofits cannot undertake,” Millona says. “A lab researching integration at a school of social work could inform future generations of social workers about best models for helping their clients assimilate into our economy and society.” It could likewise complement and inform an organization’s own research efforts and vice versa, she adds.

An interesting example of this potential came during a presentation in September 2012 to Boston area government and agency leaders by students in Egmont’s summer course, “Immigrant Integration: Social Benefits in the EU Compared with the US.” Millona was among the gathered experts who heard students’ assessment of organizations and programs they visited in Oxford, London, Belgium, and Paris and their recommendations of models that could work in America. Among them was the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), an interactive tool and reference guide to assess, compare, and improve integration policy. “It was good to be reminded of the EU’s MIPEX, which might be replicated here in comparison of state-to-state integration policies,” says Millona.

As a result of the students’ findings and because they are in concert with the Immigrant Integration Lab’s intention to identify benchmarks for effective immigrant inclusion, adapting MIPEX for use by US entities is high on Egmont’s list of possible research projects. “Our focus is to pursue a research agenda that utilizes peer assessment, identifies benchmarks, measures progress, and promotes promising practices,” Egmont explains. “Benchmark issues include family reunification, length of residency, labor mobility, housing patterns, and education attainment.”
Still in the Formative Stage, the Immigrant Integration Lab is already making strides. A first research fellowship has been awarded to a student developing a humanitarian assistance plan for basic human needs of asylum seekers being released from detention centers. The IIL is connecting to initiatives at the White House where integration has been added to the President’s proposed immigration reform bill; the Department of Homeland Security; the National Partnership for New Americans, a 12-state coalition of immigrant advocacy organizations; and European research centers like the Migration Policy Group (MPG). It is also seeking to assist the US Conference of Mayors and the National Governors Association with their immigrant integration agendas.

At the September 2012 National Immigrant Integration Conference in Baltimore, Egmont explored how to improve awareness among colleagues of each other’s research. “By organizing disparate scholars for information sharing, agenda development, and dissemination of research findings, the lab is identifying and leveraging key partner relationships,” Egmont says.

He also moderated a workshop on the usefulness of academic research to immigrant leadership, who often feel they are treated “like mice in a lab—people are talking at them, not with them,” Egmont says. “We have to build partnerships if we want to do responsible community-based research.”

Closer to home, there are 180 agencies that have potential relationships with the GSSW within an hour’s drive of the school, and the Immigrant Integration Lab sees collaborative opportunity with them. In December 2012 a colloquium was held at BC to open a dialogue “to inspire and inform the community of what’s going on at the school and to listen effectively so the school can be responsive to the community’s needs,” Egmont says. Demetri Papademetriou, head of the leading Washington, DC, think tank, Migration Policy Institute, discussed the inevitable escalation of global human-capital migration along with global ideas, capital, and goods.

Among initiatives on the table at the IIL are adding field education sites for GSSW students; strengthening the curriculum so more students, regardless of their social work specialty, are sensitized in the classroom to immigrant issues; and providing continuing education opportunities for agencies’ bicultural staff, directors, and providers. Some of these people may be in the job because they have language capacity or other skills but may not have formal social work education. “With hundreds of social work programs in the US, pioneering efforts can have a multiplied impact on a generation of professionals in service,” Egmont explains, “especially with the phenomenon of the high percentage of care givers who are themselves immigrants.”

Such ideas resonate with Marjean Perhot, director of refugee and immigration services at Catholic Charities in Boston. Most of her employees are not social workers; they have been hired for other abilities required for immigrant resettlement. “Right now,” Perhot says, “many people in resettlement agencies like ours are paraprofessional social workers, so they don’t have the skills that social work graduates have. New skill sets will make us both better partners.”

Not only that, she continues, when her clients move out from under the umbrella of Catholic Charities and are dealing with the myriad challenges of daily life, they need to be met by social workers at every turn who know how to deal with newcomer populations. “If social workers can blend cultural competency with the work they are already doing, it will make for a more robust delivery to these populations,” Perhot says.

At its best, education is responsive to a community’s pulse, and today the pulse of the community is throbbing with new blood, increased nationality, languages, and racial diversity, says Egmont. “We are either isolated or we are players. And if we are players, we are connecting ourselves to the leadership that recognizes the opportunity to work in partnership with the university. That is so that students are welcomed in where they can get leadership and training and internships, where courses are designed to actually prepare people to work in those environments, where the research is in response to the questions the community is asking, and where there’s an opportunity to use knowledge for the advancement of human kind.”
DEVOID OF CONTENT, NETWORKING RESEMBLES BEWILDERING WHORLS OF PARTICULARITIES RATHER THAN A SYMPHONY OF CREATIVE ENERGIES AND SYNERGIES.
By mid-century, the majority of the US population will be made up of minorities, predominantly HispanicLatinos. Here’s why that matters: HispanicLatinos are typically poorer, have less years of formal education, and are more disadvantaged than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts. Unless the socio-economic status of HispanicLatinos advances, the US is looking at a future of lower economic growth and tax revenues, with serious implications for the country’s competitiveness and security.

In response, the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) launched a new HispanicLatino Track that focuses on the cultures and communities of HispanicLatinos here and abroad, with courses conducted entirely in Spanish. The goal is to graduate bilingual leaders who are equipped to bring interventions that can change the trajectory of HispanicLatino life—and that of the country.

Writer and social critic Jesse Treviño is sounding the clarion call: If current demographic trends continue, the American population is going to be poorer, less educated, and more disadvantaged than it is today. The implications for the country’s future are enormous. But is anyone listening?

The Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW), for one, is. A 2007 report of the Task Force on Latino/as in Social Work Education, commissioned by the Council on Social Work Education, stated that “the field of social work is unprepared for the rapid growth in the Latino/a population in the United States.” In response to the Task Force’s findings and to Treviño’s call, the School established a HispanicLatino Track (HLT) which compliments and strengthens the existing MSW program.

The HispanicLatino population in the US, Treviño says, is growing rapidly (as is the population of other minorities), while the population of non-Hispanic whites is declining. But the socio-economic status of “HispanicLatinos” (a term coined by Treviño) is far lower than that of non-Hispanic whites. Taken together, these facts point to a future population that will not be able to generate the growth and tax revenues that keep our country secure, prosperous, and strong. Add to this that the US is already struggling with difficult fiscal realities and must also compete economically on a global scale, and we’re at nothing less than a “decisive point” in American history. It’s one, Treviño says, to which we are not paying enough attention.

Recent data bear this out. By 2050, largely through rising birthrates, HispanicLatinos will make up one-third of the population, up from 16 percent today, while the non-Hispanic white population will fall below 50 percent. More than one in four HispanicLatinos lives below the poverty line, with a poverty rate that’s more than double that of non-Hispanic whites. Fifty-nine percent of non-Hispanic white students complete college in six years, but only 51 percent of HispanicLatino students do.
Addressing the consequences of these trends will require the deft and strategic allocation of resources. Treviño believes that America’s colleges and universities are among the institutions that can make a real difference. “Most of the economic progress that this country has made has resulted from the most powerful force in human development, which is education,” Treviño says. “Education has to remain, and is, the driving force of whatever economic progress we make. What universities should be doing now, in my opinion, and what states should be doing and what local governments should be doing, is understanding the whole panoply of the ultimate impact of the HispanicLatino population. And if they do so, they will not retreat from such things that are called affirmative actions. They will, in fact, double-down by making sure that the new, younger population has the tools in order to pay taxes that will support an aging population and the country’s future national security needs.”

The Graduate School of Social Work’s new HLT aims to increase students’ linguistic and cultural competencies to work with HispanicLatino communities here and abroad. “We at the GSSW will strengthen our efforts to attract students from Hispanic backgrounds while at the same time increasing cultural awareness and Spanish language skills of students with different backgrounds,” explains Dean Alberto Godenzi. “The courses will differ not just in terms of being taught in Spanish but, as importantly, by familiarizing students with the realities of Latino life in the US and their respective home countries.”

Assistant Professor Rocio Calvo teaches Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues, a foundational required course for all MSW students. She teaches one section in English and another section in Spanish for students who qualify for HLT. The course focuses not only on HispanicLatinos, but on a broad range of historically oppressed groups and on the development of cultural competency skills necessary for the effective practice of social work. Calvo, citing the same demographic projections as Treviño, says social workers who can conduct their practices in Spanish will have a competitive edge, and that her students are aware of this: “In the not too distant future, it will be a real asset to be able to engage and collaborate with Latino clients in their native language. This is what I think the students thought when enrolling in the class,” she says. Dean Godenzi is convinced that “adding a second language to the portfolio of graduating students deepens empathy and expands imagination, both core principles of a Jesuit education.”

In response to the new Hispanic/Latino Track program offering, Erin Ramsey, a dual degree student in clinical social work and theology and ministry said, “Having lived in Central America for two and a half years before starting my MSW, I knew that the ability to work with ‘cultural humility’ with Spanish-speaking families here in the US would be an important part of my social work practice. The new Hispanic/Latino Track at BC will assist me in working towards my goal by helping me focus my studies on the unique set of strengths and challenges that this population faces. As social workers, it’s our ethical responsibility to be able to respond to the needs of the fastest-growing demographic group in the US with professionalism, humility, and sensitivity. Having the opportunity to take classes in Spanish and gain insight into ways to better serve our Spanish-speaking clients will enable us to be more effective, competent practitioners in the emerging landscape of the US.”

Networking will be essential to the program’s success. From expanding the pool of capable teachers to cultivating enriching partnerships with communities and organizations, the GSSW will be tapping its HispanicLatino connections at all levels—regional, national, and international. Treviño applauds the new initiative as “novel and unique,” and stresses the importance of this and similar interventions. They will, he says, fundamentally define our future.
Through the power of the internet and the collaboration of American Jesuit universities, higher education is bringing college-level learning to refugee camps in Malawi, Kenya, and Jordan. Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM), founded in 2010, has launched a pilot program that offers accredited certificate and diploma courses via the internet and on-site teaching to nearly 600 refugees. The Boston College Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) has helped create curricula for an on-site class in psycho-social case management and mentored its students, who are teaching these skills to refugees in the African camps.

By Julie Michaels

The Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya stagers the imagination. Opened in 1992, it serves 90,000 refugees from a dozen nations—today the majority are Somali, followed closely by Sudanese, Ethiopians, and Congolese—each fleeing wars or violent conflicts in their home countries. More than 100 languages and dialects are spoken in the camp, and in every single language there is a word for “hope.”

Gretchen Emick, GSSW ’10, arrived at the Kakuma camp in January 2010, eager to complete a four-month internship that would earn her a master’s degree in the Boston College Graduate School of Social Work’s Global Practice Program. She stayed two years, first as an intern and then as an employee, moving from project to project under the auspices of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), one of many NGOs operating at the camp.

Emick had been working at Kakuma for a year when she was asked to help launch a new pilot project, one focused on bringing the best in Jesuit education to those who need it most. Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) aims to use online education technologies to deliver accredited university courses to refugees who have had no previous access to college learning. Logging on to computers powered by solar cells, refugee students are being taught by Jesuit university faculty sitting halfway around the world.

“This was such a compelling vision,” says Emick, who is now back home working at a rural hospital in Colorado. “It completely reflects the Jesuit credo of ‘men and women for others.’ We were educating people who could then turn around and teach others in the camps.”

Jesuit Commons makes use of two great networks that exist in the Catholic community, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), an international organization that advocates on behalf of refugees in 50 countries around the world, and the 28 Jesuit-affiliated colleges and universities in the US. Together, their goal is to bring higher education to those who are truly at the margins.

The program is a logical extension of the online learning opportunities that have blossomed in US colleges and universities, explains Mary McFarland, Jesuit Commons’ international director.

Previously, McFarland was dean and professor of the School of Professional studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, where she greatly
expanded the school’s online programs. “Once we had mastered the skills of teaching online,” says McFarland, “we in the Jesuit world wondered if we could bring higher education to places in the world that needed it most, like the refugee camps.”

In Africa, especially, many refugee camps have become permanent installations, their presence essential on a continent that has witnessed a never-ending string of civil wars. “Many residents have lived in these camps for 17 or 18 years, virtually their whole lives,” says McFarland. As a result, people have been cut off from any educational opportunity. Although just in its infant stage, the Jesuit Commons program offers not only opportunity but also respect for residents who often lack either hope or purpose.

A PRIVATE, ANONYMOUS GRANT has provided Jesuit Commons with funding to launch pilot programs in three refugee camps: Kakuma camp in Kenya, Dzaleka camp in Malawi, and an urban camp in Amman, Jordan. Students who qualify can earn a 45-credit diploma in liberal studies from Regis University in Boulder, Colorado. Their online courses are taught by faculty from various Jesuit universities, including Marquette, Gonzaga, and St. Louis University.

Realizing that only a small number of refugees have the background for such advanced studies, Jesuit Commons also established a Community Service Learning Track (CSLT) that awards professional learning certificates in important skills such as Child Protection, Community Development, Information Technology, and Psycho-Social Case Management.

From the program’s inception, Boston College’s Graduate School of Social Work has been deeply involved in designing the program in Psycho-Social Case Management. Together, GSSW grads Petra Dankova, ‘09, and Emick worked with faculty at Fordham University and Boston College to design a curriculum for the certificate program in the Kakuma camp. At the Dzaleka camp in Malawi, Lauren Healy, GSSW ‘11, fine-tuned the curriculum for her own refugee cohort, the majority of whom come from Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi. Altogether, the graduate trio has trained more than 60 camp residents, who use their skills inside the camps, providing counsel to those who are experiencing the stress of personal loss and difficult living conditions.

Back at Boston College, Teresa Schirmer, the GSSW’s associate dean of academic and student services, acted as liaison for the overseas students. Her job was to provide the interns with journal articles, guidance, and advice from faculty specialists. Whenever necessary, the interns could email or Skype Schirmer with questions or requests. “Because our program was new and evolving, we were constantly in need of information,” says Emick. “It was great having the university behind us, knowing I could ask for all kinds of academic support.” The Jesuit Commons project has also reached out to staff at other NGOs in the camps. “We encouraged other NGOs to send us people who were already working within their communities,” explains Emick, “since we were offering them the tools to make their counseling more effective.”

“The Jesuit Commons project reflects one of the founding ideals of Jesuit education,” says Fr. Charles L. Currie, SJ, former president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and a founding board member of Jesuit Commons, “which is educating those who have traditionally had no access to an education...It’s great to be part of such a life-changing endeavor.”

Gretchen Emick and Lauren Healy enthusiastically echo that sentiment. “I chose to earn my social work degree at Boston College because, of all the schools in the US, it has the best program in Global Social Work,” says Healy.

One reason for the graduate school’s expertise is its ability to network with Jesuit Relief Service, an organization that links BC to relief programs in 50 countries around the world. Though Healy is not Catholic, she found working under the Jesuits to be very much in keeping with her own ideals of community service. “Men and women for others, learning through service, those were ideals very much practiced by us in the camps,” she says. These are the same ideals that brought Healy and Emick to study social work at Boston College.
INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY HAPPEN WHEN INDIVIDUALS ENJOY A WIDE BERTH AND THE MANAGERIAL SUPPORT TO TAKE RISKS AND EXPERIMENT.
THE MAN IN GOOGLE GLASSES

A REFLECTION ON THE ETHICS OF NETWORKING AND GOVERNANCE IN THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

The following are excerpts from the paper Orobator presented at the April 2012 conference, “International Networking in the Society of Jesus,” at Boston College. For the complete transcript of his talk, visit: https://www.box.com/jesuitnetworking

"IN THE LARGER SENSE OF THE TERM, NETWORKING CREATES COMMUNITIES, enables sharing, and connects people with intentionality, interests, and benefits. Intentionality, because of a pre-established need or necessity to connect with others: People link to or participate in a network because they want or see the need to. Interest and benefit, because of a perceived set of favorable outcomes that influence and accrue from the choice to participate in or join a network. There is something in it for people who join a network. Thus, alongside a technology and sociology of networking, there exists a politics of networking. When we join, who we join, where we join, and why we join all result from a prior definition of intent, perception of interests, and calculation of benefits. Yet the presumption that networking is beneficial in any field of endeavor and in a multiplicity of combinations and permutations—from business to geo-politics, atheism to terrorism, advertising to advocacy, prostitution to religion, etc.—needs to be carefully examined."

"NETWORKING IS ANALOGOUS TO THE PROCESS OF CREATING AND BUILDING COMMUNITY. I HAVE mentioned above that networking creates a community of interests. As used here, the notion of community needs to be further nuanced. In the world of geeks, nerds, and techies, what passes for (social) networking resembles adolescents hobnobbing in a digital co-op, where meeting is virtual and making and unmaking “friends” fleeting and perfunctory. The concomitant isolation, alienation, fragmentation, and exclusion have pernicious impact on the concept and experience of community."

"THE PARADOX OF INSTANT CONNECTION AND INTENSE ISOLATION IN A NETWORKED WORLD IS BEST epitomized by Google’s Project Glass. The man in Google glasses is a caricature of a networker. He appears to inhabit a world of infinite connectivity, accessibility, and possibilities, but only on the scale of his field of vision. In other words, the contours of his world hardly extend beyond his nose. It is devoid of binding, human ties and anything resembling a communal experience. The breadth of his electronic connectivity bares the depth of his personal isolation."

"INTERESTINGLY, DESPITE THE RISK OF GOOGLE’S PROJECT GLASS VITRIFYING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS via technologies of communication, the man in Google glasses makes a revolutionary revelation: Properly construed, the ultimate goal of networking is to create a space not a community. In this space without borders, the old ponderous rules of cosmology evaporate into effortless, timeless, and limitless ‘virtuality’. Thus, unlike the analog community, where authority and power descend from the top of the pyramid to the base or the masses, networking creates a space where multiple interactions, encounters, and participations happen. Everybody is a player or a networker; everybody gives and everybody gets.”