

# JENNA: Establishing Collaborative Relationships

## An Introduction to CMS's Work from the Eyes of a Student



Being able to build a relationship with Jenna allowed CMS to have very candid conversations with her. We asked her a few questions recently and thought it would be valuable to share her thoughts with you.

### **I. KATE: What did you find in our classroom activities to be the most helpful?**

"In the beginning what was crucial for me was to experience a feeling of safety. There was something different about the class. It had to do with an overall understanding that everyone was expected to pay close attention to what each participant had to say. It wasn't about whether you agreed or disagreed with someone's observations. The focus was on how we differed from one another, and how that difference creates our individuality. I had a great deal of inner conflict throughout the semester, and I quickly discovered how hard I was on myself and others as a result of my preconceived expectations. I had grown up in a very rigid family structure and there was not a lot of leeway to express any vulnerability. I carried that protective shield through high school, at the Academy and into my career as a leader in the military. As I began to reflect on my feelings both in class and in the broader community, I realized that I was constantly seeking affirmation from almost everyone. I was always questioning whether I was doing the right thing. All of this had become a disabling distraction, and it produced overwhelming anxiety that was stopping me from being more effective and self-accepting. I think learning to be less judgmental, more open to alternative approaches, and embracing my emotional vulnerability has allowed me to become more of a risk taker. This focus on being open is now present in my everyday life."

### **II. KATE: What was it about the class process that opened up these possibilities?**

"I've never participated in a class where we actively focused on learning how to listen and to care about the other students. This went way beyond applying prescriptive formulas for analyzing case studies. That's one of the things that has always frustrated me in my educational experiences. While searching for the best collective response to a specific problem, we never seem to consider one's inner spirit, the impact on your thinking based on how you grew up or how you wish to express your inner compass. The environment in our class was anything but that. We personalized the reasons for our assessments and documented these thoughts and feelings based on the extensive reading assignments. When faced with complex issues, it wasn't about finding the correct answer; rather, we learned to see the value in how each of us uses our unique set of experiences and assumptions to approach situations in quite different ways. By slowing down our need to proffer an immediate response to the first idea that pops into our awareness, we practiced reflecting on our assumptions, attending to our observations from multiple perspectives and looking for fault lines in our reasoning. Presence was huge for me, and that actually translated into seeing my yoga practice as not only a good way to strengthen my body by staying fit, but it also allowed me to experience the challenge of being in the moment with myself. My conversations with Kate helped to motivate me to stop rationalizing my actions and to refine that quiet space. Dr. Langlois was always there to remind us to think what you want to say before you start talking and to pay close attention to why other people have their reasons for why they think the way they do. We were reminded that you find significant differences in the individual not in the collective response."