On An Academic Mission: An Interview with Donna Hamilton, the Interim Associate Provost and Dean of the Division of Undergraduate Studies

Donna B. Hamilton, Interim Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies, has a clear vision for undergraduate education, one that relies implicitly on the sort of excellent teaching by both faculty and graduate TAs that is possible when faculty and TAs share their ideas and best teaching practices with each other: “This Division has a great responsibility to the students and to the University to foster an undergraduate education that stands up to and benefits from the ambitions the University of Maryland has for its research and graduate agenda.”

Dean Hamilton is passionate when she says these things, leaning forward to emphasize her words. These are issues she has always been passionate about. At the recent Fall Orientation for new graduate teaching assistants, she spoke about the important role TAs play in the academic lives of our undergraduate students here at Maryland. She also spoke about how important it is for graduate students and faculty to enter into a dialogue about the intersection of teaching and research, emphasizing as she did so how crucial it is that graduate students seek out mentors, not just in their areas of specialty but in matters of teaching as well. When speaking of the TAs she has mentored in the past and watched develop as teachers and scholars, she remarked, “I knew them not only by reputation as teaching assistants but first-hand as teachers, I felt a collegial bond to them, a sameness with them, that helped bridge that sense of disjunction graduate students often feel as they move from the classroom in which they teach to the classroom in which they are students.”

She has, herself, as exemplary a record of excellent teaching as she does excellent research and administration. She has been a faculty member in the English Department for 31 years and during that time has published numerous articles and books, modeling for her undergraduate and graduate students the ability to balance and integrate teaching and scholarship with grace, an almost ferocious energy, a ready smile, and a sense of humor.

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Making Teaching Visible

One of the missions of the Center for Teaching Excellence is to improve student learning through increased awareness by faculty of various teaching methods, techniques, and innovations. This year the Center for Teaching Excellence is piloting a Distinguished Scholar Lecture series that will bring to campus faculty who are nationally know for their work and leadership in scholarship in teaching and learning (SoTL) within their disciplines.

On October 16th, Dr. Jonathan Arries (College of William and Mary) visited our campus and gave a fascinating talk on his important work in looking at students’ transformational learning in a foreign language based service learning experience.

On November 14th Dr. Dennis Jacobs (Notre Dame University) will visit campus and talk about his use of group work in a large multi-section chemistry class for at-risk students. Dr. Jacobs is the 2002 Case-Carnegie U.S. Professor of the Year.

Both of these exemplar teacher/scholars illustrate the importance of making visible the work and innovations we do in our classrooms. Too often faculty teach in isolation behind closed classroom doors where the only players are the instructor and the students. While this closed system provides a measure of safety for the instructor and the students, it reduces accountability, peer feedback, and communications that could result in the improvement of learning on campus. Scholarship in Teaching and Learning requires that the work we do in improving our classes and student learning be made public.

Lee Schulman, Pat Hutchings and others at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching have written extensively on the importance of making our classroom work more evident.

There are many ways to do this on campus:

- **Talk to a colleague** about a problem you are having in your class or a new idea you are trying.
- **Write and submit a grant proposal**, such as an CTE instructional improvement or CTE-SOTL scholarship of teaching grant.
- **Propose a CTE workshop,** attend one of the many CTE organized conversations or workshops on teaching.
- **Write an article** for the CTE newsletter,
- **Submit an abstract for an education meeting** such as the Lilly East meeting in Apr. 2-3, 2004 at Towson University.
- **Write and publish an article about teaching** for your discipline.
- **Apply to be a Carnegie Fellow or a CTE-Lilly fellow.**

If you need more information or have questions on how to get started visit the CTE website (http://www.cte.umd.edu) or the Carnegie/CASTLE website. Please call or stop by the CTE office and let us know how we might help you in making your teaching more public.

By Spencer Benson
Director of CTE

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**YOUR LETTERS:**

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the University of Maryland Libraries’ Preservation program, I would like to call your attention to a recommendation in CTE’s literature that is damaging to library collections. The point that concerns us appeared in CTE’s *Teaching and Learning News*, Special Issue on Starting Well, vol. 13, no. 1 (Sept./Oct. 2003), p. 6., point 6: “Explain to students how to read the text(s) you have assigned for the course...show students how to use post-it and other markers in their books as a way to increase learning, retention, and study.” We would like to make sure that students understand that the use of post-it notes is damaging to library books — and to their own books, too, of course, if the books are of long term value to them.

In fact, because of the damage caused by Post-it® notes, students can be penalized if caught placing Post-it® notes in library books. The negative effects of these seemingly harmless ‘markers’ in library material is devastating. In the long term, the glue on Post-it® notes has a harmful effect on paper. The adhesive hardens and leaves a film that becomes acidic. This results in eventual discoloration and brittleness of the paper.

Post-its® left for even a short time on already brittle paper (old books) cause the paper to tear when removing the Post-it®. They were designed for short-term application to expendable documents and have no place being used on permanent records and books.

Best regards,

Yvonne Carignan
Preservation Production Group Leader
McKeldin Library

The Teaching and Learning News is grateful to Ms. Carignan for bringing this to our attention--this is information that every teacher should know and convey to students. Index cards make a fine substitute: they are sturdier and come in as many colors for easy coding of ideas. We should all inform our students about the danger that Post-It notes pose to our own and others’ books.
There have been a lot of changes in the offices of Undergraduate Studies lately. Former Dean of the Division of Undergraduate Studies Robert Hampton left the University of Maryland this past Summer to become President of City University of New York, York College. Following his departure, there was a long-planned reorganization of the Division of Undergraduate Studies: The offices of Admissions, the Registrar, and Financial Aid, all previously part of Undergraduate Studies, now report to Provost Destler.

When I talked with Donna Hamilton about the effect of these changes and her vision for the role of the Division of Undergraduate Studies, she said, “This move was greatly to the advantage of undergraduate education on campus, and the reason for that is this: taking those big administrative units away makes visible for everyone the centrality of the academic mission of this Division of Undergraduate Studies.

“This move clarifies for everyone that the role of the Associate Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Studies is to advocate for and represent quality undergraduate education for the entire University—including teaching and advising—and to take responsibility for academic policies affecting undergraduate education. That’s it in a nutshell, the broad stroke version of the mission. In short, in Undergraduate Studies, we talk about undergraduates and the quality of the education we are delivering to them all the time. That’s what we do. That’s our job. This is central to Undergraduate Studies. It is an academic mission.”

Of course I had to ask Dean Hamilton how do you see the Center for Teaching Excellence fitting into this mission?, and I really liked what she had to say. She talked and I wrote furiously so as to catch every word. What follows is her unedited answer to this question and to my other questions:

“CTE is something of which the Division of Undergraduate Studies is very proud! For two main reasons. The Center provides us with a formal structure always present and always rearticulating the University’s commitment to teaching. The Center is a permanent presence, a landmark that tells us who and where we are.

“Teaching is hard. But there is extraordinary pedagogical expertise across campus. There are commonalities in teaching issues across disciplines and CTE helps people come out of their silos and share what they know with others on campus in an interdisciplinary way that brings them together. There is tremendous richness there. Maybe there is no other place on campus where this can happen in quite the same way.

“I am aware that individual teachers and even whole academic units or departments have gone to CTE to get help, suggestions and support to solve different instructional problems they face with a new course or a new method of instructional delivery. I’m so glad that the Center encourages that! And the degree to which people recognize CTE as such a resource shows the degree to which the services of CTE have become institutionalized. This is a huge accomplishment on a research campus of this size.”

What do you see as the strengths of Undergraduate Studies with respect to student learning?

Let me first say what Undergraduate Studies is not. The Division of Undergraduate Studies is not discipline-focused, not discipline-specific. Undergraduate Studies does, however, contain a group of programs and activities that in combination both set expectations for undergraduate students and respond to their academic interests and needs. In one way or another, Undergraduate Studies serves every undergraduate on campus, through CORE, through first-year programs, through living-learning programs and learning communities, and through policies that foster student success. We are concerned about retention and graduation rates, helping students become settled in majors, and providing numerous pathways by which students can find their way to the academic disciplines that will fire their imaginations and command their energies. Those responsibilities constitute us virtually by definition as a place attuned to change and innovation. We can only fulfill those responsibilities if we are nimble, creative, and collaborative. It is a large and important challenge.

A List of the Programs Overseen by the Division of Undergraduate Studies

Letters and Sciences
Orientation
University Honors
College Park Scholars
Academic Achievement
CORE General Education
Center for Teaching Excellence
First Year Book
First Year Focus
Undergraduate Research Center
Individual Studies
Undergraduate Research Center
Academic Achievement
Letters and Sciences
Orientation
University Honors
College Park Scholars
Academic Achievement
CORE General Education
Center for Teaching Excellence
First Year Book
First Year Focus
Undergraduate Research Center
Individual Studies
Asian American Certificate
LGBT Certificate
Air Force ROTC
Army ROTC
Pre-College
Talent Search
CTE Fall Workshop Series Debriefing: Using the First Year Book

Each year a group of faculty, students and staff members come together to select the University of Maryland’s first-year book. After Undergraduate Studies solicits nominations from all over the campus, the committee whittles the list down to 5-6 books, spends winter break reading them, and eventually picks a winner. Previous first-year books include *The Things They Carried*, *Blessing the Boats*, and *War of the World*. Last year’s selection, *The Laramie Project* received quite a bit of attention and many faculty members were able to integrate the first-year book into their classes.

The 2003-2004 University of Maryland’s first-year book is *Dead Man Walking*, followed by a community discussion. Maryland’s state’s attorneys Doug Gansler (Montgomery County) and Glenn Ivey (Prince George’s County) will visit the campus to speak about how a prosecutor determines when to ask for the death penalty in sentencing. And on November 18th, Lt. Governor Michael Steele will address the University of Maryland community on Maryland’s history with the death penalty. Student groups and academic departments will sponsor additional events. Please see the Undergraduate Studies website [http://www.firstyearbook.umd.edu/resources.html](http://www.firstyearbook.umd.edu/resources.html) for all related first-year book activities.

To further encourage discussion, Provost of Academic Affairs and Dean for Undergraduate Studies, I welcome the public forums and many discussions that may arise while engaging in discussion around the University of Maryland’s first-year book. Our community is strengthened when we challenge each other in the course of respectful dialogue. For more information on the first-year book or any of the activities associated with it, please contact Lisa Kiely ([lkiely@umd.edu](mailto:lkiely@umd.edu), 301-405-0966).

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Mark Your Calendars!

**Advanced Notice:**

**Lilly East Conference on College and University Teaching**

**April 2-3, 2004**

**Towson University**

Join your colleagues at the 7th Annual Lilly-East Conference on College and University Teaching to be held in Towson, Maryland, on April 2-3, 2004. Proposals due December 15. Information is available at [http://www.lillyeast.towson.edu/](http://www.lillyeast.towson.edu/)

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**Call for Spring 2004 Workshop Proposals!**

Faculty and Graduate TAs are invited to submit their workshop proposals for our Spring 04 Teaching & Learning Series. Proposals are due on or before November 15th.

For more information or to submit your proposal to CTE Director Spencer Benson, e-mail him at sbenson@umd.edu or call him at 301-314-1288.
How to Be a Great Teacher Without Being an Orator
by William Destler, Provost

1. Go over the material to be covered before each class/lab, and rehearse your presentation. Don’t use notes. Understand the material yourself before you try to teach it.

2. Hand out a course syllabus at the first class, and follow it.

3. Remember everything your professors did that you didn’t like when you were an undergraduate, and don’t do those things.

4. Start each class with a brief review of what was covered in the last class.

5. Return all homework, lab reports, and exams the very next class. Make yourself available to students who want to discuss your grading of their exam/assignment/lab report. If you make a mistake grading an exam/assignment/lab report, correct your mistake.

6. Treat every question as a good question, no matter how bad you might think the question really is.

7. Make the material easier, not harder for your students. Education is not a rite of passage – the goal is knowledge transfer and intellectual growth.

8. Don’t assign more homework than is necessary to convey the material.

9. Don’t assume that your class is the only one your students are taking.

10. At your first class, state clearly the method by which grades will be determined. Do not change this method later in the semester.

11. Don’t try to trick your students on exams or homework assignments.

12. Make sure your exams allow all students to show how much they have learned. Consider questions with multiple parts that start easy and get harder. Give partial credit.

13. Never turn a student away from your door, even if they come outside of stated office hours.

14. Be just in your grading. Students who do better should get better grades.

15. Use the same notation, terms, etc., as are used in the textbook or reading assignments. Be consistent.

16. Consider handing out and reviewing examples of previous exams prior to each exam. Similarly, consider providing examples of excellent lab reports at the beginning of lab courses.

17. Do not use problems from previous exams on your exams. Take the time to write original questions and problems.

18. Make eye contact with your students as you teach – you will be able to tell whether they understand you from the looks on their faces.

19. Come to class on time and end class on time. Stay a few minutes at the end of each class to answer questions, address concerns, etc.

20. Identify those students who are having trouble with your class/lab early in the semester and meet with them individually to address these problems. Offer to give them extra problems/assignments if appropriate.

21. Take pride in how many students do well in your course, not in how many do poorly.

22. Get to know your students, but don’t encourage personal relationships with them. Remember that you are in a position of authority over them, and any personal overtures to them on your part could be misinterpreted.

23. Have fun!
Good Classroom Management 101: 
Strong Beginnings and Endings for Large and Small Classes 
by Nora Bellows, Editor & Peggy Stuart, UTLP Coordinator

A late start and a frazzled end could cost ten minutes of teaching and learning time during a 50 minute class— that is twenty percent of your class time. Make sure your students are getting the most from your class by having a number of established opening routines and closing routines. Try some of the following suggestions to Maximize Time for Teaching & Learning!

**Routines that signal the start of class**
Starting a class well is very often linked to class size. While there are methods for beginning class that may work better in a small discussion-based class than a large lecture, it may, in some cases simply be a matter of voice volume. Saying “Let’s start!” may require the microphone in one of those big classes.

- **Simply shutting the door can function as a signal that class has started for a small class of, say, 35 students or less.**
- In any sized class, you can greet the class with a particular question and have them take a moment to reflect on paper so that they are ready for discussion or the day’s lesson. “What did you find interesting or notable in the reading for today?” Supply your own content-specific filler (i.e. “Brahms,” “structural-functionalist theory,” “agar”)
- A hand-raising poll at the start of class on some issue related to the lesson content can work in small or large classes. Use this poll as a starting point for the discussion or lecture. E.g. A good many of you felt that we can still see evidence of the early modern humoral understanding of the human body in today’s language--what are some examples?/Let’s look at some examples.
- Write an Agenda for the class meeting on the board, and begin class by referring to the first item on the list.
- In a large class, you may want to signal the start of class by training your students that when you raise your hand, it is their cue to be quiet and also raise their hands. The raised hands will spread through the class like a wave in the bleachers of a Terps game.
- Have students take a non-graded “quiz” to jog their memories of past lessons or to get them thinking about concepts that will be presented in the current lesson.

**Routines that signal the end of class**
We have all been witness to the shuffle and scrape of students packing up before the end of class. Don’t let class end on their terms! Here are some tried and true ways to help teachers keep students in their seats so they retain what you have just covered.

- Have the students do a “one-minute-paper” that has them reflect on one thing they learned during the class, and one thing that is still unclear. Collect these “papers” and use them to help you plan subsequent lessons. Dismiss them as a group.
- Have the students reflect for a moment on how a particular issue/topic is relevant to the rest of the class material or to their own lives. Go around the room and hear from everyone (very briefly--this takes about 5-10 minutes, depending on the class size).
- Cross the last item off your Agenda to signal the end of class and indicate to students that they can pack up.
- Tell the students what they should have learned in the class and preview what they will learn in the next class.
“Chalk Talk” by Jonas Chalk

Jonas on CHANGING THE SYLLABUS MIDSTREAM

Dear Jonas:

In your previous column (T&L News, Sept/Oct 03), you wrote about changing the syllabus in the middle of the term. At one point, you mentioned that while the syllabus may not be legally binding, it is “morally binding.” I’ve spoken with some colleagues who are of the opinion that the original syllabus virtually does have the status of a legal contract between instructor and students. Others maintain that, if the changes won’t adversely affect student grades, it’s o.k. Can you give any more guidance on this?

Signed, Worried Syllabus Slider

Dear Worried:

Obviously, most instructors are not lawyers (nor am I), so we shouldn’t be expected to write our syllabi like contracts that must be followed to the letter for fear that students would hold us “liable” for breaching its terms. The syllabus would wind up reading like a mortgage agreement!

Clearly then, I view the syllabus as a moral agreement rather than a legal one, and moral agreements bring more responsibility rather than less. It may be a matter of semantics, but I would prefer to think of the syllabus as a firm “handshake” agreement that you make with your students about the guidelines that will govern how both the instructor and student will conduct themselves. It is up to each instructor to be as specific or as general as he or she would like.

However, in my experience, a more complete, detailed syllabus yields a smoother and less contentious operation. It will result in fewer questions and fewer attempts by students to see “loopholes” in the syllabus. These loopholes might undermine achieving your learning objectives, or the effectiveness of your grading policy and office hours, as well as other expectations that you have for the course and the students.

Having said this, what about the instructor changing the syllabus in the middle of the academic term? Can you make changes without students claiming that you have breached or contradicted some part of the contract or syllabus agreement? In the earlier Jonas column, I voiced my objections to making changes, particularly to the grading policy. I likened this to changing the rules for the tenure process mid-way through the evaluation period. I still think this is valid.

In my mind, there is one overarching rule for syllabus changes: any modifications must not harm students as a result of the change. Examples of the kinds of “harm” that could result include: a student in the class would be required to do extra work beyond that described in the original syllabus; a student would be put at a disadvantage compared to other students in the class with regard to their grades or workload; changes in grading policy would lead to a lower grade for a student than under the original grading plan; or, changes in office hours would give students less access to you for help.

Substantive changes should be carefully considered and discussed with the class before they are implemented. An honest discussion with students about why you want to make a particular change, and how it might impact their grades, workload, etc. will go a long way to alleviate potential anxieties about the changes. They may not say it, but you can be sure that they will appreciate that you respect them enough to have had the discussion and sought their opinions.

I view the syllabus as a moral agreement rather than a legal one, and moral agreements bring more responsibility rather than less.

The bottom line is that mid-term syllabus changes should not be made lightly or frequently. However, if you feel strongly that a modification is needed, make it after discussion with the class, and ensure that no student will be harmed by the changes. Good luck, Jonas

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
In Undergraduate Studies, one of our goals is to establish academic programs that set students on their way through this resource-rich institution. All of the first-year, living-learning, and learning communities have these interests at their core: Letters and Sciences, Academic Achievement, University Honors, College Park Scholars, First Year Book, First Year Focus, UNIV 100 and 101, and Markets and Society. We are all aware that we need to continue to build these programs to include a larger number of students. We also need to give better academic entrée to our transfer students. We are working on these issues.

I want to raise the academic profile of Undergraduate Studies. I take that responsibility very seriously.

What would you like to see happen during your watch as Dean of the Division of Undergraduate Studies?

I want to raise the academic profile of the Division of Undergraduate Studies. I take that responsibility very seriously; it is my first priority. Second, I will put my energies behind the efforts of Colleges to deliver the instruction our students need. Also, the Provost has involved all units in a five-year planning process, and I want to do what I can to help Undergraduate Studies move through that process in ways that further all the divisional goals.

As for the rest, my inclination is to work on as many fronts as I can to support the energy and commitment that is in this Division. The strong culture of collaboration here is so energizing. I want to be a part of that and foster that. That is what I’m going to do.