

# INTEGRATIVE STATEMENT

*Contract V - Scott Schumacher*



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### So how DO we do it?

When I set out on this learning journey, I began by asking one very important question that was in my heart at the time:

*How do we create communities and lives out of the mix of art, creativity, peace, healing, sustainability, nonviolence, and social justice?*

This question has held many forms and iterations, yet it has served to guide me throughout this journey. I sought to find these answers both in the world and from within myself. I wanted my learning to become deep - in my “blood and bones” as one of my teachers had put it.



There are many answers to this question, but through this journey, I have found some very deep and meaningful answers to help me along this path. In my previous learning, I have found the following answers for my personal quest:

1. Find what is alive in you - because the world needs more people who have come alive.
2. Change the story to change the world.
3. Let Nature be your teacher.

As I continue this learning journey, more answers have come to life for me. However, I have learned that this journey will be life-long, and that answers will come to me so long as I hold this question in my heart.

### Another Answer: Allow yourself to be changed

I am still struck by the story that Laurie Witzkowsky shared at the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary:

**“I have seen a monarch caterpillar literally fling it’s face off to rid itself of an old skin. It knows when structures no longer serve him, and it is time to transform.”**

I believe that we are at a critical time in the world. We are on the brink of an impending global climate change, global “peak oil”, global unrest and turmoil over oil, resources, and now food in many developing countries. The United States alone maintains an arsenal of nearly 10,000 nuclear weapons, with over 5,000 of them in active service - some on “hair-trigger alert” even. Like never before in the history of the human race, we are at a cross-roads where we must choose our fate.

Will we choose our own destruction, or will we choose to walk a different path?

I have been inspired by the stories of people who have chosen to be faithful to their own paths. Ernesto (Che) Guevara atop a motorcycle, Catholic nuns and laypeople who have put their lives at risk to symbolically disarm nuclear weapons, children who have carved their own paths of learning, “Green Sisters” who see environmental activism as a calling of their faith, and communities in India who have held true to Mahatma Ghandi’s vision of *Swaraj*, or self-rule.

My experience in learning over the past three years has changed me. I have allowed myself to be led by my passions, inspired by others’ stories, and swept away into new and unexpected twists and turns along an unfolding “labyrinth” of learning. My heart has changed. I am now faced with new questions.

How do I honor this change?

How must I proceed?

What am I “walking out” of, and to what am I “walking into”?

## Another Answer: Follow your “River Between”

What is your River? What is that one path - that one essence or image within your heart that guides you?

The times I prescribed learning to myself in the form of classes or contracts never seemed to work for me. I procrastinated. My mind and heart wrenched and writhed from within. And then, something inspired me, and I followed it. When a bicycle tour turned sour for me, I created what became a beautiful and unfolding adventure in Portland, Oregon. When I took an Animal Mask Making class, I made connections that led me to experiences integrating my love of nature with art, music, and deeply serendipitous experiences. When I accidentally discovered a conference in Madison, Wisconsin on Unschooling, more metaphors became clear to me on my “labyrinth of learning” and I made connections with Man-

ish Jain of Udaipur, India. By getting to know Manish and learning more about Shikshantar and the network of people who have “walked out” of academic institutions, I found my own deepest intent to transcend the boxes of academia and RECLAIM my learning for myself.

The metaphor of “A River Between” will serve me well I believe. I have a web site dedicated to this theme, which currently houses my blog and online portfolio. I have visions of further writing about this river.

*When we are faced with “boulders of institutions” that surround us, yet they do not serve us well - we must find A River Between. The river flows around these boulders, making a path around obstructions - ever twisting and winding in a path of least resistance. As the water finds its way, over time it erodes the landscape, forms a new terrain, and transforms the very boulders and mountains around it. The river between is a force of change - a gentle and ever flowing current - continuously bringing new life downstream. Boulders may be placed in the river’s path, yet a path around and between is eventually found.*

## How must I “walk out”?

Sometimes it’s called “cognitive dissonance” - when experiences and learning create extreme conflict with previously held notions within the mind. In the final stages of this journey within an academic program, I was inspired by the story of Che Guevera. At the end of the movie “The Motorcycle Diaries”, there is a scene where Guevera says goodbye to his friend Alberto Grednado at an airport. He states to his friend that he would not be returning to complete his medical exams. He tells Alberto, “Something has changed in me,” and that he has seen “so much injustice.”

As for me, I could not stop reading the stories from Udaipur about people who had “walked out” of educational structures to reclaim their own learning. My very own notions of “I must live my own curriculum” were beginning to lead me to a door in my heart - deep within my heart - that was luring me to “walk out”, just as others who had inspired me had done.

Would I be a hypocrite for staying and finishing a degree, when my inquiry was leading me to deeply know that degrees and certifications were tools used to divide humanity? Was I facing a moral and ethical decision? Would I be compromising my values to obtain yet another degree? Could I finish and reclaim my learning somehow in a very beautiful way? If I walked out, would I be leaving opportunities behind? If I did not walk out, would my words no longer hold power?

In the same spirit of “being led”, I decided first to receive a grade of “incomplete” for my last five credits. I needed to live there. I needed to begin to feel my “hand against the wall” of potential “failure” in the eyes of academia.

Here I was learning without boundaries and borders, and at the same time I felt as if the institution of academia wanted to wrap me up in a box, sew up my learning, stamp the letters M and A upon me, and bring me into the fold. I could get a job in this world. I could start assigning grades, evaluating others, and sort out the new “haves” and “have-nots” of learning. And, I could become an “alumni success story” to lure others into these hungry jaws - the very “boulders” rising up out of the water that my river wanted to flow around.

I also learned the following things, which greatly distressed and disappointed me, while in my period of “incomplete”:

- I could not engage in further learning with my adviser outside of the academic setting for a period of one year after graduating - as a university “guideline” - when inquiring about taking workshops with her on creative leadership in the future.
- I would have to pay fees up to \$200 simply to present my final colloquium and to “graduate.” My colloquium could only take place in Minneapolis at the college, and not the place of my choosing.
- Core faculty at one point were “advised” against giving letters of recommendations or being a reference for students. I probed this issue with Student Services and found out there was no current policy concerning references. They are still awaiting legal counsel I’m told.
- My final position paper must conform to specific style and APA guidelines only. If I choose to share this paper within the university system, it will live in a locked cabinet and my name removed.

The institution of education is doing “business as usual.” I’m sure that none of the statements made to me by faculty or advisers were meant to be personal, and I do not take them as such. However, this too, was a learning experience - one that was valuable. At the very time that humanity must choose to “wake up” to injustices - we simply continue to perpetuate them because we are “only doing our job.” These things, along with other developing notions and ideas have led me to a decision.

I am leaving the boxes of academia. I will not be completing the prescribed position paper, nor will I be presenting a colloquium to satisfy the institution. Further presentations, writing, inquiry, and research will be to satisfy my own needs and my own learning. I will find other ways to share this knowledge with the world that is more meaningful. This is not a retaliation to faculty, staff, nor the institution, but part of an honoring of the “river between” that I must follow. I will illustrate and share my portfolio of learning as an invitation to others, and “rename and reclaim” my learning as my own. My path is now open. The door

in my heart has ached to be broken down, and I need to find some way to satisfy that longing, in my own way.

A very poignant phrase comes to mind:

**“Know where you stand - and stand there.”**

At the gates of Fort Benning, I cried out with 20,000 others to say “No mas! No more!” to the injustices of military madness. If I could stand at the gates of a military complex, I can stand against the gates of the “academic industrial complex” as well. My words will now carry power, and will serve as an authentic invitation to others who may be aching to “walk out” of structures that do not serve them, and to “walk on” to meaningful learning and a meaningful life - to find “what is alive in them.”

## What am I walking into?

A great learning journey that has begun to unfold for me more deeply is my spiritual connection with nature and the honoring of my Celtic roots. I have discovered an organization called the Ancient Order of Druids in America, and the realm of Druidry. By its very name, “druidry”, an “ism” is not implied. In fact, I am learning that Druidry is based on a connection with nature that is viewed more as a craft or an art that develops over time - neither a dogma nor prescribed path. Nature is one’s teacher. This year, I plan to embark on a new learning journey, creating another portfolio of learning of my own experience in learning the “spirals” of Druidry.

I’ve begun mentoring students who are on their own learning journeys. I am working with a community member of Starwalkers, the intentional learning community I helped to found. Amy is on a path of contract learning with Prescott College in Sustainable Community Development. I am also helping an intern in Saint Olaf College’s “Leaders for Social Change” to find research and projects of meaning to him as he completes an internship with The Center for Sustainable Living this summer. I also now facilitate the Northfield Commons Cafe - an open space learning opportunity where people come together to explore questions that matter to them in the Northfield community. The motto, of course, is “We are the leaders we need.”

I would love to someday travel to India to visit Udaipur, and to contribute to Shikshantar for a time, in whatever way might be possible. Perhaps I will create a “walkouts” network in Minnesota to reach out to others who have “walked out” of the ready-made world, in whatever way this notion has manifested for them.

The door is open. The lid is off. I will allow myself to be led by this notion, and see where the path takes me - just as I have so many times before in the last three years of this learning journey.

## Many Thanks!

I want to formally thank those people who have supported me throughout this phase of my learning journey. First and foremost, to all of the wonderful teachers and faculty I have come to know. I have enjoyed my time with you, and the opportunity to grow my learning in such an organic way. It has been nothing less than life changing. I have been invited to speak to others in your classes, and you have had the opportunity to read and review my portfolio of learning over the last few years. You have inspired me, and I hope my words have also inspired you, as we all need inspiration as human beings in the world we are facing today. Please honor my decision to leave, and to spread my wings in this way - at a time that I believe is pivotal in my life.

Perhaps my leaving the “academic box” will have created its own dissonance. One less student will contribute to a “graduation rate” statistic. No “corks will be popped” to celebrate the signing of a diploma. Eventually, we can move beyond the current hierarchical relationship we have, and new doors of co-creation and learning may show themselves. I have learned in life that the connections made with others can be deep, and even after we say goodbye, we often get other chances down the road to meet again. At that time, we can move beyond a “Teacher-Student” relationship. No one will need to assign grades, enforce deadlines, or feel trapped by academic policies. I’d really like that.

To my partner, Michael - you were my inspiration to follow my heart when I began my studies. You are a living example of authenticity that I someday wish I could even half way emulate.

To Marijane, Michael’s mother - thank you for all of the labyrinth tours! Thank you for the labyrinth at Wasafarm! Thank you for all of your encouragement and kind words throughout my journey.

To Manish Jain, Olivia Frey, Rose Ann Steenhoek, and other Unschoolers who have shaped my learning and opened my eyes to a broader paradigm of learning - your lives have been an inspiration for me to create my own deep and meaningful experiences. I have never been the same since meeting you. I am so grateful!

## An invitation...

I would love to share my learning and my life going forward with those who are reading. I believe that great experiences should be shared, and that in that sharing, our feelings of isolation can break down. There is too much isolation in the world today.

You are welcome to check in from time to time at my website and blog, "A River Between." There will be many invitations.

<http://www.holisticgeek.com/riverbetween/>



**May we all come  
alive!**

**Thank you!**

**-Scott Schumacher**