Building a Global Learning Community

Wisdom University is embarking on its second decade of growth and service. We have had an epic journey thus far: one that began with the proclamation of a new theology based on creation spirituality and deep ecumenism; endured great contradictions with the Roman papacy; developed an integral pedagogy dedicated to a holistic learning for body, mind, heart and psyche; and is now moving forward into a global phase of growth and service.

It all began with Dr. Matthew Fox who, as a Dominican priest with a passion for the medieval mysticism of Meister Eckhardt and Hildegard of Bingen, established the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality at Mundelein College in Chicago in 1977. The theology of creation spirituality he developed sought to integrate western wisdom spirituality and global indigenous cultures with the emerging scientific understandings of the universe and the creativity of art. Such an approach radically challenged Catholic dogma. In 1983, he moved the Institute to Holy Names College in Oakland. In 1989, as his popularity grew and his books received critical acclaim, Fox was silenced by then-Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, who at the time headed the Office of the Doctrine of the Faith for the Vatican. In 1993, Ratzinger expelled Fox from the Dominican Order, in which he had served for 34 years. In 1996, Fox founded the University of Creation Spirituality as an independent graduate school.

In February 2005, Dr. James Garrison, a theologian and historian with a background in non-profit management, succeeded Matthew as President of the University with a mandate to lead the institution into its next stage of growth and development.

What we mean by “wisdom”

When he accepted the presidency, Garrison recommended, and the Board unanimously agreed, that the name of the university be changed to Wisdom University and that the institution embark on a mission to build a global learning community. While the university had always honored all traditions from the viewpoint of deep ecumenism, creation spirituality itself is rooted in the Christian wisdom tradition. The change of name
signaled that the school would henceforward embrace equally and in greater depth all the major wisdom traditions as essential to the health and survival of our globalizing world.

“Wisdom” is one of those rare, powerful words not already captured by fundamentalists, the New Age, or Madison Avenue. It is also a word that means about the same thing the world over. Universally, people who are “wise” are recognized as those who have a high integration of discernment and compassion. Wisdom is a quality of knowing that enables one to have a wider scope for understanding and thus leads to humility and kindness. Embracing the world wisdom traditions thus allows the university to appeal to the higher self in all of us no matter where we come from or what our backgrounds are. Wisdom University offers instruction and insights into the wisdom traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, the Indigenous Peoples, Judaism, and Taoism. All have something important to say as we globalize our communications, integrate our economies and manage our societies. All are essential if we are to build a truly global and humane civilization.

As far as we know, there is no other institution of higher learning that is exclusively dedicated to the explicit study of and training in the wisdom spirituality of the major world traditions. There are numerous theological schools that teach certain dogmatic formulations, a plethora of secular institutions that teach the liberal arts, and myriad schools that teach specific professional skills, but only Wisdom University has dedicated itself to the scholarship and exploration of the world’s wisdom traditions. In this sense, our name differentiates who we are and our particular niche in the larger community and academic world.

Any deep reflection on wisdom must begin with noting that it is generally conceived that there are two basic ways of discerning the truth around us. One way is through divine revelation or numinous events that seem to come from the other side and communicate the truth directly, such as the experience of Moses in receiving the Ten Commandments. Almost all denominational schools are in this revelatory tradition and they thus teach dogmas that are to be believed. The second way is the pursuit of scientific investigation through gathering data and analyzing the world logically, which is the basis of modern culture and virtually all contemporary educational institutions. It is from these that most of us took our various degrees.

Socrates asserted there was a third, even deeper way to discern truth, and this was through dialogue. It was his conviction, carried forward by Plato, that the deepest way to perceive truth was neither through revelation nor through science, even though he honored both these pathways. For Socrates, it is when seekers come together and discuss the profound questions of existence in a spirit of deep inquiry that the truth is perceived most deeply. It was this perception that informed how Socrates conceived of wisdom itself.

For Socrates, wisdom is not something one attains. It is not something that can be finally grasped by either mind or heart. Rather it involves a never ending quest, a willingness to walk down the road with another human being and through mutual reflection discern an
ever deepening understanding of reality and discernment concerning how we should act as individuals and be in community. As the wisest man in Athens, Socrates declared he knew nothing. He was wise because he knew questions are more important than answers, inquiry more profound than certainties, and therefore dialogue is more profound than either revelations from the gods or assertions of empirical science. Philosophy thus becomes a way of life and philosophers “lovers of wisdom,” perpetually in pursuit of her through the art of questioning themselves and the world around them ever more deeply. It is at the deepest and most paradoxical levels of this inquiry that the Lover and the Beloved become one. We cannot think of a more profound way to express what we should be as a university and how we should conceive wisdom to be.

As we enter our next phase of development, we are motivated by a deep intention to build a global community of wisdom teachers and institutions. We seek to align our integral pedagogy with the most ancient of the wisdom schools, and we are committed to bringing ancient wisdom into a constructive interface with contemporary society.

Globe as Classroom

A basic commitment of Wisdom University for the next decade is to operate with the world as our classroom. This has several important implications. The university is now entering a phase in which we have relinquished our Oakland campus and all that a campus entails. Instead, we have established a small administrative headquarters in San Francisco, and the university has been structured so that it can be operated quite literally via computer and telephone. We have become essentially virtual, capable of existing in cyberspace at one level while organizing classes anywhere in the world at another. This is essential if we are to be global in scope, rather than trying to get students to come to a specific campus in a specific country for instruction. It is also an extremely important capacity in a time of escalating uncertainty and turbulence on the one hand and extraordinary opportunities and challenges on the other.

Our new capacity allows us to provide two very different but interactive offerings:

• We will now be taking our Intensives and our faculty to our students. We have done an analysis of our student/alumni base, and over the next several years we will be developing Intensives in the different regions of the country where our students and alumni are clustered. This will allow us to custom design our Intensives and bring them to where the students are, saving them time, money and travel.

• We want to take our faculty, students and alumni to where teaching can have the most potency. It is one thing to study Mary Magdalene and the Black Madonna in an academic classroom. It is a completely different matter to study these themes in France where tradition places Mary Magdalene and where some of the most dramatic Black Madonna sites can be found. In October 2005, thirty of our students went on a pilgrimage to France for this purpose. In September 2006, our Intensive on Celtic Spirituality and Cosmology was held in Killarney, Ireland in September 2006; and in September 2007, we will conduct a pilgrimage to Turkey to visit sites associated with the great Sufi poet Rumi on the
occasion of the 800th anniversary of his birth. We believe that in a globalized world we should be taking our instruction to the students and our students to the world.

Our New Chartres School exemplifies this commitment to global learning. The year 2006 marks the 1,000th anniversary of the founding of the mystery school in Chartres, France that imagined and built the great Chartres Cathedral, called the “Mother Cathedral.” To honor that school and the magnificence of the edifice they erected, Wisdom University is establishing the New Chartres School, building upon and reinterpreting the spirit and the curriculum developed by those spiritual masters.

The inauguration of the New Chartres School took place July 2-8, 2006 in Chartres. The School is intended as a gathering point for those drawn to participate in an initiation into the deep dimensions of wisdom offered by the wise ones of our civilization long past. It is also intended as an opportunity to bring ancient truths into a fresh and creative interface with contemporary challenges and visions.

The New Chartres School will be comprised of seven seven-day Intensives, patterned after the Seven Liberal Arts taught in the original school. They will also be designed and offered as initiations, even as they were in the original school. All seven Intensives will be convened in Chartres in the very seminary adjacent to the Cathedral that held the original school.

For further information on the New Chartres School, go to

http://www.wisdomuniversity.org/Chartres/

We do not know of another institution of higher learning that has embraced the notion of globe as classroom with quite the intensity of Wisdom University. This commitment is the cornerstone of our next decade of service.

**Integral Learning for the Whole Person**

At the heart of everything Wisdom University offers is a commitment to personal and professional renewal. This is why students come, this is what our pedagogy and curriculum are designed to catalyze and nurture. The average student attending Wisdom University is a professional, with an established career, and with one or more academic degrees already in place. Our students are also individuals who have come to the conclusion that they need deeper spiritual challenges in order to maintain momentum and meaning in their lives. They are often seeking professional as well as personal transformation. Wisdom University has been designed for such a person. It has the most deeply integral pedagogy of any institution of higher learning we know of – an approach that often catalyzes renewal because it addresses and nurtures the whole person.

- The distinction of the university’s pedagogy lies in the integration it nurtures between intellectual rigor, artistic expression, and mind/body development. At most institutions of higher education, students engage in intense intellectual work, and success is largely
based on one’s ability to memorize information and capacity to express analytical thought. Art and physical exercise are generally optional electives. At Wisdom University, the pedagogy is designed to balance the body, head, heart and psyche as a single learning continuum. Each morning, students begin with physical movement and chanting, called “body prayer.” They then engage in seminars on a range of relevant and intellectually challenging subjects, each of which has an extensive reading list and requires both pre- and post-papers. Each afternoon, students engage in “art as meditation,” exploring a variety of intuitive and artistic expressions. Creativity is not an elective at Wisdom University. Like the wisdom schools in antiquity, learning is predicated on the unity of mind and heart, body and soul. The day is completed with a process session to help integrate the learning that is taking place on all levels.

- **Another distinct aspect of Wisdom University is that learning takes place in “Intensives.”** At most institutions of higher learning, students attend several hours of classes per week over a quarter or a semester. At Wisdom University, learning takes place in Intensives that are either a week long (Monday through Friday) or a weekend (Friday through Sunday). These intensives allow for the intellectual and emotional intimacy that is the basis of real learning. Our experience is that when faculty and students come together all day every day, especially in a residential retreat setting, the learning is both deeper and more personally transformative. For the latest information on our schedule of Intensives, go to

  [http://www.wisdomuniversity.org/off-sitecourses.html](http://www.wisdomuniversity.org/off-sitecourses.html)

- **Still another differentiating aspect of Wisdom University involves our commitment to sacred activism, something deeply present in all the wisdom traditions and in the university curriculum.** Most schools provide training for degrees but are careful to keep morality a private concern. Either that, or they demand adherence to a particular sectarian belief system. At Wisdom University, we have developed a curriculum that blends immersion in sacred practices with hands-on social activism, enriching both students’ interior journeys and their service in the larger world. This ethos expresses our hope and optimism about what motivated individuals can accomplish.

Sacred Activism takes on specific urgency when we understand that the world is careening into crisis and the prevailing institutions are incapable of effective response. Signs of economic disruption, ecological instability, social alienation, and political incompetence are converging to produce an almost universal sense of unease about the future. Cataclysms can erupt at any moment, virtually anywhere, affecting anyone, as the events of 9/11, the tsunami in 2004, and hurricane Katrina and the Kashmir earthquake in 2005, and the current turbulence over Iran demonstrate. People the world over are beginning to recognize that the center is not holding and only a deeper understanding will suffice to catalyze the solutions we all seek. We seem to be in one of those paradoxical moments when we have more technological capacity than ever before, yet we live without the awareness of how to govern human affairs wisely or manage planetary systems holistically.
In the midst of this there is something each and every one of us can do. We can deepen our spiritual awareness and refine our social commitments in an integrated act of faith and service. In a time of crisis, spirituality without activism is arid intellectualism. Activism without spirituality has effect but little depth or compassion. What is needed is a radical fusion of the two. This is why, in addition to granting degrees, Wisdom University is developing leadership training in sacred activism and is convening Sacred Activism conferences around the United States over the next two years, beginning in Seattle May 11-14. The next conference will be convened in Tulsa May 10-12, 200t. For more information:

http://www.wisdomuniversity.org/sacred-activism-conference.html

Integrated as a single movement of soul and service, sacred activism can transform lives and help change the world.

Taken together, our multi-dimensional pedagogy, teaching through Intensives, and our commitment to sacred activism act as a profoundly transformative catalyst for participants. As a result, students often refine their life goals, deepen their spiritual commitments, improve their professional and personal relationships, and gain clarity about more effective ways to be of service to their community. Because the whole person is nurtured, the integration of discernment and compassion is enhanced.

Our Roots in the Ancient Wisdom Schools

Using wisdom to fashion the future paradoxically harks back to the earliest days of human reflection about how to live with discernment and compassion in an impermanent and unpredictable world. Indeed, the very meaning of philosopher, a Greek word, is “lover of wisdom.”

Wisdom schools flourished in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia and informed the rise of these earliest civilizations. They flourished in Greece and Rome; in Zoroastrian Persia; in the Vedic and Upanishadic traditions of India; and among the nature schools and Taoist sages of China. They were also present among the Inca, Mayan and Aztec civilizations of the Americans and in Africa. The latest scholarly research indicates that these traditions and schools were in communication with each other and influenced each other’s teachings and worldviews. It is from all these traditions that Wisdom University draws its inspiration, content and pedagogy.

These ancient schools were the precursors of what came into full bloom in twelfth century Islam and in Europe: schools that began to call themselves “university,” from the Latin universitas, meaning cosmic order or harmony. When the great scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas gave his inaugural lecture in 1257 at the University of Paris, the first European university, he chose wisdom as his topic. In the first universities, as in antiquity, wisdom was considered the queen of the sciences. It is to recapture this ethos that we have convened the New Chartres School.
In both the ancient mystery schools and the earliest universities, the quest for cosmic order, expressed as equity and justice, lay at the center of their teaching. Thus the “is-ness” and the “ought-ness” of life were understood as integral to one another. Virtue was inherent in and inseparable from truth, beauty and goodness. Discernment without compassion was seen as cold and indifferent, often cruel. Compassion without discernment was seen as little more than sentiment, often divisive. The integration of discernment and compassion was seen as the wellspring of wisdom.

This was true then. It is true today. It was to deepen the exploration of this “perennial wisdom” that Wisdom University was founded. The institution now seeks to further illumine this domain by developing a curriculum that encompasses the full spectrum of wisdom studies, both past and present, and wisdom engaged, both spiritually and socially. Such dimensionality lies at the heart of the wisdom civilization for which humanity has yearned since the beginning of its earthly journey.

Degree Programs

Wisdom University offers several advanced degree and study opportunities in wisdom spirituality:

1. Students can obtain a Master of Arts in Wisdom Spirituality. A Bachelors degree is required for admission. Seven Intensives and a thesis are required for completion.

2. Students can obtain a Master of Arts in Indigenous Mind, the only such degree program anywhere that focuses exclusively on indigenous wisdom. A Bachelors degree is required for admission. Seven Intensives and a thesis are required for completion.

3. Students can receive a Doctor of Ministry Degree, which is focused on the reinvention of work. A Masters degree or equivalent is required for admission. Ten Intensives, a candidate review, and dissertation are required for completion.

4. Students can receive a Combined Masters and Doctorate. Seven Intensives in the Masters program and a thesis are required for completion of the Masters phase of the program. An additional eight Intensives and a dissertation are required to complete the DMin. portion of the program.

5. Students can obtain a Certificate in Wisdom Spirituality. A Bachelors degree is required. Seven Intensives and Certificate Review are required for completion of the program.

6. All Wisdom University Intensives are offered as Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Mystics Without Monasteries: The Chairs of Wisdom University
At the heart of Wisdom University is the commitment to provide a home for the wisdom teachers of our time. At a time when our attention is directed to infotainment, war and sensationalism, it is critical that we listen to the voices in our midst that direct us to a deeper resonance with the created order and with each other. While in traditional times, mystics largely resided in the monasteries and the cloisters, today, most of the wisdom teachers and the mystics live and work in the world, coping with the same issues and challenges of us all. This only accentuates the gravity of their messages and the importance of their presence.

To date, Wisdom University has attracted several "Mystics Without Monasteries," a term coined by Caroline Myss, to join the University as Chairs. These include:

- Angeles Arrien (Cultural Anthropology)
- Lauren Artress (Labyrinthian Mysteries)
- Alex Grey (Sacred Art)
- Stan and Christina Grof (Holotropic Breathwork)
- Andrew Harvey (Sacred Activism)
- Jean Houston (Social Artistry)
- Walter Link (Wisdom Civilization)
- Caroline Myss (Energy Medicine)
- Paul Ray (Emerging Wisdom Culture)
- Gabrielle Roth (Sacred Dance)
- Rupert Sheldrake (Holistic Science)

For further information on these individuals, please go to

http://www.wisdomuniversity.org/mysticswithoutmonasteries.html

Summary

Wisdom University is on an epic journey to reinvent education in a turbulent and disconnected world. For ten years, we have been demonstrating that the pursuit of wisdom must be central to learning, that an integral pedagogy can catalyze profound personal and professional renewal, that spiritual depth and social activism should be inseparable from one another, and that we can learn deeply from communities in the distant past who, like us, were confronted with severe political and spiritual challenges and who rose to a higher integration of discernment and compassion, thereby experiencing a renaissance. A commitment to the globe as classroom, a dedication to attract mystics without monasteries, and an embrace of all the world's wisdom traditions now allows the university to take these passions to our students and to take our students to the world, providing Wisdom University with a unique and, we believe, compelling mission as we begin our second decade of service.

For further information, contact Wisdom University at P.O. Box 29434, San Francisco, CA 94129 (415-561-2348) or www.WisdomUniversity.org