Relating Student Experience to Courses and the Curriculum
by Virginia S. Lee, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Asking students to relate their personal experiences to the curriculum can actually enhance learning and further the outcomes of a liberal education rather than squander precious instructional time as many instructors often assume. A liberal education influences behavior less by direct application to experience than by instilling a habit of routinely reflecting critically on our experience within the broader frames of reference acquired through such an education. If this is the case, then instructors need to provide students occasions to reflect on their own experiences through the lenses of their disciplines during classroom and study time.

Further, what we know about learning points to the initial state of learners—their prior knowledge and experience with the course material at hand—as the starting point of instruction. Effective instruction builds upon this experience deliberately because functionally individuals will interpret and incorporate new ideas through their existing frames of reference. And according to Kolb’s well-known learning model (1984), individuals form abstract concepts and generalizations by reflecting on experience. These concepts then become working principles, the implications of which individuals test in experience and subsequently modify after further experience and reflection. Good instruction guides students consciously through this process.
The Learners Are Part Of The Curriculum

I often hear campus faculty and other teachers speak about the students and the curriculum—as if they are separate entities. What we have to teach is described by the catalogue and more fully by the syllabus. That seems pretty clear to most teachers. The content is what we feel we have to cover in order to meet our teaching obligations. On the other hand, the students have to do their part: attend, listen, participate, study, learn. That seems pretty clear too. When both sides operate properly, the result should be good. Is there anything missing from this picture?

In a recent CTE workshop called Creating an Inclusive Classroom Environment, participants discussed some dilemmas related to diversity; particularly the dilemmas highlighted by the fact that the course content does not match up with all learners equally and that a number of factors can get in the way of an ideal teaching-learning experience. All of the realities that teachers and students bring with them, all the influences of culture, age, learning style preference, personal circumstance, outside obligations and concerns, and educational background—all of these enter into the picture. When we fail to realize the inextricable connections, and the potential for connecting (or disconnecting) content and learners through the ways that we establish climate, construct assignments, express expectations, design reading lists and problem cases, and establish relationships, we fail to understand curriculum in its fullest sense. The curriculum is not just the course of study. The curriculum is all that takes place in regard to the educational experience.

Our editor, Nora Bellows, chose an extremely relevant lead article in Virginia Lee’s piece on the importance of recognizing student experience and its impact on learning. What educators often refer to as “constructivist learning theory” identifies as critical the connection between learners’ experience and new knowledge. Lee’s article gives us tips on planning, choosing teaching strategies, designing teaching tools—all in support of the goal to make learners part of the curriculum, not hopeful recipients of it.

Many other selections in this issue of the Teaching and Learning News speak to the theme of making learners part of the curriculum. Jonas Chalk (see p. 3) addresses the basic doubts many teachers have about the time it takes to ask and answer student questions—time that could be used to cover more material. Jonas’ answer affirms the importance of taking the time to connect the learners to the material, vs. just covering it. Questions and active reflection on answers and reasons help connect students to the material, to make it part of their own understanding, to help them retain information—in short, to help them learn better. On p. 4, we find helpful suggestions on getting students involved, and on p. 9, we get a very good overview of ways to help students connect productively to library resources and library assignments. From a student’s perspective, as Rebecca Smith tells in p. 11, students will work harder and will learn more from teachers who take the trouble to care about them as individuals and to make them part of the curriculum.

New teachers are learners, too, of course, and they are learning about teaching while beginning their careers as faculty or T.A.’s. On p. 10, T.A.’s talk about what they learned from our campus orientation and what made the most difference. Inevitably, material or suggestions that connected to a personal need or personal challenge seems to have mattered most. Similarly, the SOTL project on “Talking about Teaching” (see p. 8) revealed the value that teachers at several different levels found when they were learners and their experiences of teaching actually were the curriculum.

Thanks to Nora, Sue Gdovin, and all those who contributed to this issue. As always, we would appreciate hearing from readers and knowing your reactions to the Teaching and Learning News. May the coming year be a good one for all of us, and we’ll look forward to bringing you more news in 2003.

By Jim Greenberg
Director of CTE

Looking for Teaching Experience Helping Undergraduates With Their Career Paths?

EDCP 108D, “Career Planning and Decision Making,” is a one-credit course designed for sophomores that emphasizes the lifelong process of self and career exploration and effective decision-making skills for choosing a major and developing a career plan.

This course has been offered at UMCP for over twenty years; eight sections of the course are offered every Spring and Fall semester and are held to twenty students per section. Instructors are provided extensive training in course content (career development) and process (developmental instruction).

This is an unpaid position that offers graduate students an opportunity to structure and teach a college course and to interact with fellow novice instructors (during weekly instructor meetings). Experience in student advising, college student development or career development a plus but not required. Co-teaching the course is an option. Time commitment includes 10 hours of training (in January), 2 hours per week of teaching and 1-1.5 hours per week of group instructor meetings. For more information or to obtain an application contact Sue Gossman, at sgossman@ds9.umd.edu, 301-314-5916.
Dear Jonas,

In your last column, you recommended that faculty break up lectures with other activities. I understand that some of my colleagues stop their lectures to ask questions of the students as part of their lesson. Doesn’t it seem contrived? Also it’s very time-consuming. Wouldn’t my time be better spent covering the material?

Questioning questions

Dear Questioning:

Asking the students questions in class is actually a very effective and efficient teaching tool. It does not have to seem contrived - in fact, it can wake up the class! In addition, asking questions based on the material just presented provides students with feedback on whether they understand and can apply the information correctly.

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As a professor, you may want to ascertain students’ comprehension of a concept that you consider a building block for a new topic that you are about to introduce. Asking questions can help you gauge what students already know or don’t know, and how well they actually understand the concept. After a concept or operation has been introduced, you can ask application questions to get feedback on how well the students grasped the material. For example, after you’ve introduced some basic notions of probability theory, you could ask a student how this applies to the Maryland Lottery. If students can’t apply the concept, then you know they really haven’t understood the concept and only followed the mechanics. Some more specific questioning might point you to the cause of the problem, and provide you with the opportunity to clarify. Additionally, asking questions based on the material just presented provides students with feedback on whether they understand and can apply the information correctly.

Quick tip: To see how the students are doing, I often ask them to tell me where the concept or operation would apply. Have they seen it before or used anything similar before? What does it remind them of? That way I know that the application is one that they are familiar with, and that it ties to something they have seen or known before, without giving applications or examples myself.

This edition of “Jonas Chalk” was reprinted with permission from Donna M. Qualters, Director of the Center for Effective University Teaching at Northeastern University. For more information or to see other “Jonas Chalk” columns, visit the following website:
http://gemasterteachers.neu.edu/documents/documents.html
UTLP Roundtable Discussion is a Good Place to Get Ideas: Three Discussion Ideas To Get Students Talking

About this time in the semester, discussion can lag a little: students are tired, exams are looming, and it is sometimes difficult to get students to complete assigned readings. At the latest UTLP Roundtable Discussion about “conducting discussions,” participants (including TAs and faculty) shared their strategies to get students talking. Here are three of those ideas:

1. **Help students process what they have read by having them answer the same set of questions for each text** they read and then have them turn in a one page reflection at the beginning of class--this reflection helps students articulate complex responses to readings so that they can talk about those ideas during class discussion, instead of thinking about an issue or trying out an answer to a question for the first time during class. Here are some good questions to get them thinking and assimilating what they read:
   - What was the text about?
   - If you could sit down with the author, what would you ask?
   - If you were leading discussion, what question would you ask to launch the class discussion?

2. **Use ungraded quizzes to assess student retention and get them primed for the class discussion.** People who have used this technique said they begin with lower level questions and move on to higher level provocative questions. Students complete the ungraded quiz at the beginning or end of a class. Most importantly, the higher level questions (and students’ answers) function as a jumping off point for discussion. Secondarily, these quizzes are useful for teachers (and students themselves) as they can easily see the material people are having trouble with.

3. **Make students responsible for class discussion questions.** Have students sign up to be responsible for discussion on a particular date. The class meeting before that date, the student needs to bring in enough copies for everyone of their 3 (or so) high-level discussion questions, which can function as a springboard for discussion. Students may become more invested in the success of the discussion if they generate the questions.
Spring Workshop Series on Grading Writing Assignments

CTE is interested in fostering a cross-campus, interdisciplinary discussion among faculty and TAs about the many and complex issues surrounding the grading of and commenting on written work in all disciplines. To this end, we will offer a series of related workshops during the Spring semester. The workshop series will focus on meeting discipline-specific needs and at the same time work on concrete issues that are relevant to all disciplines.

We extend a special invitation to groups of teachers from the same department, teachers of large classes (who may have several teaching assistants working with them) or TAs who work in teams to teach discussion or lab sections. Discipline-specific groups can work together to generate consistent standards for their classes.

The workshop topics and scheduled workshop dates are listed below and on our website. All workshops will be held in the Maryland Room in Marie Mount Hall (Rm. 0100). Mark your calendars!

1. **A Rubric For Any Assignment (Thursday, Feb. 13 from 3:30 - 5:00):** Do you want to develop a specific rubric for the written (or other) assignments in your course? At this workshop, we will focus on developing a process for identifying key aspects of any assignment, creating rubrics for assignments, and strategizing ways to use rubrics effectively. Participants will leave the session with concrete strategies and maybe even completed rubrics.

2. **Written Comments That Make Students Think (Wednesday, Feb. 26 from 12:30 - 2:00):** Make written comments on student work that they will not only pay attention to but will help them to become better thinkers and writers. This workshop will focus on helping you get your students to function on a higher intellectual level by making written comments that require them to THINK—all this in a time-efficient manner!

3. **Help Your Students Learn How to Learn (Thursday, Mar. 13 from 2:30 - 4:00):** Many student failures can be prevented by helping them learn how to learn (and study) in ways that REALLY WORK! This is an eye-opening session that will instruct participants on the types of learning most of our students experienced in high school (methods most of them still practice, even if they are not first-year students) and then learn how we can help them engage in higher level thinking in college. Participants will learn concrete strategies to help their students learn and study better. Moreover, participants will be asked to consider how to make good learning and study practices a part of their course(s) in a way that HELPS teachers get through all of the content they need to because good study methods improve student retention of course content.

4. **English 101 For Teachers (Monday, April 7 from 1:00 - 2:30):** Do you worry that your own knowledge of academic writing is not good enough for you to comment effectively on your students’ written work? This session will help you improve your own abilities to recognize and assess your students’ written assignments. Come to this informal workshop for a refresher in good writing and best teaching practices.

5. **A “Peer Revew” Format That Works in Any Class (Tuesday, April 22 from 3:00 - 4:30):** This session will focus on helping teachers integrate the “peer review workshop” or active and shared reflection on others’ ideas, specifically written ideas, into any class format. Successful workshops can increase student critical thinking and learning outcomes, foster community and teamwork, and help students become more self-sufficient learners. Participate in this interactive session for a model of the process as well as concrete applications of this pedagogical method.
Following are specific suggestions on how instructors can integrate personal experiences and course material to promote student learning.

**Planning:** Integrating students’ personal experiences and course material begins in the planning stage as instructors articulate their goals and objectives for the course. Along with those related to course content, analytical skills, research methodologies and the like, critical reflection on personal experience through the discipline becomes another explicit goal of instruction and a desired student outcome. In designing the course, the instructor will select a variety of methods, some of which we describe below, to further this outcome.

Instructors also need to help students see the possible connections between their experience and the course material. Conceptualizing the course in terms of broad-based themes that run through an array of phenomena (including students’ experiences and the course material) may help students see these connections. It will also provide them with wider frames of reference for subsequent reflection.

Planning of this kind is easier, of course, if instructors know the students they teach. As they teach, instructors can explore students’ experiences through personal data sheets, class discussion, and individual conferences. They might also keep abreast of student life and culture through campus newspapers, attendance at campus events, general reading, and informal conversations with students. As instructors come to know and understand the students in their classes better, they will be able to draw stronger and more relevant comparisons between students’ experiences and the curriculum.

**Teaching Strategies:** A range of teaching strategies help students integrate their personal experiences and course material. By creating explicit opportunities for students to draw connections between their experience and course materials and then providing them with tools for reflection, instructors can help students internalize a habit of critical reflection. Well-chosen comparisons and analogies draw from students’ immediate experience, ring true, and have cognitive utility. They can expand students’ experiences and the curriculum.

Simulations and games draw students toward and into the course material, literally forcing them to experience it.

Debriefing such experiences critically provides the analytical tools students will need to reflect upon their own experiences. Finally, through experiential learning students engage in an actual work or field experience outside the confines of the classroom but as part of their regular course work and then reflect upon it in a manner consistent with the discipline at hand.

These teaching strategies vary in the degree to which they incorporate actual student experience. Comparisons and analogies incorporate student experience indirectly by drawing comparisons between the course content and student experience or by asking students to do so. By contrast, in experiential learning students take part actively in an experience as a course requirement that the instructor consciously weaves into the course material. But whether the strategy involves a simulation, a case study, or an actual field activity, the strength of the strategy lies only partially in the nature of the experience itself. Even more important is the guidance and support provided to students for critical reflection on the experience. Using Kolb’s model, reflection is the critical link between concrete experience and the formation of abstract concepts and generalization by which we order and regularize experience. As a result, instructors need to plan carefully reflective exercises that employ the methods of critical inquiry peculiar to their discipline. Through guided reflection of this sort, students learn how to learn from experience, not simply
the particular classroom or field experience, but from any experience.

Evaluation: If the ability to reflect critically on personal experience through the discipline is a desired outcome of instruction, teachers need to develop ways to evaluate this ability. Well-designed assessment instruments provide opportunities for students to practice new skills and abilities and to enhance their learning. They also permit instructors to assess the effectiveness of instruction and the extent of student learning. Three major guidelines for evaluation described below insure the integrity of course planning and evaluation, increase the likelihood of student success on assignments, and provide consistent and fair assessment criteria:

* Tie student assessment to specific course objectives.
* Provide detailed assignments in writing that clearly specify your expectations.

If the ability to reflect critically on personal experience through the discipline is a desired outcome of instruction, teachers need to develop ways to evaluate this ability.

the course material. Such assignments are apt to be nontraditional and hence unfamiliar to students. Unless structured properly, they may invite aimless confessionalism with little reference to critical inquiry in the discipline. As a result students will not have had the learning experience intended by the assignment, and instructors will be at a loss to evaluate completed assignments so different from their implicit expectations.

Following are two specific examples of assignments in which students must relate their own experiences to the course material:

Literature and Life Project.

An instructor of an introductory course in contemporary literature specifies the following as one of her course goals: to see literature as participating in and dialoguing with a larger cultural system. To evaluate this goal she asks simply that students explore the extent to which the readings have affected them. In her written evaluation scheme, she describes carefully assignment options corresponding to conventional grade levels. For example, students electing the “C” option need only identify the impact a work of literature has on them, while those choosing the “A” option must not only

What greater gift can there be than helping students believe in themselves? Excellent teachers change the way students approach and value education. Students then question more intelligently and think with more cutting-edge precision. Extraordinary teachers open minds and hearts. They influence attitudes and behaviors. They plant the seeds and momentum for lifelong learning and personal growth. The best teachers help students find direction, meaning, and satisfaction in their lives.

--Frederick J. Stephenson, Editor; Extraordinary Teachers: The Essence of Excellent Teaching

Putting Theory Into Practice: Some Tips for Creating Good Multiple Choice Exams

To avoid some of the disadvantages of multiple choice tests, such as a favoring of recall of facts v. higher level thinking, and the higher likelihood of “clueing” or students ability to figure out an answer through elimination, I have included below, without alteration, several of the tips or suggestions found in Chapter Two of Tips for Improving Testing and Grading by Ory and Ryan.

1. Avoid statements that fail to present a complete thought or question in the question stem.
2. Eliminate excessive wording and irrelevant information.
3. Include in the stem any words that might otherwise be repeated in each answer [such as “in the” etc.].
4. Use negatively stated stems sparingly. When used, underline or capitalize the negative word. [Which option is NOT an example of . . . ].
5. When using incomplete statements avoid beginning with a blank space.
6. Use familiar language, avoiding fussy, archaic or unusual diction.
7. Provide sufficient information in the stem to allow students to respond to the question.
8. Make sure there is one correct or best response.
9. Make all alternatives plausible and equally attractive to both the less knowledgeable and the skillful students.

If you would like more information about ways to construct and grade a multiplicity of exam types, come peruse our library in the CTE office and check out Tips for Improving Testing and Grading (Volume 4) by John C. Ory and Katherine E. Ryan.
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Talking About Teaching: Does it Help?

CTE continues its involvement in the Campus Program of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL). The Academy's Campus Program, coordinated by Carnegie's partner, the American Association of Higher Education, hopes to create a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) that will improve the quality of student learning and the status of teaching at colleges and universities across the country.

As part of its Campus Program, CTE together with the Office of Undergraduate Studies, and the Office of Research and Graduate Studies established a SOTL Fund to provide financial support for the development of ideas related to teaching and learning. A total of eleven awards have been made over the last two years and we are pleased to be able to present here a brief account of the work of Dr. Nancy Traubitz, Center Alliance for School Teachers (CAST) in the Center for Renaissance & Baroque Studies (CABS). Dr. Traubitz asks a very challenging question: Talking About Teaching: Does it help?

What happens when TAs, university faculty, and practicing classroom teachers are provided with a regular, ongoing opportunity to interact and talk about specific teaching content areas and the pedagogical methods to convey that material to students? During the 2001-2002 academic year the Center Alliance for School Teachers (CAST) in the Center for Renaissance & Baroque Studies (CRBS), with the help of a generous Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) Grant, explored this question with eight TAs, university faculty, and teachers from local schools in a series of “conversations” called Talk about Teaching.

The goal of Talk about Teaching, now in its third year, is to bring together teachers from all academic levels to share insights and discuss problems and solutions they have encountered in teaching texts and confronting issues central to humanities instruction.

While most of the study’s participant feedback on the series related to content and pedagogy, our opportunity to discuss with TAs issues related to teaching undergraduate students resulted in unexpected findings. First, we were surprised by the difficulty in combining content, seen as important in terms of the graduate program, and pedagogy, seen as important in terms of the teaching assignment. Second, we were surprised and pleased with the pleasure expressed by TAs in sharing ideas, not only with experienced classroom teachers, but also amongst themselves. Our discussions repeatedly led to questions about the relationship between content and pedagogy.

TAs often expressed the belief that the content that they were charged with delivering in their classes was perceived as more important than the method by which it was delivered. Yet the TAs who participated in this study told us in the initial interview that they hoped to improve their teaching skills and were willing to treat their own pedagogy as a subject worthy of study. Participants found all sessions enriched their graduate studies, ranking all the sessions higher than 4 on a 5-point scale.

Based on the invaluable comments from the post-session interviews with TAs, we have discovered four important suggestions to improve outreach to TAs:

1. **Focus on both content and pedagogy.**
   In discussion sessions, encourage participants to model effective teaching strategies and to make teaching strategies as visible and important as content. One suggestion of a way to make teaching strategies visible is to appoint a participant at the beginning of each session to keep a checklist record of references to content and to strategies.

2. **Conduct carryover or follow-up summaries at the beginning of each session.**
   At the first session participants set the pattern of discussion for all the sessions to follow. At the beginning of each of the following sessions, individual participants should be given the opportunity to review pedagogical issues raised in the previous discussion group.

3. **Devote fifteen minutes at the end of each session to summary and closure.**
   Groups of no more than three participants should interview each other to summarize content and teaching strategies. Emphasis should be placed on the possible impact of the discussion group session on teaching practices.

4. **In overall planning, brace for schedule conflicts.**
   Be ready to change schedules each semester. Defining what “helps” a teacher turned out to be much more difficult than we had expected. At the end of the project, we were glad to point out several reasons why we feel talking about teaching, in this specific format, helps. We also searched for evidence of increased cross-discipline awareness. Our participants enjoyed interacting with a range of experienced teachers. Moreover, Talk about Teaching promoted an increased awareness of the ways informal learning experiences of talking about teaching could supplement a teacher’s repertoire of pedagogical methodologies.

We believe that outreach efforts like Talk about Teaching can have a long-lasting and far-reaching impact on classroom practices of University of Maryland TAs by habituating an analytical and reflective approach to classroom practice. It is our hope that this project will emerge as a non-discipline-specific model encouraging teaching professionals at all levels to view their accumulated expertise as scholarly content worthy of sharing with colleagues and publishing for the profession.
Trudi Hahn, Manager of User Education Services, moderated a discussion by a panel of our campus librarians about strategies for creating effective research assignments for our undergraduate students. The panelists, Peggy Antonisse, Gerri Foudy, Susanna Van Sant, Cindy Todd, and Bob Kackley shared their personal experiences of working with students in the library - with the hope of trying to bridge the disconnect between what teachers intend to be the learning outcomes of student research assignments and what actually happens once the students leave class. Here are a few of their suggestions:

1. **Emphasize process (not just product).** Be aware that students often don’t know how to do library research. Taking class time to discuss ‘how’ is as important as discussing ‘what’. Librarians observe that:
   - Students tend to be literal – they often use the exact terminology given by the teacher for keyword searching and are unable to interpret or think of related terms.
   - Students are not familiar with searching strategies and often use either a single word or type in a complete sentence.
   - Students expect to find that one single article that pertains exactly to the assignment, even if the assignment is asking students to apply a concept to a real world problem. It would help to discuss whether your assignment is simply information retrieval or whether it requires application and synthesis – and what that entails.

2. **Make sure assignments are designed at an appropriate level.** Often student knowledge is not yet at a level that would enable them to understand the language used in articles from scholarly journals. Consider using magazines geared toward educated laypersons.

3. **Define your terminology.** How do you define magazine vs. periodical? Primary vs. secondary source? These terms can mean different things in different disciplines. Be clear and explicit about terms so that students are not confused, and librarians can help guide them.

4. **Consider possible consequences of the limitations you put on student assignments.** There are many electronic databases and even more online journals – so if you limit or restrict the use of the Internet or Web sources, remember that there is a difference between method of delivery and the actual material.

5. **Give students enough time to complete research assignments.** It takes time to do library research. Do the assignment yourself first to determine the amount of time needed (as well as to check the availability and currency of your resources). Also, using benchmarks will help pace the students through the different steps.

6. **Put your assignment in writing.** This will ensure that guidelines and requirements are remembered accurately, as well as enable librarians to read and interpret directions for students that need help.

7. **Remember that you have friends in the library!** Let librarians know ahead of time to expect your students so that they can be prepared to help them. Solicit their feedback to see how your assignment plays out at their end.

8. **For more on Creating Effective Library Assignments visit** - [http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/assignment.html](http://www.lib.umd.edu/UES/assignment.html)
What TAs Learned from Campus-Wide TA Orientation

At the beginning of each Fall and Spring semester, the Center for Teaching Excellence offers a one-day orientation for new TAs from all over campus. The orientation consisted of morning and afternoon sessions: the morning session focuses on an introduction to University administrators, best practices in teaching, and an introduction to campus resources through an interactive session on case studies, while the afternoon session provides TAs with several simultaneous sessions that focuses on such topics as Active Learning Techniques for Math & Science, Leading Good Discussions, Setting the Tone on the First Day, Expectations for Lab TAs, Teaching Critical Thinking, Dealing with Problem Students and Student Problems, Working With Students from Diverse Backgrounds, and Addressing Issues for Non-Native Speakers.

In an effort to evaluate the success of the various aspects of the orientation program, and to continue to improve the program offerings, we surveyed a number of graduate TAs, asking them, “What is one thing you learned at the TA orientation (either morning or afternoon session) that you have used this semester in your teaching or in your life?” What follows are some of the answers we received:

• “Making it clear that as a TA you don’t know everything, and directing students to other sources of information that are more concrete. Listening to previous TAs prepared me for some of the challenges.”
• “I attended the entire morning session and two sessions in the afternoon. One was on how the first day of classes should be conducted, by Dr. Sue Gdovin. That session was very useful, and I used all that I learned from it: how to introduce myself, etc. . . . The second one was on grading assignments. I used those techniques while grading quizzes for my class.”
• “[During] the afternoon break-out session for lab-science TAs, I really learned what to expect and what was expected of me.”
• “I learned about how to make a first impression, use case studies, and involve the whole class in a discussion.”
• “The most interesting part was case studies . . . because of the marked difference in opinion between the science and humanities people . . .”
• “As this is my first ever teaching experience, overall the TA orientation helped me ease out the tension. Dr. Gdovin’s ‘Setting The Tone’ did help me very much. I used some of the strategies that she told me to enable me not to look very stupid on the first day in front of my students. I was tense until I went to that [session].”
• “The afternoon session with Patty Shields and the TA panel was the session relevant to science lab instruction. It was good information.”
• “The importance of organization.”
• “I learned how to handle the situation when a student plagiarizes.”

Allison Brovey Warner leading an afternoon session on dealing with problem students and student problems.
What We’re Reading: CTE Red Packet on Motivating Students and the Teacher/Student Relationship

CTE’s Red Packet on MOTIVATING STUDENTS

Traditionally, the classroom serves as a venue for presenting the concepts and content of a discipline in an organized and clear fashion. Teachers explain what students need to know and understand, and students demonstrate that they learned it. In this situation, uncertainty is uncomfortable and indicates a lack of understanding. In the article “The Uses of Uncertainty in the College Classroom,” Virginia S. Lee explains that this is contrary to what research tells us about the motivation to learn. The reality is that new, unknown experiences cause us to question and motivate us to explore and investigate. This natural process is what leads us to progress and develop in our learning.

Lee goes on to say that it’s important to discuss this process of learning – and the role of uncertainty – with your students. Ask students to remember a time when they taught themselves how to do something and to identify the motivator. How did they then go about learning? You will most probably find that these discussions will bring up things such as internal motivation, curiosity, trial and error, practice, and satisfaction – things that are not usually associated with classroom learning.

Problem-based learning is a way to incorporate uncertainty into a class and mimic the natural learning process. Another strategy would be to intentionally create cognitive dissonance. This can be done by exposing students to ways of thinking that contradict their own or by presenting two contradicting assertions about the same concept.

For more on this topic, as well as other articles pertaining to motivating students, please visit the CTE library in 0405 Marie Mount Hall.

by Sue Gdovin, Assoc. Dir. CTE

A Response to Richard Tiberius’ “The Why of Teacher/Student Relationships”

The student / teacher relationship at the undergraduate level demands a certain degree of mutual respect. Progressive students take a more proactive role in their education, seeking out interactions with their professors outside of the structured classroom setting. For example, taking advantage of office hours. I have had numerous beneficial circumstances arise from just such interactions. As a transfer student from a local community college, I decided that getting to know my professors early on at College Park would be in my best interest. I did this to figure out which teachers I would seek out for my remaining two years: Who can I learn from? Who will let me explore areas that interest me? Who will point me in a positive direction? Whose research is exciting to me and valuable to the field? These are key questions that many students consider.

I have had a wonderful opportunity to work closely with a teacher on campus and another student as an undergraduate teaching assistant. This experience has informed my outlook on the rest of my college experience: in my role as a student, I now understand that (passionate) teachers really want to share their love for the material, and find ways to do this. They struggle to teach to people who learn in a variety of ways, through different media. I used to wonder why it took my teachers so long to hand back my tests, projects, and papers—they didn’t know that students are agonizing over their possible failure? But I now know that grading objective pieces of work takes TIME. A lot of time, to do so fairly and accurately.

I love when my teachers share little tidbits about their lives. This type of friendly dialogue really loosens up a classroom, usually makes people smile and laugh. I feel like it means we students are important to you teachers if you share with us. I learned way back in kindergarten that “sharing is caring,” and this simple observation holds true in this professional atmosphere as well. We are humans, and even though we live in a competitive, capitalist society, we need to feel like the guy next to us, or the teacher who is paid by our tuition, really gives a hoot about us. Then, I will want to work harder. Oh that is an important statement—yes, I want to work harder and smarter for somebody who I feel is really interested in what I have to say. Developing interpersonal relationships with your students will motivate them to learn and contribute to your class.

As Richard Tiberius points out, people relate new information to previous experiences in order to learn material. Thus, the teacher who knows how to access each student’s individual experiences (through dialogue or round-the-room sharing sessions) will be able to produce relevant examples and analogies that speak directly to student’s experiences.

Teachers should realize that they are performers. Not entertainers, because they have different responsibilities. A student’s success lies, in part, in a teacher’s ability to transmit memorable information and to teach retainable skills.

I agree wholeheartedly with Tiberius that teachers and students must have good relationships for the teaching-learning process to be the most successful. As a teacher, you have an important job and a responsibility to live up to the standards that your institution but especially your students hold you to.

by Rebecca Smith, Undergraduate
identify their responses but analyze and act upon them. She also spells out the time and page requirements for each option.

**Service Learning Project.** In a labor economics course investigating the role of labor in the economy, students work for an organization that helps the unemployed find appropriate jobs. To assess several related knowledge, skills, attitude and values, and service objectives, students submit three assignments associated with this experience: an organizational profile; a journal in which students reflect upon and analyze their experience; and a final paper in which students relate their experiences in the organization to the concepts, models, and theories of labor economics. The instructor distributes evaluation criteria for each assignment.

**Summary:** Frequently instructors view the relationship between student experience and the course material as a trade-off. Allowing students to air their personal experiences in class takes away from the time the instructor has to “get through the course material.” In fact, purposefully integrating student experience into courses and the curriculum can enhance the effectiveness of instruction. It can help students broaden their frames of reference and reflect critically on their experience, thereby furthering the broader outcomes of a liberal education.

**Suggested Works to Consult**


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