

A Bit of Me

This series of profiles on SUNY Broome community members is a part of the Student Village diversity calendar initiative. We will be highlighting members in our community who identify with or can speak on the diversity theme or topic for each month. The theme for October is LGBTQ+ pride and the topic is cultural appropriation. To be featured in this series please reach out to Pamela Alvarez or Alexandria Donkor.

Dr. Henry Bartlett

Professor and Chair in the History,
Philosophy, and Social Sciences
Department



Hometown: I am originally from a very small rural town, Callao, Virginia.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE ON CAMPUS?

As a full-time professor, I teach classes, advise students, serve on college committees and represent the college in the community through volunteer service. As a department chair, I work with my department colleagues to offer courses that inspire learning, creativity, and help students develop critical thinking skills. The courses in HPSS also serve several of the SUNY general education requirements. What I do as the department chair varies according to the individual needs of each faculty member and the collective needs of the department. However, the focus is always on supporting the interactive process of teaching and learning.

HOW DID YOU COME TO CHOOSE THIS CAREER?

I can honestly say that the career chose me. Teaching is a third career for me. I worked in the private sector for over 20 years before I started teaching. I didn't even start college until I was 25 and I was 34 by the time I completed my undergraduate degree. Yes, I was a late bloomer. I never planned a career as a college professor.

I was painfully shy so I never imagined that I could stand in front of a class and say anything, much less teach. I specialized in applied social research in my graduate sociology program at Virginia Commonwealth University and my plan was to work full-time as a social science researcher for the Virginia legislature or one of the state agencies. However, after I finished my master's degree Reynolds Community College (RCC) in Richmond, Virginia was in need of an adjunct sociology instructor to cover one introductory sociology course right before the fall semester was to start. I had entered a Ph.D. program at this time so I was not working full-time. A colleague at Virginia Commonwealth University who had taught for several years as an adjunct at RCC recommended me for the position, without my knowledge. At first, I was not interested. But, several colleagues succeeded in talking me into giving the adjunct position a chance. So, I was hired less than 24 hours before the first class meeting. I had no textbook, syllabus, and absolutely no idea what I was going to do. I was scared to death. I just knew I had made a big mistake.

The semester went well, after my legs and voice stopped shaking. I was asked to return the following spring semester to teach a full load of sociology courses and I guess the rest is history. I have never looked back. It was very special to return to the downtown campus of RCC as an instructor because it was the place I had started my college education 11 years earlier. I am so dedicated to the students and mission of the community college because I know, first hand, the important role community colleges play in offering so many students an opportunity that would not be possible otherwise. I am the first to say that I know, without a single doubt that I would not be where I am today, educationally, professionally, and personally without the educational opportunity available to me through the local community college.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

The interactions I have with students and colleagues.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

The feeling of not belonging.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE SUCCESS?

Success to me is being content. We are not always going to be happy and we have little control over many things in this life. However, if we can achieve a place in our life where we are truly content, then I think we have achieved the type of success that really counts in the end. After all, we cannot take money, power, prestige, a job title, or anything of physical substance with us when we exit this life. When we take our last breath, all we will have is our personal thoughts and emotions.

WHAT IS THE COOLEST (OR MOST IMPORTANT) TREND YOU SEE TODAY?

I do not know if it is a trend, but I find it very moving emotionally and intellectually to see so many people pushing for equality and equity for all people, regardless of any socially defined category. I am hopeful that our society is evolving culturally to be one in which all people have the opportunities necessary to become all that they can be.

WHAT DOES LGBTQ+ PRIDE MEAN TO YOU?

In my mind, it is about opening up society so those who identify as something other than heteronormative are able to experience life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to the fullest extent possible while being honest about who they are. It takes so much emotional and physical energy to hide one's true identity. When people hide their true identity they are reduced to something less than. How can someone who feels less than realize their full potential?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CELEBRATE THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

It is important to be visible. I think this is an important element for all minority groups. If you are not visible, you are not recognized, you do not exist. Therefore, you do not count. Nothing about you counts. This is a horrible way to live and it can be devastating for young LGBTQ+ individuals growing up. When you do not see yourself in mainstream society, you begin to understand early in life that there is no place for you. You begin to see yourself as unacceptable. Now, how do you think this affects a person's overall well-being? So, we must stand up, be counted and we can do that by celebrating the entire LGBTQ+ community. I think it is vital to celebrate all minority groups for the very same reasons.

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

That the LGBTQ+ community is very diverse. It is not monolithic. Therefore, you cannot assume that you know much about the LGBTQ+ community just because you have a few friends who happen to identify with one or more of these characteristics or because you have taken a few seminars. Each group within the larger LGBTQ+ community has their own unique issues and circumstances to deal with. The LGBTQ+ experience is different for everyone who identifies with the community.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS WHO MAY NOT FEEL PROUD OF THEIR DIFFERENT IDENTITIES?

Do not be afraid to seek out professional counseling services and/or someone you trust who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community as a mentor. Surround yourself with other people who love and support you. Do not get caught up in allowing others to define who you are, how you should feel, and what your value is as a human being. Most importantly, love yourself and if you do not, please make every effort to focus on learning to do so.

WHAT WAS THE LAST EXPERIENCE THAT MADE YOU A STRONGER PERSON?

Holding my mother's hand as she died.

IF HOLLYWOOD MADE A MOVIE ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE CAST AS YOU?

I have never thought about this; however, I will go with Brad Pitt.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OUR STUDENTS?

Work hard, play even harder, and do not be afraid to tackle those hard courses. Keep people in your life that support your educational and professional goals and leave the others behind. Focus on lifting people up, rather than knocking them down. Be kind, be generous, and always be true to yourself. You can give in occasionally, but never give up. Yesterday is gone, so get over it. Today is what you have, so make it count. Focus on positive thoughts for tomorrow and deal with it as it unfolds. Think in terms of possibilities and be flexible.

WHAT IS THE WILDEST THING YOU HAVE EVER DONE? BE HONEST!

I am afraid I have to plead the fifth on this one!