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Catherine of Siena Virtual College

Progress 2012

Empowering women



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Engendering equality

Online learning in 2012

Online learning goes to the front of the class

Online education is no longer considered a pedagogical fad that will someday fade from existence. Nor is it considered a lesser cousin of the time honored traditional education model found in our colleges and universities. Indeed, online learning has earned a place of respectability alongside traditional education as the innovation that will democratize education, increase educational attainment and change the way we accredit learning in our students. A study by the US Department of Education compared online and traditional learning between 1996 and 2008. The [Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning](#) found that:



- *Students in online conditions performed modestly better, on average, than those learning the same material through traditional face-to-face instruction.*
- *Instruction combining online and face-to-face elements (blended learning) had a larger advantage relative to purely face-to-face instruction than did purely online instruction.*
- *The effectiveness of online learning approaches appears quite broad across different content and learner types.*

Catherine of Siena Virtual College was conceived during a period when online education was being tested in larger institutions. One of the first colleges of its time to offer online women's and gender theological studies with full scholarships to students in developing regions, it has matured and continued to offer innovative ways of connecting students to critically important gender studies and to each other. Since then, many educational institutions have developed online learning and some top institutions around the world are not only offering high quality educational courses, but without cost to the students who take them.

Online learning has important advantages over other models of education. First, robust online learning begins by giving each student the freedom to determine where and when their learning will occur. Secondly, in many cases, teachers and students get to know each other better than in traditional face-to-face

classes. Community of participants develop trust and respect in a safe circle of learning where understanding and knowledge is deepened and enhanced. Many times participants find it safe to share life experiences in ways that are impossible in a face-to-face classroom. Thirdly, our online learning model removes language obstacles across international regions by engaging students in forums and chat rooms that use written communications as the primary means of exchange that uses forums and chat rooms removes other obstacles across international lines. Regional variations of English are less likely to become obstacles to international understanding when communications are written rather than spoken.

Catherine of Siena Virtual College is coming of age in the golden age of online education. Our students have reaped the rewards of this new technology. But technology alone has never been the sole secret to our success. As with any human institution, Catherine of Siena College is thriving because of the people inside its virtual walls. Those theologians and activists who create the courses, the professors who teach, the administrators and technicians who work to help the students find their way into the new environment, those who tackle technical problems as they arise, and of course, the students themselves, who are highly motivated to learn all make this educational endeavor a success.

While almost all educational institutions are offering online education, Catherine of Siena College has secured its own niche in the marketplace of innovative learning environments with high quality gender and women's studies courses in a safe supportive environment where bonds and trust are built and deep learning that leads to women's empowerment and gender equality continues to be the highest goal.

"Harvard and Yale were founded shortly after the colonization of North America. IT, Stanford, and the state university systems were products of the Industrial Revolution and American territorial expansion. We are now in an early stage of an inflection point that I believe is the most consequential in history: the Information Revolution.

*~Salman Khan
Khan Academy*

**Empower yourself!
Empower your community!**



**Catherine of Siena
Virtual College**

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The State of the College Report

by Professor Aaron Rose-Milavec
Academic Director

Our online College just celebrated its fifth year of operation. My purpose is to share with you the State of the College at this point in time with special emphasis upon the year of 2012.

For the first three years, the enrollment doubled each year. During the early years, our participants came primarily from North America and the UK. In the last three years, there has been an overwhelming shift towards Asia and now Africa. This shift is due to the efforts of Deborah Rose-Milavec in visiting twenty institutions in South and East Africa and talking with participants from around the at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting. When participants show up in our online classroom, the first thing they do is to introduce themselves. In the past year, students from Kenya have specifically mentioned that they were inspired by a presentation by Deborah at their university.

Introduction to Online Learning



Dr. Susan Bainbridge, who, a year ago, provided input for improving our online classes went a step further this year. In collaboration with our college, she developed and piloted a course called *Introduction to Online Learning*, which was designed to help students from Nepal assess their readiness for online learning through a series of engaging online exercises. Twenty two students from Nepal took that class. Eight of them went on to take one of our women's and gender studies courses. Their eagerness to begin was outstanding and it was difficult for them to wait for two weeks between their enrollment and the beginning of their course. One participant wrote me that his heart and mind were "absolutely empty and ready to begin." Having spent some time in Nepal, I was

pleased to register a Buddhist perspective was being brought forward in our class interactions.

I was initially concerned, however, that their limited English skills and their slow internet connection would discourage them completely. But it was not so. Their zeal for learning made up for any difficulties they may have encountered. Some of the interviews were dramatic and showed some of the daily obstacles people face in living out their lives in the midst of violence, degradation and injustice. Whether the interviews were dramatic or not, this introductory learning experience illustrated that language limitations did not prevent students from telling the stories they received during their fieldwork. Our Nepalese participants confirmed their readiness for internet leaning.

Women, Bodies and Sexuality



Other 2012 courses touched on some critically important but sensitive topics. Dr. Mary Ryan, a feminist scholar with a degree a doctorate in sociology from South Africa developed [H32 - Women, Bodies and Sexuality](#).

I worked closely with Dr. Ryan over the course of several months and, by the end, she had adapted her material to an interactive media and mastered the skills of conducting an engaging chatroom as well. This demonstrates that a motivated teacher can successfully learn the programming skills required for our course methodology.



I was initially concerned, however, that their limited English skills and their slow internet connection would discourage them completely. But it was not so. Their zeal for learning made up for any difficulties they may have encountered. Even when it came to their field work, I was amazed at their ability to conduct interviews in their native tongue and then to translate into English.



The State of the College Report continued

The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India: Study Guide and Reflection



Another important topic focused on the roles of women in the Church and in society in India from the vantage point of a document created by lay and religious women in India and approved by the Indian Bishops. The seminar, named after the new document was called [The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India: An Exploration](#). Created and moderated by Deborah, this six week seminar included live interviews with experts in the field. The participants in this seminar came to appreciate how a few engaged women and a forward looking bishop had worked together to produce the most advanced gender policy within Catholic circles.



Women, Scriptures and Vatican II



Deborah and I developed a new course to celebrate the achievements of Vatican II at the time of its 50th anniversary and to acknowledge the contributions of women before, during and after the conference. We gave this course the title, [H18 Women, Scriptures and Vatican II](#). While preparing this course, my own eyes were opened and I realized, for the first time, how the twenty-three women invited as "auditors" to the third and fourth sessions of the Council were able to make decisive contributions to the bishops and to the texts which they drafted for the *aggiornamento*. We also examined how the popes and the curia following the Council served to implement but also to scuttle critical segments of the vision overwhelmingly voted for by the assembled bishops. This course ends up being an eye-opening analysis of the Vatican and its aftermath.



Feminist Theology from around the world



Our other new seminars give students a chance to engage with some of the writings of world renowned feminist theologians from around the world on topics that touch on spirituality, ethics and theology, as well as readings in modern masculinities. These seminars will be offered beginning in 2013.

In 2013 we look forward to developing a course on the women mystics and doctors of the Church with Sr. Dr. Sue Rakoczy of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, a course of the psychology of gender, and a course on women in the Church.

Other upcoming improvements include updating our college site to the latest version of the Moodle platform to improve performance and enhance student experience, as well as, possible changes to our course format that will improve the completion rates of our younger participants.

Our college would not be successful without the diligent work of so many people including our course creators, teachers and administrators. A special thanks to our Registrar, Virginia Saldanha for her outstanding achievement in helping students get enrolled and find their way to our courses.

~ Aaron Rose-Milavec

Readings on Modern Masculinities





This journey with this class made me feel part of Catherine of Siena.. I learned to be more of a writer for myself and for the advocacy of women.

~ 2012 participant in Women Writing

This class was particularly special because the women in the class had similar engagements with women, the church., etc. We had the same passions for life, the environment, justice, family. We shared many similar experiences of joy and pain.

~2012 student

Progress in 2012



Course Development

In 2012, we developed ten new courses and opportunities for our students.

In collaboration with Dr. Mary Ryan of South Africa, we developed an academic course called *Women, Bodies and Sexuality*. Another academic course developed by Aaron and Deborah Rose-Milavec focused on the contributions of women before, during and after Vatican II. This course has been titled *Women, Scriptures and Vatican II*.

A new seminar, *The Gender Policy of the Catholic Church in India* explored the forward thinking mindset of the Catholic Bishops of India in promoting gender equality in society and in the Church. A new management skills course has been added entitled *Writing an Effective Grant Proposal*. We are also preparing a group of new seminars which include readings on spirituality, ethics and theology, masculinities, classical feminist theological texts and feminist theology from around the world. Each of these seminars will be short and intensive, allowing students to engage with foundational texts from some of the most renowned feminist theologians of our day.

With our collaboration, Dr. Susan Bainbridge piloted an introductory course, *Introduction to Online Learning* that proved to be very effective in helping students who have not had a great deal of experience in online learning engage successfully with the online learning process getting them ready for core women's and gender studies courses.

Year	Academic	Skill/Seminar	Total
2007	2	1	3
2008	3	2	4
2009	2	1	3
2010	2	1	3
2011	2	1	3
2012	2	8	10
Total	13	14	28

2012 PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

- **256 students from 35 countries enrolled in our courses in 2012**
- **Since 2007, 874 students from 50 countries enrolled in our courses.**
- **From 2011 to 2012, 475% increase in the number of students from African continent**
- **10 new courses added in 2012 for a total of 28 academic, skill, and seminar-style courses.**
- **Piloted first introductory course for online learning to help students with little to no online experience gain readiness for women's and gender studies courses.**
- **CSVC participates in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting in Feb 2012**
- **CSVC Vice-Presidents invited to give presentations on aspects of Vatican II at partner college, DVK in January 2013**



Progress in 2012

Student Enrollment Numbers

Since 2007, student enrollments nearly doubled for three years. 2011 saw a healthy 37% growth in student enrollments bringing the total number of students enrolled to 618, and 2012 saw a similar number of students enrolling as 2011 with 22% of students taking more than one course.



2007	19
2008	54
2009	95
2010	190
2011	260
2012	256
Total	874

Courses taken by students

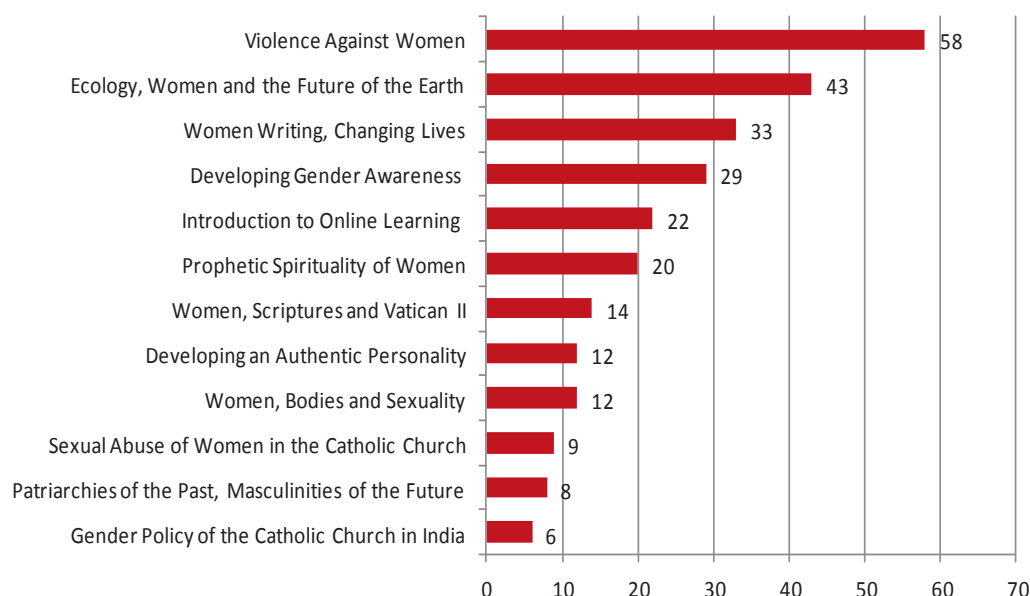
Catherine of Siena Virtual College courses are offered four times each year. Our January, April, July and October terms ensure that students from around the world will be able to engage our courses successfully and in alignment with their own university schedules. Courses are offered on a rotating basis and, while allowing the flexibility needed to adjust that schedule in accordance with special requests or needs that may come from our SHARING partners.

My writing potential was stirred while taking a course at Catherine College.

~Esther from Kenya



2012



Demographics

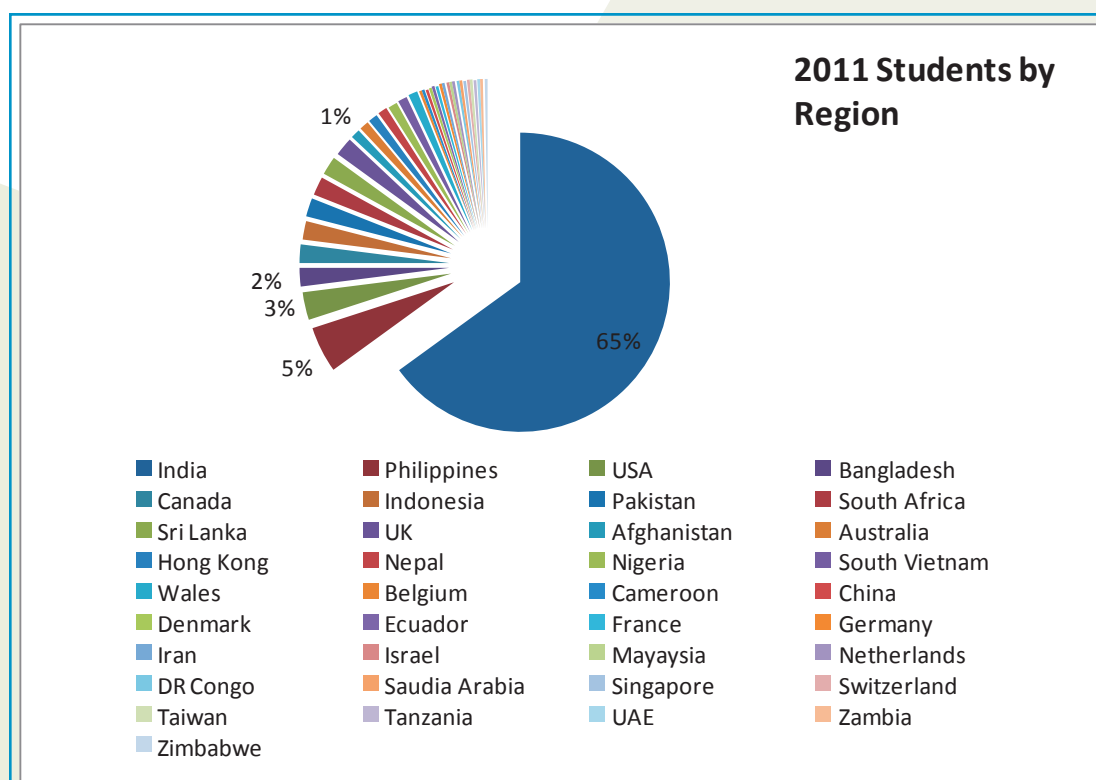
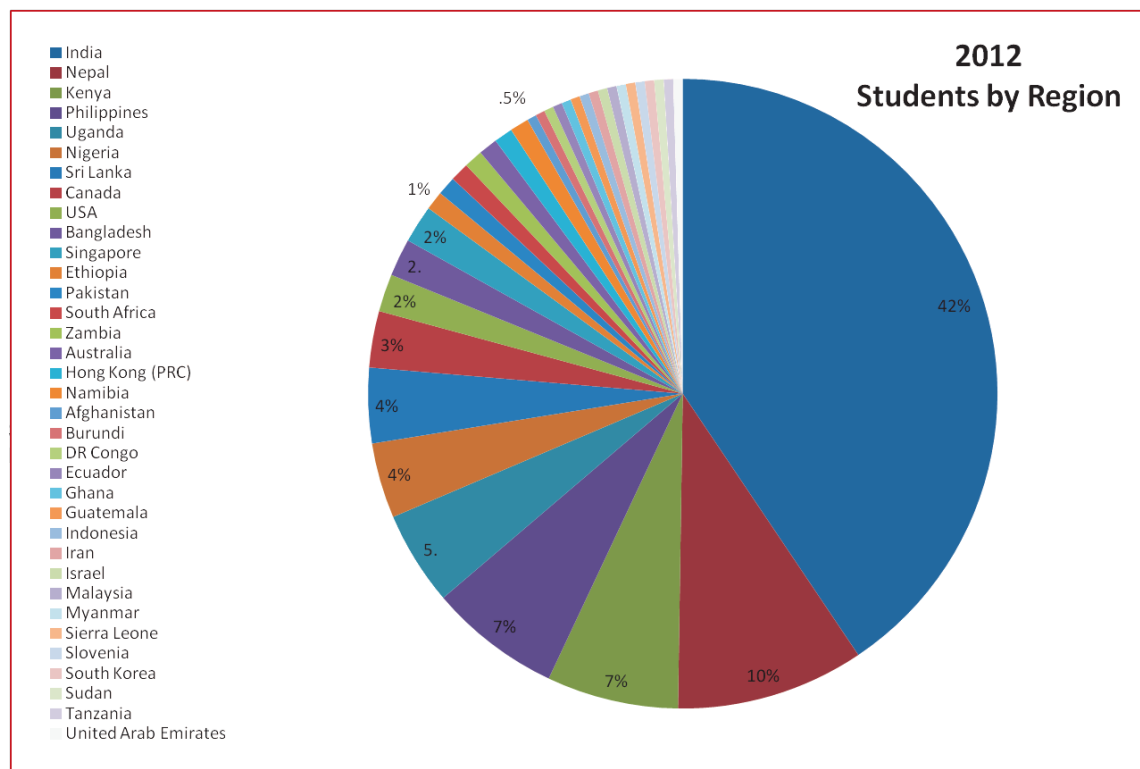
I enjoyed sharing my experiences, interacting with co-learners, listening to new ways of looking at life, reading the carefully prepared lessons, reading read back responses, listening to responses of other learners and reflecting on them. I enjoyed interviewing a woman passionate about the environment and listening to her ramble on; in doing so I pondered new ideas shared. I felt I was motivated to think deeply, creatively once more after along time... and I enjoyed this! I felt energized by being in the course. I loved reading what other learners felt about the topics dealt with.

~2012 Student

Students by geographical region

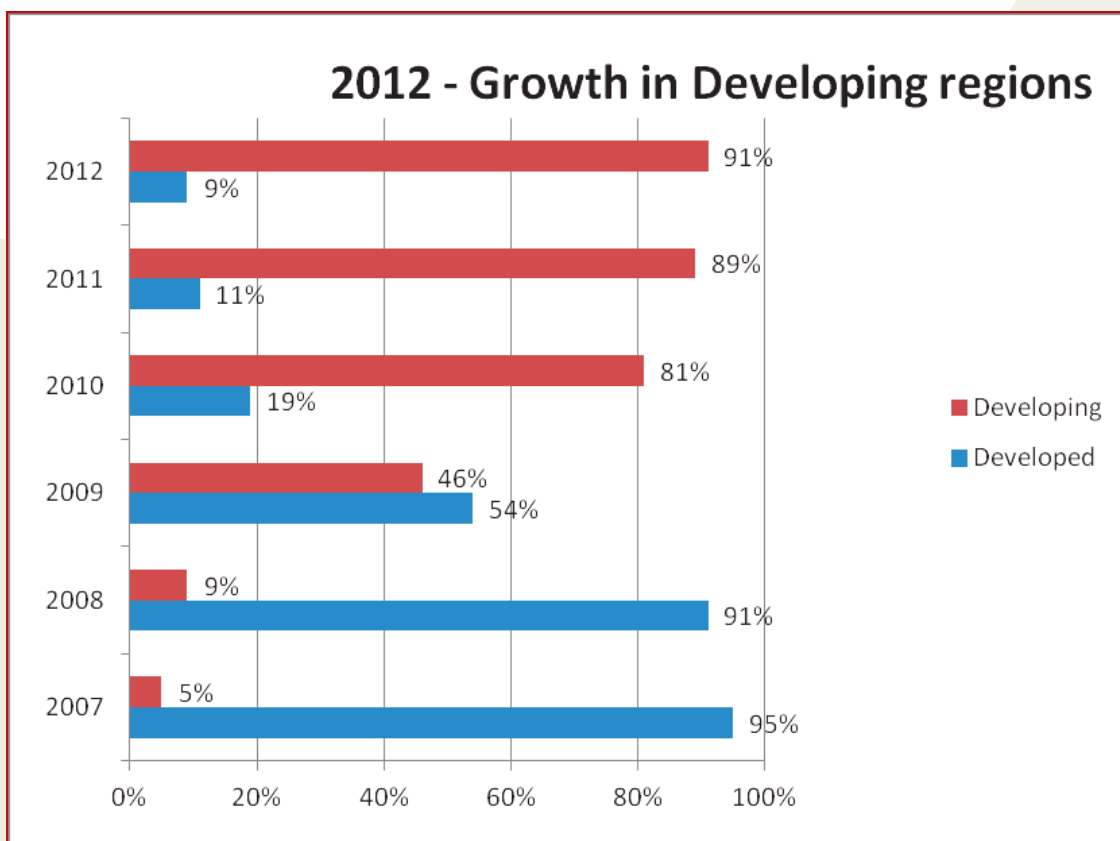
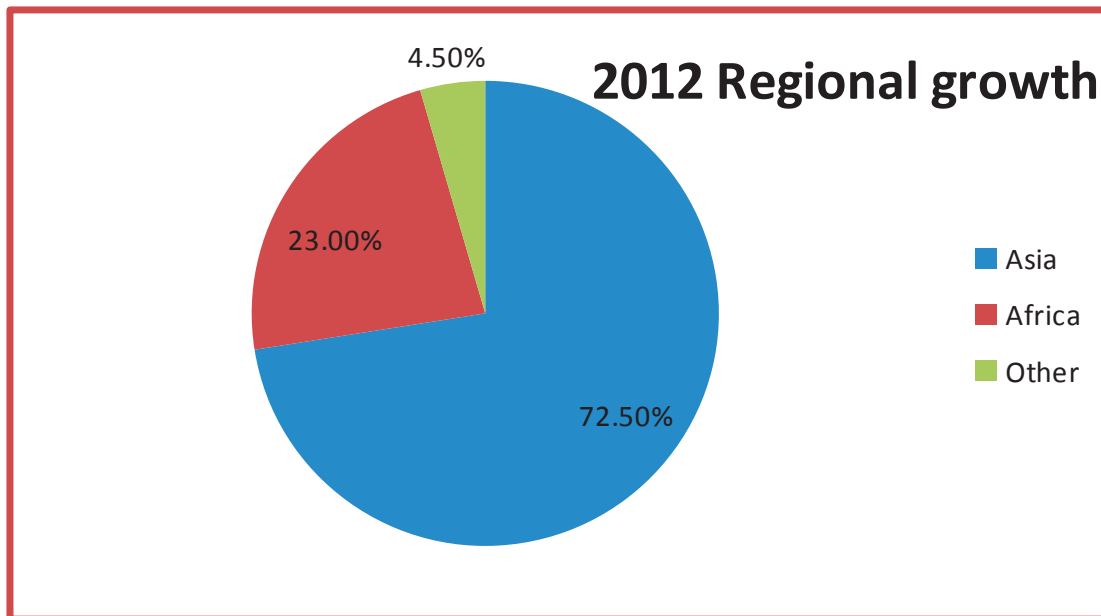
Over the past five years our student population has expanded in numbers as well as in diversity due to our robust outreach efforts, strong advertising campaigns, and our reputation for high-quality, personalized and transformational educational experiences.

In 2012 students from 35 different countries enrolled in our courses. This year we added seven new countries to the regions we serve including four from Africa. Since 2007 we have enrolled students from 50 countries around the world!



Growth according to region

In 2011 a little over 4% of our students came from the African continent. Since our outreach to Africa in late 2011, student enrollment rose to 23% of our total student population, a 475% change (increase) in enrollments from the African continent.



Demographics

The courses I took were Developing Gender Awareness and Patriarchies of the Past; Masculinities for the Future. These courses have helped me to understand who a woman is; not just a female we have been seeing, but a human being like me who deserves respect.

~Joseph from Kenya



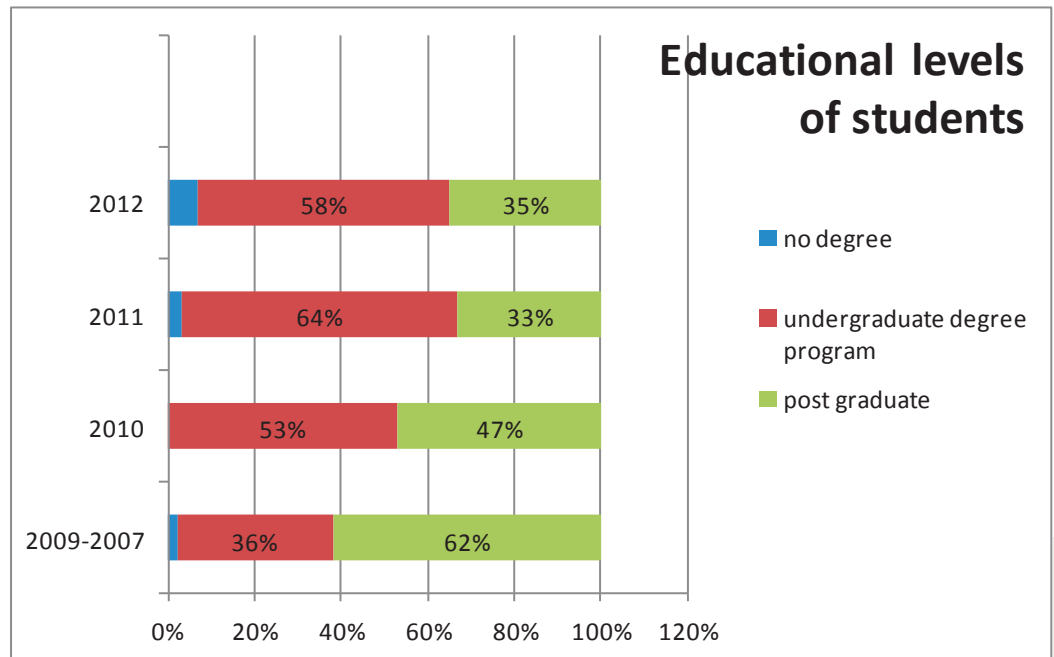
Demographics

I am aware of the harm that we humans are doing for our dear planet. And I am interested in doing what I can to prevent it. I am also interested in women's issues. These are very dear to my heart.

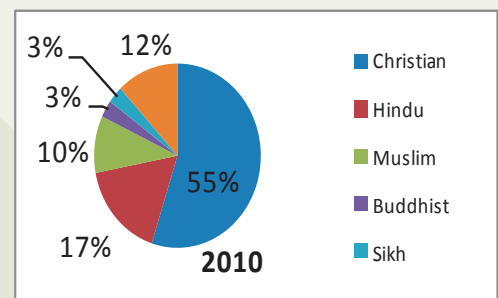
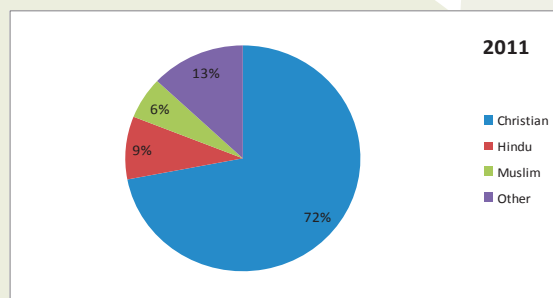
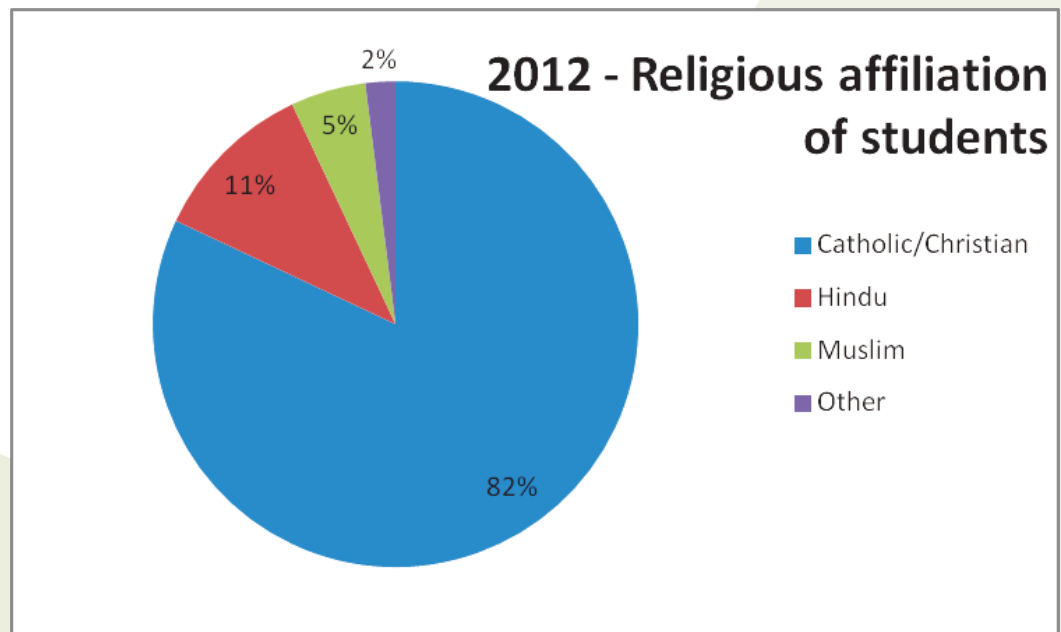
I would like to specify to areas-one being the field work, the other being lesson 7 which encouraged us to take a hunch, read material and then come back and rectify our hunches. I found this module most effective and interesting for learning and cognitive activity.

~2012 Students

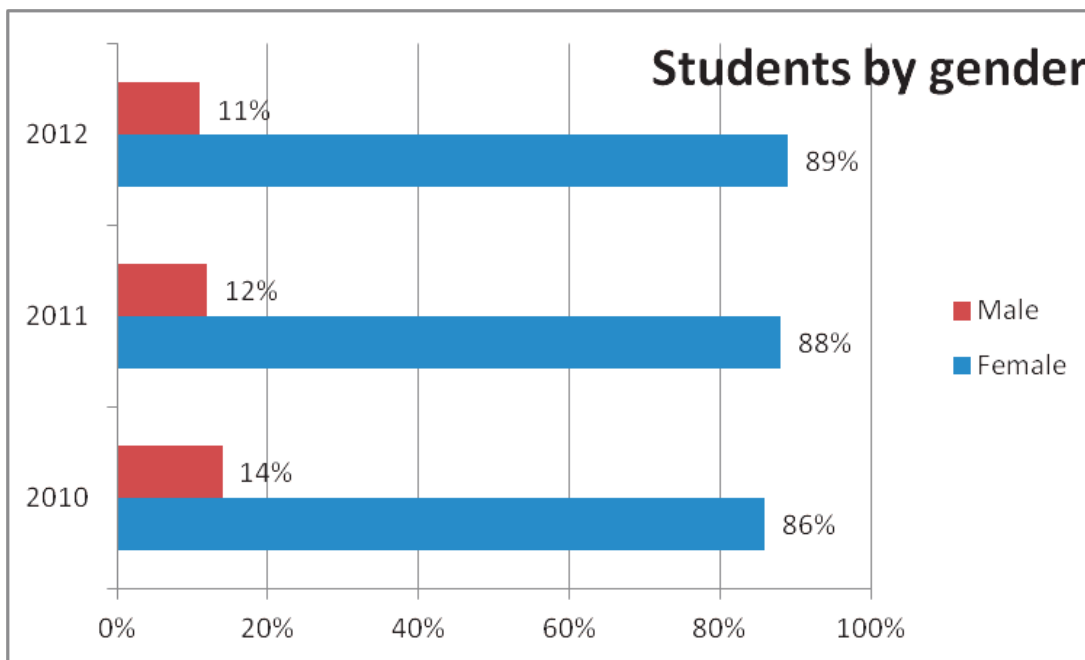
Students—educational levels



Students—religious affiliation



Students—gender



Summary of the data

We have enrolled students from 50 countries around the world in the last five years.

We have served a total of 874 students in the last five years.

More new students took our courses than in previous years. Approximately 22% of our students took more than one class. In previous years around 30% to 35% of our students took more than one class.

Our student population continues to be strong in SE Asia and is growing rapidly in terms of African students.

True to our mission, of offering women's and gender studies courses to those with little or no access in developing regions of the world, the number of students from developing regions of the world continues to grow. Our numbers are now completely reversed from those of 2008 where 9% of our students came from developing regions and 91% came from developed regions.

The number of students who have post graduate degrees or who are in a four-year degree program remains fairly consistent.

There is a trend showing that those attracted to our courses are most often Catholic/Christian.

Female students are overwhelmingly attracted to our courses with the number of male students remaining fairly consistent over the past three years.

Students who have little or no experience taking online classes were overwhelmingly successful after taking our pilot *Introduction to Online Learning* course.

Both Deborah and Aaron were great in the way they subtly led us to be critical and grow in 'wisdom and understanding.'

~2012 Student

I was very impressed with Dr. Mary's knowledge as well as her sensitivity as a person.

~2012 Student



Demographics



*I learned to love
myself and all the
women in my life!*

~Edwina
2012 Student

Qualitative Data



Student surveys were conducted in 2012 to help measure student motivation, satisfaction, and learning as a result of taking our women's and gender studies courses.

Chart I indicates motivation factors for students. Students take our courses because they expect the topics will help them develop skills for creating a better world and because they have a personal interest in learning about the topic. Personal and professional development and growth are important to these students, but to a lesser extent.

Chart II indicates where students profited from our courses. Participating in the chatrooms, having a safe climate for sharing, and interacting with other students are the three most prominent responses of our students. These kind of survey responses show how our online learning is both unique and true to our mission of transformative education. This is not an isolated learning experience, but one that is conducted in the midst of an online learning community.

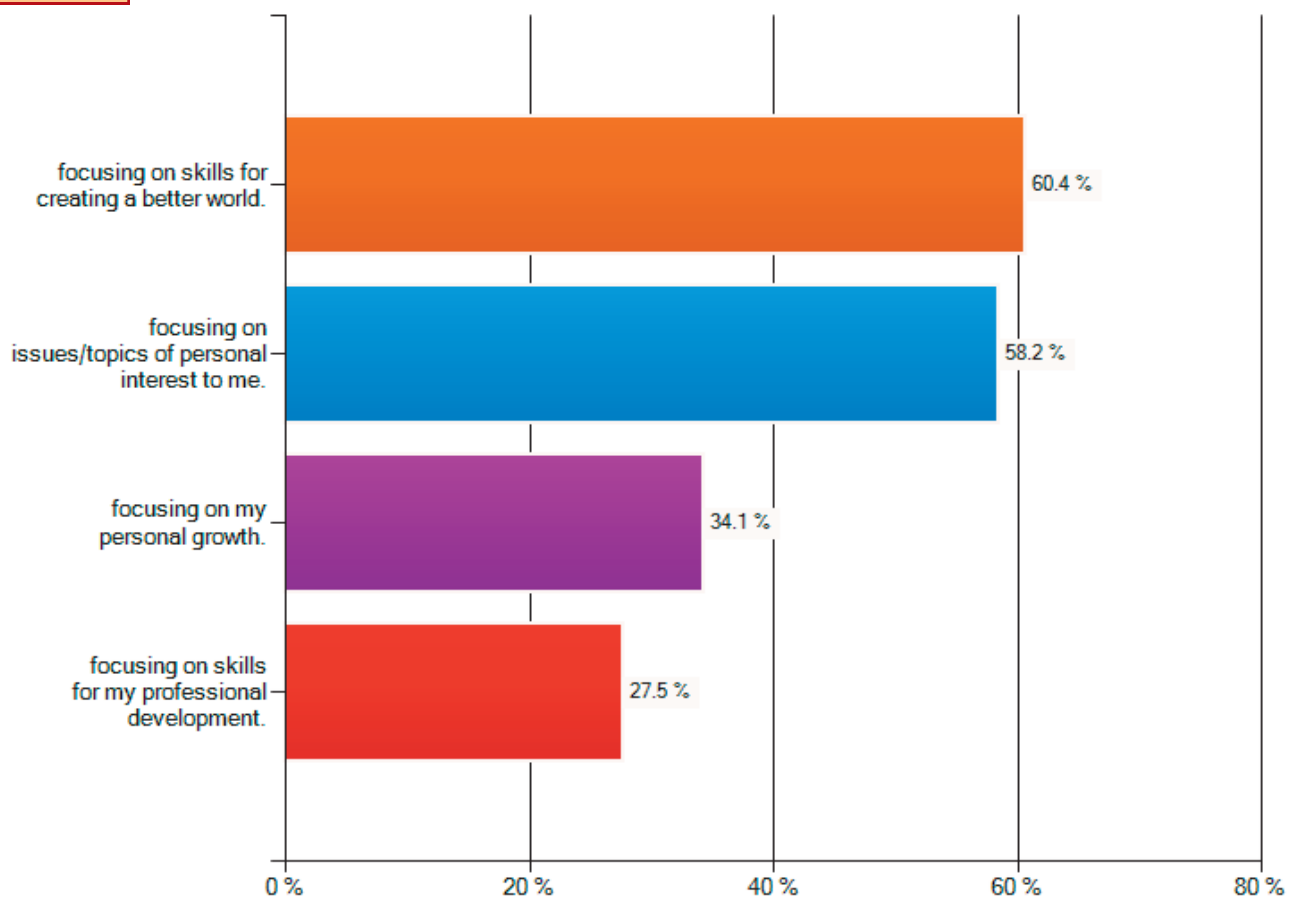
Chart III focuses on teacher/student interaction, as well as responses to technical problems.

Chart IV shows us which elements of our courses seemed to be most effective with our students. That our lessons use case studies, that the lessons are well ordered and the use of an interactive chat room seem to be the most effective aspects for our students.

Chart V focuses on satisfaction with peer interaction.

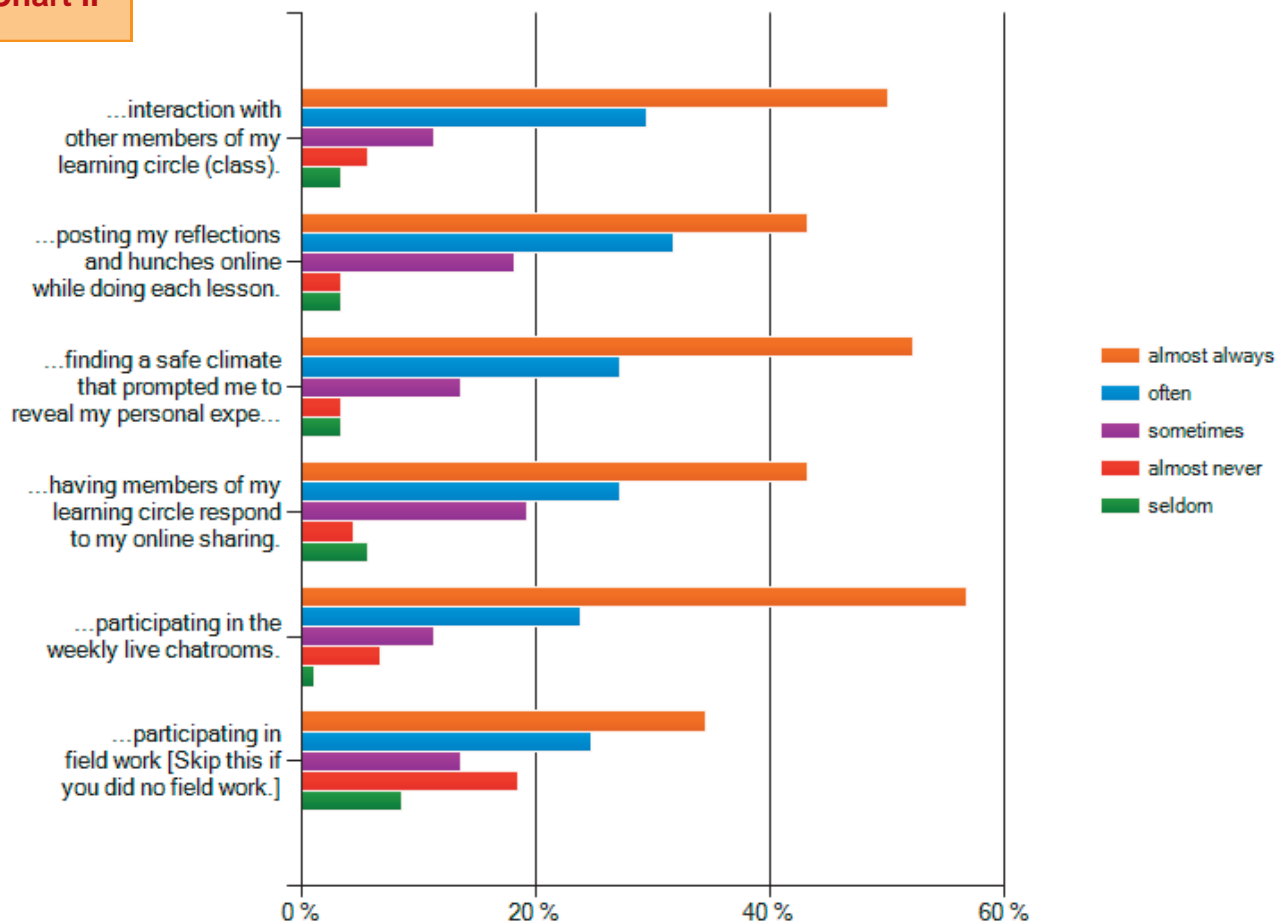
Chart I

My selection of this course was primarily motivated by...



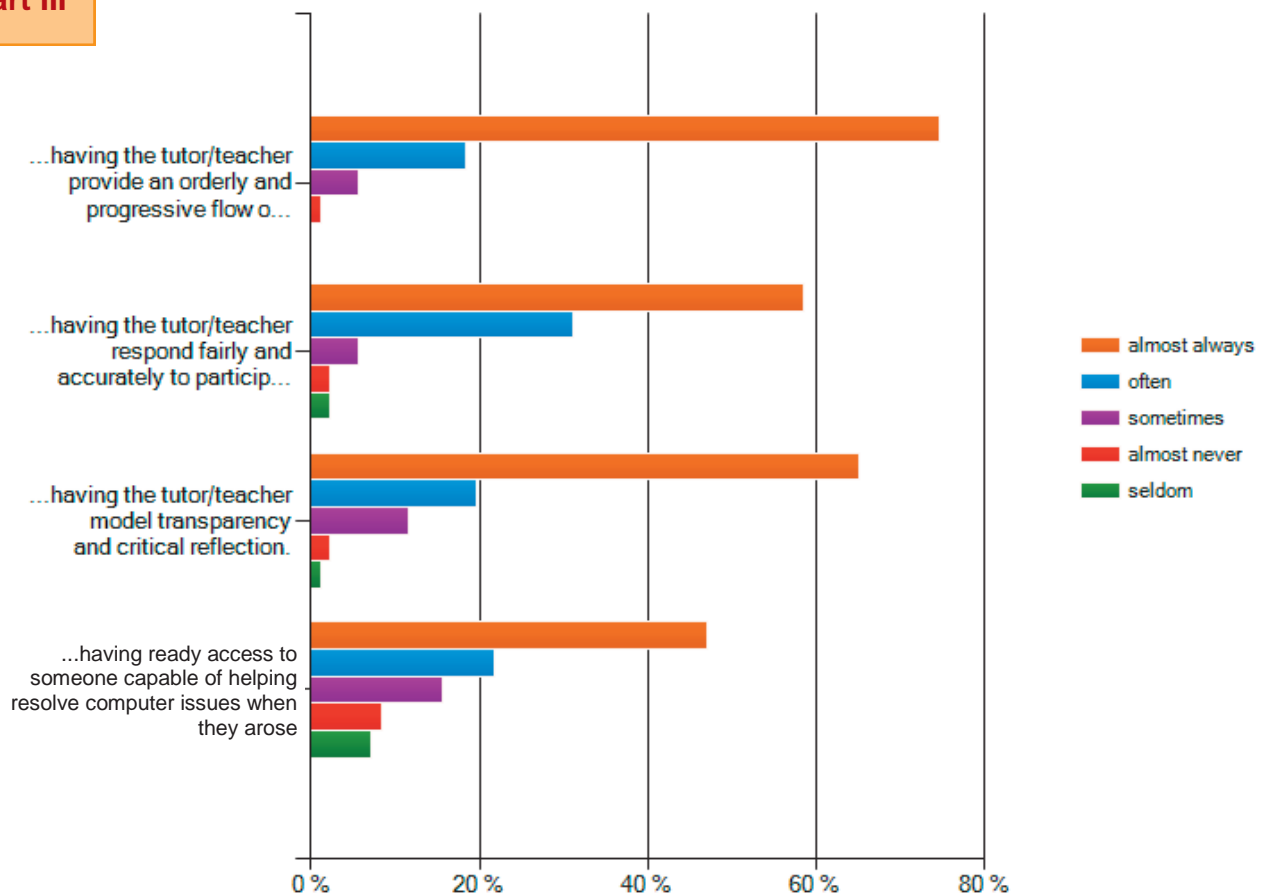
I enjoyed and profited from...

Chart II



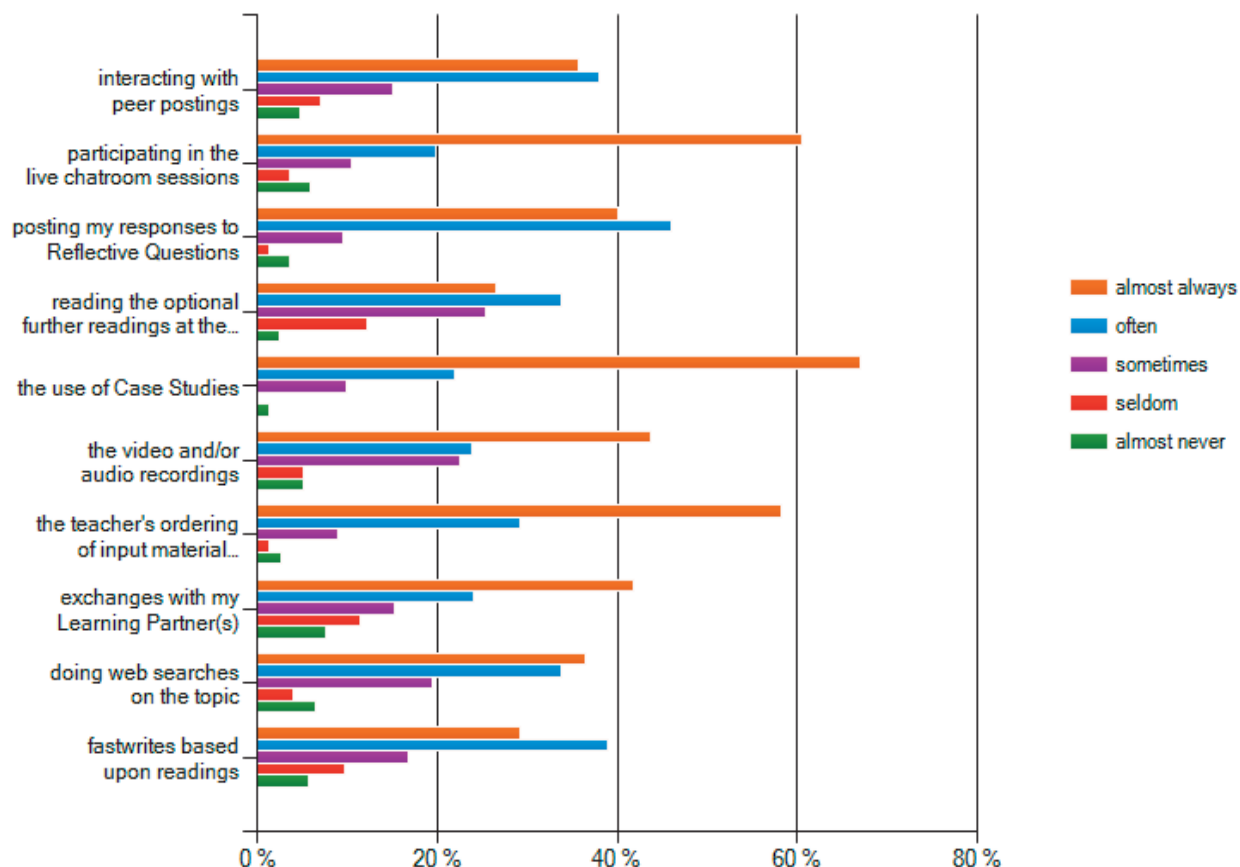
In my course, I enjoyed ...

Chart III



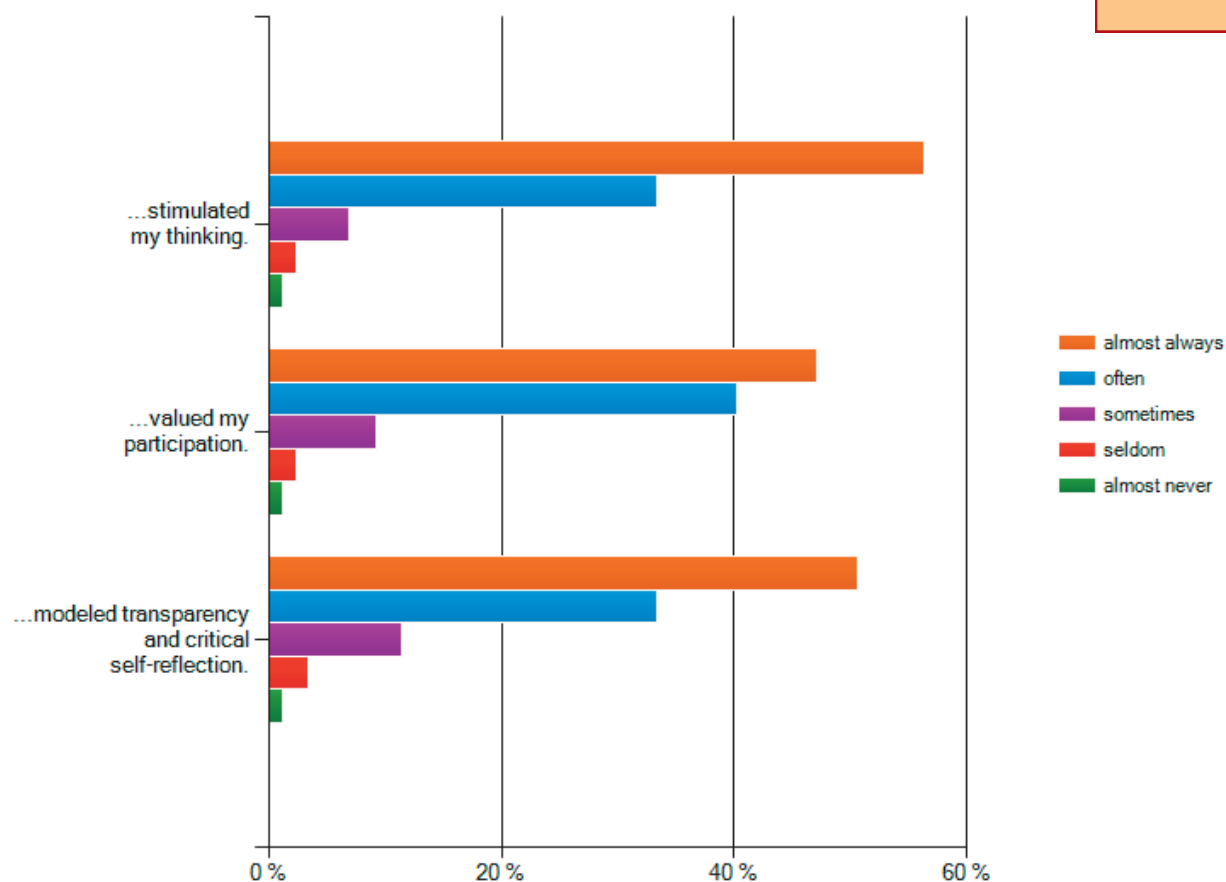
Sometimes the academic tasks within a course contribute to your overall satisfaction and learning; sometime they do not. Rate each of the activities below on the basis of HOW OFTEN they contributed to your significant or deep learning. Note: If some activity was never used in your course, leave the choices blank.

Chart IV



In my course I enjoyed having peers that ...

Chart V

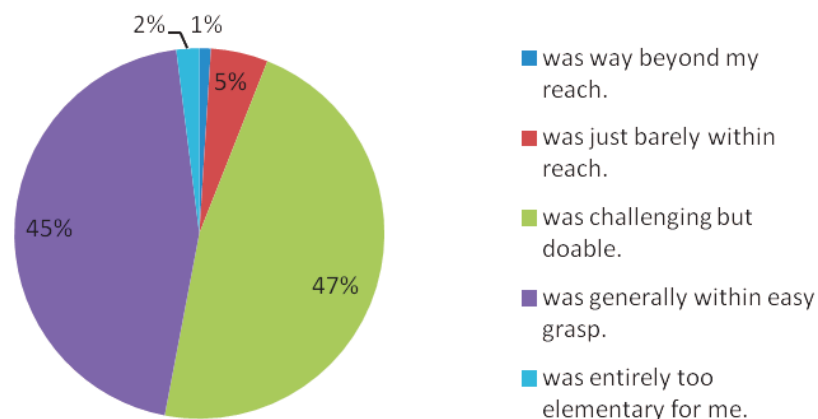


Qualitative Data

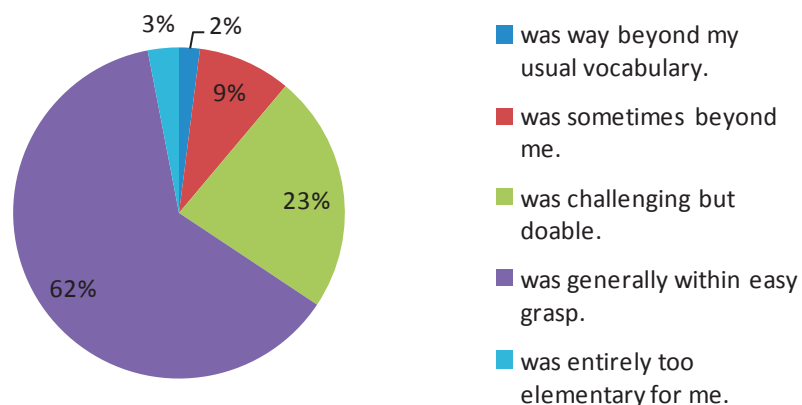
The course material most contributed to my deep learning. It gave me a fuller view of what was happening in other parts of the world.

~2012 Student

The academic level...



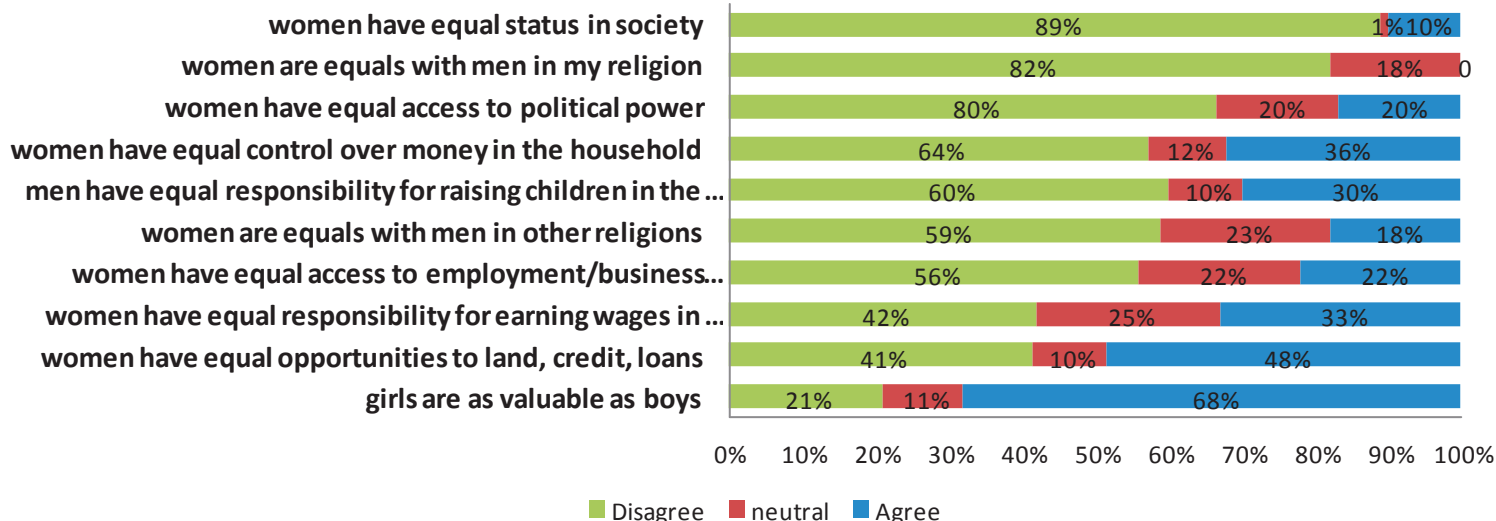
The vocabulary...



Student Learning

We also conducted surveys that focused on changes in student perceptions/learning as a result of taking one of our courses. The first survey question asked students to report their perceptions of the status of women and girls in their communities.

Current perception of the status of women/girls in your community





Qualitative Data

The second survey question asked students to gauge what learning occurred and/or changes in perceptions as a result of taking one of our courses. Students who completed this survey responded after taking the following courses: Violence Against Women, Developing Gender Awareness for Empowerment, Women Writing, Changing Lives, Ecology, Women and the Future of the Earth, Women, Scriptures and Vatican II, Prophetic Spirituality of Justice, and Sexual Abuse of Women in the Catholic Church.

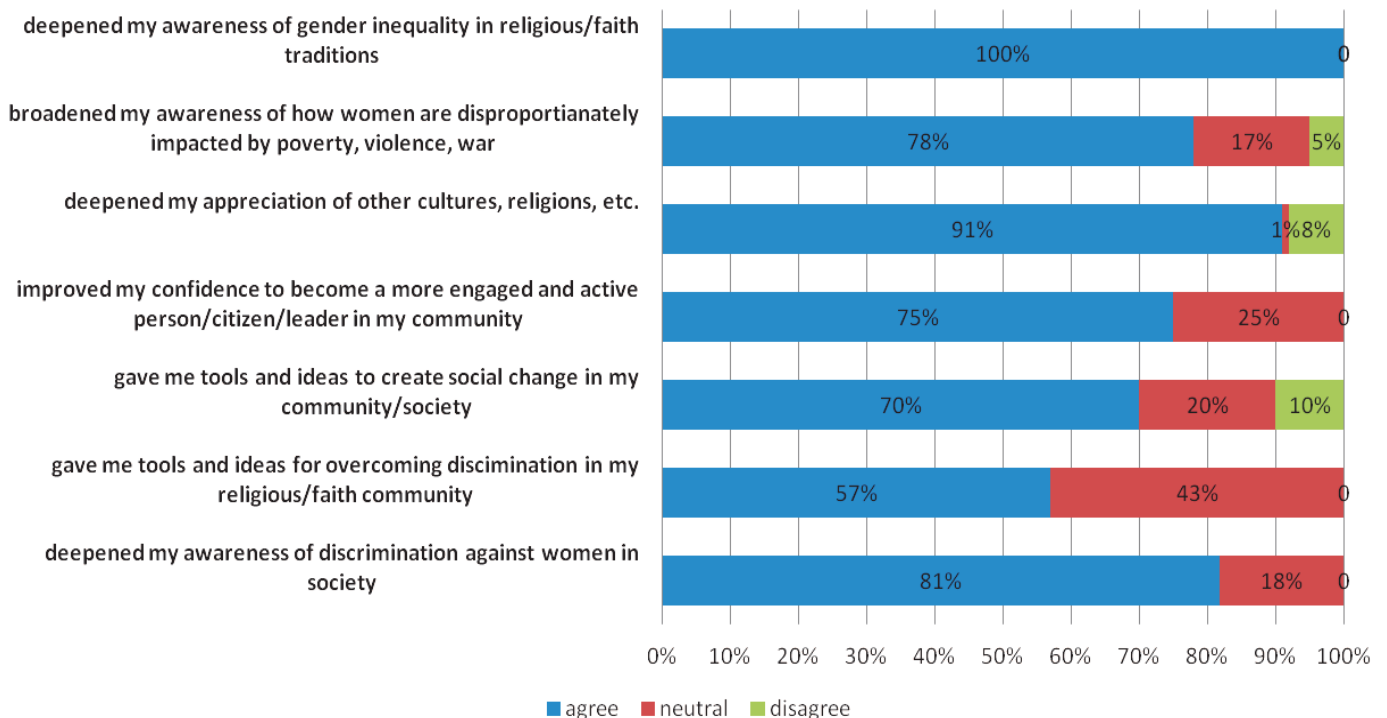
Overall, students agree that they developed a deeper awareness of gender discrimination after taking one of our courses. Additionally, their experience and understanding of other cultures was deepened. While we consider how to develop more practical tools for helping students implement new actions based on their newfound awareness, we know there have been some very important successes.

For example, the course *Sexual Abuse of Women in the Catholic Church* helped support the efforts of leaders in India who held subsequent seminars and wrote a brilliant new book, **Gender Relations in the Church**. Another student from India is teaching other Catholics about the history and theology of Vatican II after taking our course. A student in Canada started her own website and support group for victims of clergy sexual abuse after taking our course.

Other comments from students regarding their learning include:

- I learned many others social issues and the problem faced by the woman in the society.
- This course helped me understand the how and the why of discrimination within the Church and more importantly the vision of Jesus and the Church [Vatican II in particular] for it to be otherwise...
- The course improved my awareness of gender, it has made me confident in gender issues not only in the community but also in church issues.
- To me the engagement with the members of the circle was more spiritual than social.
- Deepened my knowledge on who a woman is in society.
- The course gave me some wonderful insights and understanding of the problem, of clergy sexual abuse. I am now able to speak, write, create awareness on the subject with confidence. Since I am influential in the catholic community I can also help influence policies / action.

To what extent (if any) did you change your perceptions about the status of women after taking your course





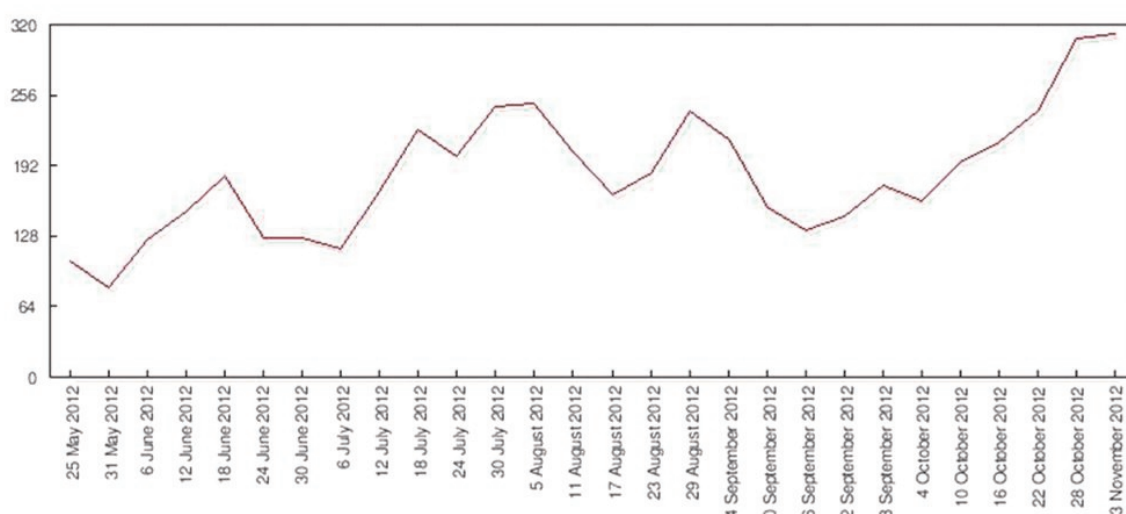
Report from our India office

Virginia Saldanha, Registrar



Virginia Saldanha joined the Catherine of Siena Virtual College staff as our Registrar in 2011. Because of Virginia's efforts, our students have found an improved environment for getting enrolled and finding their way to the courses. Below is a chart showing the trend toward improved login rates that was directly facilitated by Virginia. Since technical difficulties can be one of the most discouraging aspects to new students, it is quite important to have an experienced guide who can help them find their way.

Catherine College - Logins



Having been a victim of abuse, it has become my mission to work for the empowerment of women, hence this course was the right course for me to have taken, though I have done a previous training on the Gender Policy in India.

~2012 Student

I have long felt the Church misuses Scripture to deny women their rightful position and dignity. I have found it difficult to believe that Church teachings could have the same slant.... needed to understand whether my doubts were justified or not.

~2012 Student

Virginia also conducts outreach for the College in India and other parts of Southeast Asia. This year, alongside Margaret Kennedy of Ireland, she contributed a chapter to a new book titled **Gender Relations in the Church: a call to wholeness and equal discipleship**. Their chapter is titled, "The Well from which We Drink is Poisoned." The book focuses on clergy sexual abuse, especially as it applies to women along with the more systemic problem of women's inequality in the Church. One of the book's editors took the Catherine College seminar on *The Sexual Abuse of Women in the Catholic Church*. The Conference of Religious of India credited the Catherine of Siena Virtual College course for having been instrumental in addressing the issue of clergy sexual abuse in relation to a seminar on the topic in India. [Read her article.](#)

Virginia also contributed several articles and reports in various publications, some directly related to Catherine College and others that focus on other women's empowerment work she is conducting. The India n Women Theologian gathering focused on poverty.

Despite India's claim to economic growth and the abundant stocks of grain beyond the capacity for safe storage, there are alarmingly large numbers of people that still go hungry. We realize that the nature of the political economy together with exclusion caused by our entrenched caste structure adds to this hunger, which is not just physical but also for inclusion, recognition and partnership.

[Read more](#)

Report from our India office continued



Virginia's Outreach Report

In January 2012, I visited two cities Guwahati and Tezpur, in the North East to give a seminar with Streevani. I had the opportunity to speak to the religious sisters (about 45) from different congregations working in the North East about CSVCS in the course of the seminar. I distributed the bookmarks and fliers about our courses to the sisters, many of who were leaders in their congregations. In Tezpur, I gave some fliers to the diocesan officials in the bishops' house and spoke to them about the courses. They were interested.

I was also given an opportunity to speak to the all girls association of a convent school in Guwahati where about 100 girls were present. I spoke to them about CSVCS and distributed the bookmarks to them.

In February the topic of raising awareness among women came up at the board meeting of the Centre for Social Action of the Archdiocese and I told them about CSVCS. One priest from Xavier's College was present and promised to personally promote the courses of our college. He forwards our newsletters about our courses to students he is in touch with.

At the celebration of Women's Day by the Women's Networking group, I distributed the bookmark among those who had not heard of CSVCS and convinced a few to register for the April 2012 courses. In the month of March I wrote an article on Catherine of Siena Virtual College for the Mar-Apr 2012 issue of *My Educational Guide*, a newspaper that caters to students.

I was invited to a programme at the NM College of business in Mumbai, that was discussing corporate social responsibility. I used the opportunity to speak about gender justice in the workplace and introduced them to CSVCS. I distributed the bookmarks to the students present as well as other guests.

During my stay in Columbus I joined a Women's group called Lydia's House, that met each month at the Newman centre. I spoke to them about CSVCS and distributed bookmarks to the group. I joined the Eucharist celebrations of the Columbus Call to Action group and distributed bookmarks to some of those I got into conversation with.

In October, I gave a lecture on women's empowerment to the students of the Post graduate Teacher's Training College. It is an all woman college run by religious sisters. There are about 100 students in the college. I spoke to them about further awareness and introduced them to CSVCS. I also distributed bookmarks to all the students.

In December I will attend another programme to celebrate Human Rights Day organized by Women Networking at the YWCA and will use the opportunity to speak to the guests on a one on one basis about our college. I always carry bookmarks with me and use every opportunity to distribute them.

I will also be going to Goa in December and am planning to visit my niece's college to try and speak with the Principal about CSVCS and see if he can offer our courses as credits.

Overall, I have created regular opportunities to bring the advantages of CSVCS to the attention of women in Asia.

Virginia Saldanha

I mostly enjoyed the live chat with the members of the learning cycle. It became good platform for me to share my experiences and get others' views as well. The other thing is immediate feedback from Virginia (my tutor). She was so kind to my responses because she always inspired me for betterment.
~2012 Student

I believe that online learning is a sign of the future, and have encouraged it specially in the media field (which is my background). Yours is a pioneer effort, and deserves every encouragement.
~Fr. Myron from India





Outreach Report

Throughout 2012 we have updated and improved our main website, our college website, our blog, facebook page and twitter account with new features and news from around the world. We have

updated our marketing materials and have been successful in finding new ways to get the word out about our courses. One of the areas where we have been more intentional has been in the use of videos in our courses and in our marketing and outreach. For instance, our course on Vatican II makes use of more videos to help improve student's experience. We have learned the technology for converting old video technology into modern technology that can be used in our courses.



Our newest video, [Women: The Face of God](#) is an example of our new use of media to create interest and enthusiasm for women's empowerment and women's equality. This video beautifully

portrays women's struggles, but also the beauty of women's empowerment for creating a better world.



effective tool to help build new awareness for the College and for the work of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women everywhere!

Our Facebook page and Twitter account help us to reach out to people who engage these modern media venues. In these forums we can highlight events important to the College and issues that are pertinent to our mission and work.

In this modern media landscape, we are utilizing every

In the chatrooms, I got to learn different experiences and traditions of other countries. Reading the materials provided for each session, posting my reflections and hearing responses from my learning circle was a major contributing factor to my learning.

~2012 Student

The most enjoyable activity was the interaction in the chatroom and its resultant bonding and greater understanding of women from around the world.

~2012 Student

Outreach Report continued

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Through connections made with the Sisters of Charity in 2011, Catherine of Siena Virtual College was invited to participate in the 56th gathering of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women from February 27—March 9, 2012. Deborah Rose-Milavec, Dean of Students and Outreach Director attended. It was an exciting opportunity to spread the



word about the college and to network with women who are leading high level and/or grassroots efforts in their own countries to empower women and support equality and women's/human rights.

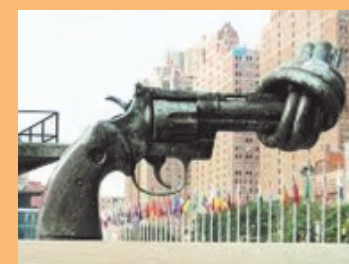
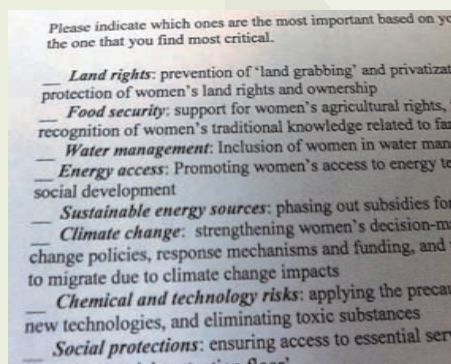
What was immediately noticeable was the value women place on community and communal problem solving. In each session, women from around the world sat in circles “thinking together” about the most pressing issues they face and how to im-

prove the plight of women and children. During a session on war and violence against women, a woman who has been engaged in addressing the problem of violence as a result of organized crime for 20 years spoke very clearly, “One woman can do nothing! It takes a community to address this problem.” Over and over again, communities of religious women and community based organizations spoke about their collaborative efforts to address any number of problems.

Yet new technologies are helping us see the deeply rooted systemic effects of the current economic, social and political systems that are in place. Technology is creating globally aggregated data that allow us to see in a comprehensive way patterns of women's existence. We know the statistics are still grim with regards to caregiving, growing food, huge gaps in wealth, power, and decision making authority. The picture for men and boys is also grim as too many are taught to kill and be violent, and to be cut off from nurture. Feminist poet Bell Hooks comments, “we have to bear witness to what is going on around the world by raising consciousness through the sharing of stories—both success stories and struggles.”

The UNCSW

The Commission on the Status of Women is a functional commission of the [United Nations Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#). It is the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Every year, representatives of Member States gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York to evaluate progress on gender equality, identify challenges, set global standards and formulate concrete



Outreach Report continued

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting con-

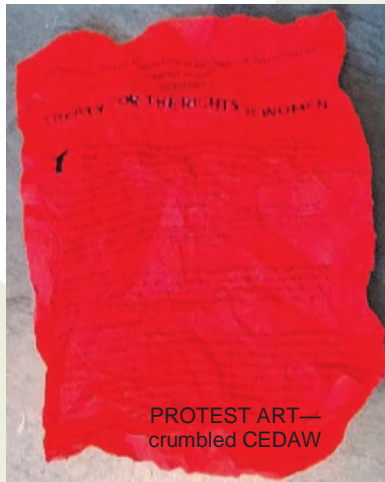
policies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. Following the 1995 [Fourth World Conference on Women](#), the General Assembly mandated the Commission to integrate into its programme a follow-up process to the Conference, regularly reviewing the critical areas of concern in the [Beijing Platform for Action](#) and to develop its catalytic role in [mainstreaming a gender perspective](#) in United Nations activities.

Outreach efforts



The conference focused on the needs and challenges facing rural women. Women from organizations around the world talked about their efforts to fight poverty, end hunger, create socio-economic and political opportunities for women, restore women's rights, end sex and human trafficking, abolish torture, sextortion, war and many other forms of discrimination and violence that disproportionately affect women.

Deborah attended four to five sessions each day and met with women working to solve the problems of gender inequality, exploitation, discrimination, and violence against women and girls in every region of the world. She met women from India, Egypt, Rwanda, Canada, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Iran, Zambia, Columbia, USA, USSR, Eastern Europe, Sweden, South Africa, and many other places around the world, listening to the stories of their experiences and work and telling them about Catherine of Siena Virtual College. She also met leaders from organizations that are considering how to collaborate with CSVC. .



Informational brochures, promotional notepads, and invitations to take a course with a full scholarship for people in developing regions were distributed widely to hundreds of participants at the conference. Many names and emails were collected for future contacts and possible collaborations. Future work will include becoming a member non-profit organization.



UN WOMEN REPORT

Gains as of 2011:

173 countries guarantee paid maternity leave

139 constitutions guarantee gender equality

125 countries outlaw domestic violence

117 countries have equal pay laws

115 countries guarantee women's equal property rights. but despite significant advances, women continue to be denied their rights.

Gaps:

127 countries do not explicitly criminalize rape within marriage

61 countries severely restrict women's rights to abortion

53 percent of women work in vulnerable employment

50 countries have a lower legal age of marriage for women than for men

10-30 percent is the average pay gap between women and men



Catherine of Siena Virtual College 2012

Other outreach

Other outreach included becoming a member of the advisory board for Future Church which is working to develop women's leadership within the Church. Catherine College is a supporting partner of the Office of Peace Justice and the Integrity of Creation's Violence Against Women Conference which will feature Sr. Joan Chittister in 2013. and our new video for a crowd of 700 or more. Catherine College has been working with women religious in the USA on a project called "Solidarity for Sisters" providing support to the LCWR. Another project supported by Catherine College called "Voices Speaking" is a coalition of lay persons involved in direct dialogue with church leaders regarding women's leadership in the Church. In November 2012, Catherine of Siena College sponsored a booth at the Call to Action Conference in Louisville, Kentucky and talked with many conference attendees about our courses.



Conclusion

Catherine of Siena Virtual College just finished its fifth year of operations. We are both proud of our accomplishments and looking for ways to improve. We have a solid formula with our case study methodology, interactive student forums, and weekly chat rooms. We want to build on that formula and create an environment where all students who are willing to seriously engage in the enterprise of online education, can be successful.

There has never been a greater need for our women's and gender studies education in the ever expanding landscape of online learning. And we are proud to know that some of our students are taking the learning they received and engaging in the work of empowering women and promoting gender equality in new ways in their own communities and regions. The course on the Sexual Abuse of Women in the Catholic Church supported the growth of two pioneering efforts in India and Canada for education, advocacy and support for women who have been abused. In other cases, women are gaining the confidence they need to educate and raise awareness in others around women's roles and leadership in the Church based on the theology of Vatican II.

We are committed to fulfilling our mission of promoting gender equality and empowering women for life and leadership throughout the world, but especially in regions where access to women's and gender studies courses is limited. We are committed to building bridges of understanding, solidarity and hope so that all people may share in a world of justice and peace.

