

# Celebrating **10** of Insight YEARS

## What has God done?

MELODY J. WACHSMUTH

“I had no idea what I had here,” related Mariah, Insight class of 2004. “It wasn’t until I was in college that I realized it, and I wished I would have taken more advantage of the time.”

Mariah was speaking in terms of transformative knowledge and community, both common themes reflected upon by former students at the recent 10-year celebration of Insight’s existence and impact. Insight, the U.S. Center for World Mission’s one-year college level academic program, aims to “prepare future Christian leaders through an intensive study of God’s purposes throughout world history” (Insight promotional materials). It accomplishes this through an integrated, multi-disciplinary study that spans history, social-sciences, philosophy, literature, science, theology, biblical study, and missiology. The four chronological modules are largely based around independent study and reflection followed by a focused peer-facilitated discussion, thereby creating a unique and dynamic learning environment. Students also benefit from occasional guest lecturers and content-related field trips.

The 10th anniversary celebration of Insight, held at the USCWM on March 26, began with a private alumni dinner in which alumni were able to freely share about their Insight experience—a sharing that was replete with humorous stories, fond reminiscences, and heartfelt sharing of Insight’s impact. As favorite memories and moments of hilarity were received by knowing laughter from the crowd, one sensed a tangible sense of cama-

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raderie in the room possible only after an extended shared experience. It is this shared learning experience, forged by individuals undergoing paradigm shifts, that creates such a deep community who desire to stay connected long after finishing the program.

Following the student sharing, the gathering opened up to the USCWM community at large. Dave Datema, the first director of Insight and current General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship, gave the keynote address for the evening. Thoughtfully reflecting on the last ten years, he mused upon the original goals and hopes surrounding the birth of Insight. Why should students not be able to gain the advantages of the Perspectives course in an undergraduate format, preparing their minds to interpret the information they would gain at a secular college? What if they had a foundation for missions and an understanding of God’s movement through history before they went to college? Insight’s beginnings were bathed in prayer, related Dave, and consequently its intent was never to be just about books and words, but to affect a deep level change in each student.

Was this hoped-for transformation evident in the student sharing during the evening? In fact, even as Insight uniquely offers a multi-dimensional view of history in order to provide an intellectual basis for faith and mission, so student sharing presented a multi-faceted picture of Insight’s impact. Jonathan, class of 2003, described his process of learning to love God with his mind as the “big, wrecking ball of Insight” that began to pound against his world-view. As his paradigm shifted, his questions began to center on the question of what God was doing in the world and a realization that he could be part of God’s work and story.

Mariah related how Insight’s exposure to current mission trends provoked her own personal realization that she thrived on being a “fore-runner, feeling out boundaries and traipsing near the cutting edge of

knowledge and methodology.” Carrie, class of 2006, shared how Insight gave her a “colorful palette” from which to participate in discussions and critically think “out-of-the-box.”

How has this expanded knowledge and consequent transformation impacted students’ present paths and future vocations?

Datema noted that there is no particular pattern or prediction of where people go after Insight. Both domestic and international, and in vocations that range from science teacher to working cross-culturally, students’ life paths are diverse. This in itself testifies to the positive effect of the curriculum. Rather than streamlining students into a particular line of work, it prepares students’ minds to interact missionally with the world at large, wherever they find themselves. For Kirstie, class of 2006, part of her future direction sprung from an idea she had during Insight. As she was participating in a discussion one day, she suddenly wondered how all of this knowledge could possibly correspond to her love of writing for children. “What if,” she wondered, “there was a children’s mission magazine?” Years later, she finds herself working in just such a capacity as a writer for the Global Xpress Kids Club.

Katie, class of 2009, shared about her childhood desire to be a missionary, and Insight’s role in illuminating, refining, and forging that desire into a focused, informed purpose. When she moved to the border of Burma and Thailand, she was able to put into practice everything she had learned. Although she confessed that she had previously been very shy as an Insight student, her confident and articulate sharing illustrated yet another point of change.

Mariah’s love of being a “boundary challenger” is constantly tapped as she has found herself in various roles and jobs which required her to “invent” a particular direction in which to move. Currently, this strength manifests in her new role of being on the missions committee at church. As it is presently in an ambiguous place, she therefore sees an opportunity to utilize some of her knowledge and direction-setting skills.

With all of the testimonies of transformation and exciting ways Insight students have applied their experiences to their present lives, one might wonder how effective Insight has been statistically. Does it work like a magic formula, merely needing to plug students into a year program and expecting 100 percent success rate? Indeed, how can Insight categorize success? Dave Datema mused that one of Insight’s strengths is the provision of a safe place for a “doubting genera-



tion” of students where they can question, probe issues, and develop a robust foundation and a deep conviction behind beliefs. However, Dave noted that Insight is a very small point in a person’s life so that sometimes an experience, although powerful at the time, can fade amidst the loud, distracting voices of our culture. But Dylan, class of 2003, who seemed so deeply impacted that he struggled finding the best words to articulate how life-changing Insight became

for him, poignantly noted that this is never the end of the story. The result of such an intense and transformative experience like Insight cannot be turned off from one’s consciousness. Instead, Dylan says, he believes there is a “haunting of remembrance”—a remembering of what God did during that time and the story into which he is inviting each student. This is, Dylan notes, because God is God, and that is how He operates. And that point is really the crux of the matter—because God is God, he uses Insight to teach, transform, and call, and such a momentous experience remains a dynamic piece of history in each person’s life.†



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