On March 5, 2014, Dr. Clay Warren gave a presentation as part of the GSEHD Distinguished Guest series. Typically, this series invites academics external to GW; in this case, GW featured one of its own scholars who has made a distinguished contribution to lifelong learning and adult education both nationally and globally.

Dr. Warren’s talk—“An American Perspective of the International Impact of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Educational Ideas on People and Enlightenment”—was given to an overflow audience in the Marvin Center. Dean Michael Feuer introduced his guest as entitled to the description of distinguished, given his numerous publications in the field across 24 years as a member of the GW community. Warren recently co-edited a recent book on N.F.S. Grundtvig (The School for Life, 2011)—the first authoritative edition on Grundtvig’s educational writings available in English—and his work on this book and the content therein were central thrusts of his talk.

A 19th century philosopher, theologian, and poet, Grundtvig was the inspiration for the people’s college movement (1844); influential in establishing Danish parliamentary government (1849); produced 120-tomes-worth of writing across his almost 89 years of life; and, composed 1500 hymns (half the Danish hymn book). Danes are fond of claiming that visitors “meet Grundtvig when they cross the Danish border.” Contemporary polls point to Danes as being the happiest people in the world. Danes would correct that description to “happy Grundtvigian Danes.”

Dr. Warren also covered key components of a Danish people’s college. Grundtvig believed all people should be educated, a widely radical idea for the time and, in some ways, still radical in much of today’s world. People should understand their individual voice counts, and learn how to speak out by regularly practicing good communication principles. For him, the “living word” (oral communication) was paramount; it was through this means that people could become “enlightened” and see what life can look like when the sun shines on it.

The people’s college concept has thrived not only in Denmark and across Scandinavia, but also has been influential in many parts of the world. Even important political figures such as Nehru (India) and Nerere (Tanzania) have given credit to Grundtvigian thought for inspiring their thoughts on education. Nevertheless, and one of Dr. Warren’s important research discoveries, the field of adult education/lifelong learning in the U.S., as well as across the English-speaking world, has not given Grundtvig his due by reading
and citing his original writing. Part, but not all, of that circumstance is due to the few available English translations of Grundtvig’s writings. As Warren explained, that deficit is now corrected with *The School for Life*, available at Amazon. He also stressed that the real “Father of adult education in America” is N.F.S. Grundtvig.

Dr. Nick Gillespie, editor-in-chief for REASON-TV, recently interviewed Dr. Warren about *The School for Life*. That interview is available at the following link: http://reason.com/reasontv/2013/10/09/folk-high-schools-help-students-reinvent.