

Excellence in Teaching Matters

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Professor Donna Qualters

Message from the Director:

"When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, then teaching is the finest work I know. At other moments, the classroom is so painful or confused—and I am so powerless to do anything about it"
Parker Palmer, 1998

Reading Palmer can be consoling and validating. It does take courage to teach—courage to be who we are, courage to make our passions and feelings transparent, and courage to affect human lives. Welcome to our inaugural issue of *Excellence in Teaching Matters*. We hope this serves as a medium to share and learn from each other to make us all better in the classroom.

Donna M. Qualters

Teaching Excellence: Not a Goal for the Faint-Hearted

The trepidation in his voice was unmistakable. Although a talented young scholar with a PhD in hand, he had never taken a graduate course to prepare him to teach at the college level. Did I have any advice? I took his anxiety as a good sign: no one should make the mistake of thinking that anyone can teach or let alone teach well or and no one should shy away from seeking guidance.

At Suffolk's *Center for Teaching Excellence*, our preeminent mission is to challenge all teachers, from the novice to the seasoned veteran, to reflect upon and enhance their teaching skills. To put it succinctly, we encourage all professors to strive for teaching excellence as the core of their professional role. Our teachers may also be graduate students, researchers, practitioners in their fields, and/or administrators; indeed, many wear several of these hats simultaneously. Some are teaching their first course, while others are award-winning veterans in the classroom. These differences matter not: we encourage all teachers to challenge themselves to refine their craft and bring it to the next level.

There is no one route, no singular path to follow. Teaching excellence comes in a myriad of shapes and sizes. Although I offered this aspiring new professor armloads of books and journal articles on successful pedagogy and course design, he will have to discover the style that is right for him. Perhaps the Socratic method approach will fit his style, and his students will learn from probing questions and dialectical exchange. But his personality might be more conducive to a discussion-based classroom, with minimal boundaries and plenty of opportunities for peer learning. Alternatively, his flexibility with technology may lead him to deliver a media-enhanced lecture that keeps his students on the edge of their seats or with or without the popcorn. And that's the most crucial thing for him to know: there is no one path, no singular route, and no simple formula that we can provide him. Teaching excellence cannot be pigeonholed; individual differences in the classroom need to be supported and embraced.

That said, I will offer him plenty of materials and support to help him get started. No matter what presentation style best fits his natural tendencies,

he will need help selecting course objectives, developing a range of appropriate assessments, preparing coherent and captivating lectures, and or the most challenging of all or grading in a manner that is fair yet discriminating. He'll need support and guidance to build a course that is challenging yet manageable, rigorous yet fun, skillfully organized yet spontaneous and exciting. The *Center for Teaching Excellence* is here to provide these and other resources to help him or and all Suffolk faculty or achieve their personal best in the classroom. Teaching excellence is not a goal or a destination: it is a continual process of challenging ourselves to be the best that we can be for each of the students in our classrooms. Join us as we engage in the process of exploring the art of teaching in this and subsequent editions of the CTE Newsletter.

Krisanne Bursik, PhD
Professor of Psychology
Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
CTE Board Member

Professor Profile: Magid Mazen

“A course, like a good movie, can have an overarching message...”

Professor Magid Mazen

What advice would you give to your new, untenured colleagues?

Advice is seductive to give, hard to receive. Looking back, I learned a lot from my many failures in the classroom, from daring to try something new every semester, from remembering that fun and learning are not mutually exclusive, from remembering that teacher's passion for the subject can be contagious, and from learning that a course, like a good movie, can have an overarching message to deliver beyond the topics of the course.

How do you keep your students involved? What can faculty do to motivate them?

Engage them as partners in the learning process from the first day, and this is of a pedagogical philosophy than a technique. For example, two minutes into the first day of the class early this semester, I asked if the students' traditional seating was optimal for effective communication during the term. Sure enough, they took matters into their own hand and redesigned

class seating into a U-shape. Beside the functional utility of the new arrangement, the exercise was spiced with two other indirect messages: Questioning is important to learning, and flattening the hierarchy between us can profit the learning process if they partner with me in assuming their own learning. I remember a quote from the old movie *Paper Chase* where John Houseman, playing a Harvard law professor, said: *“You teach yourself law. I train your mind.”*

What do you think is the best way to show your students how to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life experiences?

If we believe that classes are organizations, then paying attention to what makes organizations tick can help- regardless of the subject of the course. I design my classes as semester-long flight simulators to which most parameters of management theory apply, then pledge: If we, students and I, cannot apply what we teach to ourselves and the organization of our class, then something must be wrong with



me, them, the theory, or all of us. And this promise of accountability is written in the syllabus.

What do you see as the biggest hurdle/challenge in today's classroom?

I can think of two: (1) Trying to understand new generations of undergraduate students. (2) Trying to surface and challenge a very wicked academic assumption that university teachers should have learned teaching skills somewhere else, on their own. This assumption makes teaching a lonely process indeed, particularly for junior faculty who are facing and surfing impression management waves from all directions.

Magid Mazen, PhD
Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship

Teaching Tips {University of California Berkeley}

Ask students to write a "minute paper" At the end of a class period, ask your students to write for a minute or two on the following questions: "What is the most significant thing you learned today?" and "What question is uppermost in your mind at the end of today's class?" The resulting minute papers, submitted anonymously, will enable you to evaluate how well you have conveyed the material and how to structure topics for the next class.

Ask students to list key concepts or ideas. Ask students to write short phrases summarizing the three to five key concepts or main ideas about the class topic. You can review these lists to verify whether your students have grasped the important ideas.

Have students briefly paraphrase a reading assignment. At the beginning of the class period, you can request students to provide an oral or written paraphrase of the reading and then judge whether students have understood the assigned material.

Encourage students to form study groups. Study groups provide students with opportunities to learn from one another, and some students may find it easier to seek assistance as a group rather than as individuals.

What's New in Blackboard 9?



There's a good chance you are aware that the University is upgrading to the latest release Blackboard (BB9), our content management system, but you may not know what is new. Whether you teach in the classroom and want to use Blackboard only occasionally, or teach using a hybrid format where some of weeks are conducted online, or you are teaching totally online, this new release of Blackboard contains features you can benefit from.

New Layout

Perhaps the first thing you'll notice when you log in is the overall look is much more visually appealing. But even more than that is the streamlined organization of

different functions. You no longer have to go to a separate Control Panel page for faculty course changes because Blackboard now makes extensive use of what they call "contextual menus". What this means to you is that you can take action on an item from one page. For example, if you want to add a course document, click on the course menu tab called "Course Documents". Directly from the next screen you will be able to create:

- any type of file, text, or image
- a folder, create an external or a course link, create a syllabus or a module page
- a test, survey or an assignment
- a discussion board link, a blog link, a journal, or groups
- a Wimba Live Classroom, an iTunes U link, a wiki, or a Coursecast video link. This may seem like a fairly insignificant layout change, but if you've used BB at all, you know how annoying it

can be to have to click through unnecessary pages. I guarantee this is a change you will like.

New Tools

This new release has added new tools to its arsenal that should prove useful and easy to implement. Blogs and journals are two different instructional tools embedded into BB9. Individual journals are usually private between the faculty person and the student and are typically used by students to reflect on learning during the course. Blogs, on the other hand, can be either on an individual, group, or on the course level, and allow a sharing of thoughts and work at a variety of levels.

Elaine Garofoli,
Academic Learning
Technologist,
Sawyer Business School

2010 CTE Book Review

Barbara E. Walvoord.
Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. (Sawyer Library Call Number: LB 2822.75 .W35 2004)

This book is intended for anyone asked to do outcomes assessment in higher education. The book is divided into chapters by perspective; the first chapter identifies and discusses the essentials in assessment and

should be reviewed by everyone, while each of the three remaining provide a different user focus. As a result, faculty may read only two chapters to understand the author's practical guidance for planning and undertaking a simple outcomes assessment process from their perspective.

The first chapter is intended for all readers. Student learning assessment is defined, and Dr. Walvoord identifies three steps for assessment:

- articulate the goals for student learning;
 - gather evidence about how well students are meeting these identified goals; and,
 - use the information for improvement.
- The author points out that faculty have been doing assessment in their courses all along.

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*"Tell me and I'll forget,
 show me and I may
 remember, involve me and
 I'll understand."
 Chinese proverb*



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Book Review Continued

However, most of the information gathered from these assessments is not reported to departments or programs, and just as often is not used to inform or guide improvements in content or its classroom delivery. The chapter provides a model for direct assessment including the grading process and program assessment.

Chapter Three is intended for faculty in departments and programs. In this informative chapter, Dr. Walvoord discusses the development of the departmental assessment plan and how to conduct an assessment audit to learn what learning outcomes evidence may already be available. She identifies and explains the differences between direct and indirect measures concerning learning outcomes, and recommends steps to improve student learning once the evidence has been gathered and reviewed.

In addition to these two chapters, faculty are encouraged to peruse the rich information in the Appendices, such as sample rubrics for evaluating student classroom work, and practical examples of departmental learning goals and assessment reports.

Bob Dugan, Director, Sawyer Library

Volunteer Opportunities for Fall 2010:

Great Teaching Workshops

Volunteer to present a topic of your choice in a 90 minutes workshop setting

Teaching and Technology Workshops

Volunteer to present a topic of your choice in a 90 minutes workshop setting on some aspect of technology in the classroom

Afternoon Tea Discussions

Volunteer for an afternoon tea discussion to facilitate a topic in an informal conversational atmosphere

Book Group Facilitator

Volunteer to facilitate a book group on an education book of your choice.

Please contact Christina DiRico at cdirico@suffolk.edu or at 617.573.8222 for more information.

Spring Teaching Luncheon March 11th, 2010

70 faculty, staff, and administrators joined the Harvard Bok Players in *Teaching Improv* on March 11th at the Law School. Good food, conversation and fun enlivened our learning about ways to enhance our classrooms. The Players reported back how impressed they were with the deep thinking and knowledge of our audience. BRAVO!

