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**Center for
Academic
Excellence
Dalton State
College**

A Division of the Office of Academic Affairs
The mission of the CAE is to facilitate, support, and enhance the teaching and learning process at Dalton State College. The Center serves to ultimately improve student success and achievement of learning outcomes by promoting the creation of effective learning environments through the provision of resources and faculty development opportunities.

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Faculty and Staff Recognition



Dalton State's LPN program was recently noted in the Spring 2015 publication of *The Georgian Nurse* (official publication of the Georgia Board of Nursing) as being in the top five programs in the state for NCLEX-LPN pass rates (four-year average, 2011-2014).

The average score for DSC LPN graduate was 96.77%, as compared to the state of Georgia average of 90.88% and the national average of 83.96%, during the same four-year period. These statistics are from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) and *The Georgian Nurse* (GBON).

Pictured from right are LPN faculty: Leia Talley, Part-time Clinical Instructor; Dana Trowell, Assistant Professor of Licensed Practical Nursing and Program Director; Joey Pierce, Assistant Professor of Licensed Practical Nursing; Lisa Hunt, Assistant Professor of Licensed Practical Nursing; Andrea Ridings, Instructor in Licensed Practical Nursing; Sheila Coley, Instructor and Clinical Coordinator in Licensed Practical Nursing; and Sandy Martin, Part-time Clinical Instructor.

Dr. Christy Price, Professor in the School of Health Professions, presented workshops on engaging modern learners for the faculty at La Rochelle School of Business in LaRochelle, France, on April 9, and at Georgian College in Toronto, Canada, on April 28. She also presented multiple workshops for faculty on building rapport with students, creating captivating mini-lectures, and dealing with controversial issues in the classroom at Schreiner University in Kerrville, TX on May 11-12. Additionally, she facilitated a day-long workshop on flipping the classroom at a teaching and learning conference at the University of New England in Portland, Maine, on May 21.

Faculty and Staff Recognition

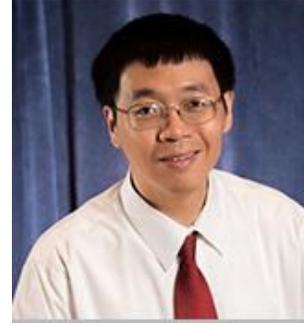


Four faculty members and one staff member were awarded prizes for excellence at the May 1 faculty meeting. Dr. Kim Hays, Assistant Professor of Biology, was given the Dalton State College Foundation Award for Excellence in Teaching. Ms. Deby West, Administrative Assistant in the Office of Academic Affairs, was awarded the Beth Burdick Service Excellence Award. Dr. Bennie Laughter, Lecturer in the School of Business, was awarded the Barbara Shiffler '76 Award for Business Teaching. Dr. David DesRochers, Associate Professor of Biology, was given the Faculty Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Professional Development. Dr. Sarah Mergel, Associate Professor of History, was given the Faculty Award for Excellence in Service. These awardees are pictured above, in order.

Faculty and Staff Recognition



Dr. Hussein Muhamed, Assistant Professor of Biology, participated in collaborative research between the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Central Florida where the team genetically engineered the chloroplast genome of tobacco plants using a native bacterial genome to enhance the capacity of plants for phytoremediation of organic mercurial compounds as highly toxic environmental contaminants. His research achievements have been published in various peer reviewed scientific journals, such as *Plant Physiology*, *Environmental Science and Technology*, and *International Journal of Phytoremediation*, as well as books and proceedings of national and international meetings. Adding another dimension to this research, he has participated in writing grant proposals for the National Science Foundation (NSF), Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), the U.S. Civilian Research & Development Foundation (CRDF), and the HUD Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control.



Dr. Thomas L. Ngo-Ye, Assistant Professor of MIS in the School of Business, presented a research paper at the International Academy of Business and Public Administration Disciplines (IABPAD) Conference in Dallas, Texas (April 24, 2015 - April 26, 2015). This paper is also published at the *Peer-Reviewed Academic Conference Proceedings: Proceedings of the International Academy of Business and Public Administration Disciplines (IABPAD) Conference in Dallas, Texas*. It can be accessed [here](#).



Dr. Kris Barton, Chair of the Department of Communication and Associate Professor, was honored by the *Dalton Daily Citizen* on May 29 as its "Citizen of the Week." The newspaper noted his work in creating undergraduate research opportunities for Dalton State students. He was also cited for initiating a twice-yearly trivia contest on campus that raises money for undergraduate travel to academic conferences and for the Wounded Warrior Project.

Thoughts from the Editor: The Old and the New

For the last three years I often felt as if I were the world's oldest living doctoral candidate. Of course, I wasn't, but now I really am proved wrong. According to a post I saw—where else—on Facebook and corroborated by more reputable news sources such as the [Wall Street Journal](#), a woman in Europe, Ingeborg Rappoport, recently earned her Ph.D. at 102. Actually, she had earned it in the 1930s, but it had been denied her because her mother was Jewish and she was living in pre-World War II Germany.

I find her story inspirational for a number of reasons, one of which is that she kept learning throughout life. Learning is something we should continue doing no matter our age, status, or profession. We have all heard research that mental activity—and learning is included in that—is a contributing factor to mental and brain health in our senior years.

The Center for Academic Excellence and this journal are two ways to keep learning about the instructional delivery of your courses. We all have our collateral reading, and for myself, I like to read books about leadership and trends in higher education and where the “experts” think higher education is going. In a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Gary Saul Morson and Morton Schapiro of Northwestern University forecast what higher education will look like in 2040.

Now, 2040 is 25 years off and, considering the first paragraph of this article, I probably will not be working in higher education then. However, I think their five predictions, based on their research and that of others, are worth thinking about:

1. Fewer tenure track positions;
2. Less support from tax base for public institutions;



3. Renewed emphasis on the humanities and liberal arts;
4. The decline of the purely liberal arts college; and
5. United States universities will attract fewer international students.

The writers were unsure about whether more economically disadvantaged students will be attending college. However, they did make a statement that sums up what I would like everyone to understand: *The focus on "going to college" obscures the fact that college is not a commodity.*

The college experience is about so much more than attending classes that might get you a piece of paper and a better job. Unfortunately, some voices are telling our students that is the sum and purpose of the investment they put into their time here. We in the Center for Academic Excellence want to have a high impact on the students who pass through our classrooms, and that is why we will continue to emphasize the AASCU's high impact practices in the coming year, taking them to the next level.

Come join us for the ride. In the August faculty assembly, the calendar for the year's events—speakers, book clubs, workshops—will be distributed. Look forward to continued relevant and substantive programming in 2015-2016.

—Barbara G. Tucker

Active Learning in the Classroom: Getting Them On Their Feet!

Abstract: Traditional lecture methods are becoming increasingly mundane to today's students as such students are growing increasingly disinterested in the learning environment as a whole. With this in mind, educators have found that active learning activities have become integral components of learning communities. When these are incorporated with traditional methods in the classroom, students are provided with the tools they need for success in the learning environment as a whole; the inclusion of active learning strategies enhances student engagement as well. This paper will describe various active learning activities that can be incorporated into the classroom and utilized in multiple disciplines.

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INTRODUCTION

Presently, pedagogical methods are being modified at all levels in academic arenas to increase engagement that cultivates learning and facilitates the mastering of new concepts (Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, & Weiss, 2009; Greenwald & Quitadomo 2014; Tilhoale, Hofman, Winnips, & Beetsma, 2015). Most administrators perceive increased student engagement as the most cost-effective approach that subsequently increases the retention and graduation rate of students in their respective institutions. Research shows that learning and understanding of materials in an adolescent mind is optimized by presenting the concept in different ways, with repetition, and over time (Hake, 1998).

In addition, students can increase their learning and retention if they practice the new material outside the classroom. True learning has been compromised when students quickly read the materials, a misunderstanding of what studying involves. The classroom learning can be augmented by reenacting the lesson outside the classroom and connecting it to a positive memory that may cement the material. Most students miss the last step — the making of positive memories that complement the learning.

Today, educators are challenged every semester with a new group of students who lack aptitude and analytical and communication skills. The institution cannot address the compounding effect that results from years of students' superficial misinterpretations and inappropriate understanding of materials, and this long-term situation impedes the true progress of students in learning new concepts. Moreover, an increasing percentage of the present student population is comprised of students classified as non-traditional (Schuetze & Slowey 2002). This group can be comprised of one characteristic or a mix of the following: employees changing careers; students who have not been part of the academic arena because of income limitations; those who harbor academic frustration and manifest a negative attitude towards academic pursuits.

Students in this category were at one time the minority, but now they representing a significant number in the student body (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). Such mosaic of students and their deficits can appear insurmountable to the average educator, but to the seasoned and experienced educator, "It's just another day in the office." Most educators will agree with the following: education is ever-evolving for educators, the materials are ever-increasing, and the methods for student

learning are constantly being explored. Consequently, an educator faces the challenges of correcting students' misconceptions about their subjects and of keeping current with the discipline' literature synchronously with course delivery.

The best tool any great educator has is an optimistic attitude towards the individual student and the student population. This is best coupled with a responsibility as an educator to learn new teaching methods to be incorporated in with the current repertoire. The arsenal of teaching techniques facilitators have available are varied. This paper will present examples that have been used effectively in the classroom across various disciplines.

EXAMPLES

Stand your ground—Variation 1

This teaching activity begins with asking the class a question highlighting a concept. For example, the instructor may ask the class whether heredity or environment impacts the development of a person more, addressing the concept of nature vs. nurture. In this variation of the activity, each student then receives an index card. At this point, each student is asked to select a stance on the issue. In this illustration, each student would choose whether he or she wanted to argue for nature or nurture as more impactful in the development of a human being. Based on which option they chose, the students would be divided into two sides of the room, or on either side of a whiteboard, depending on what option best suited the particular classroom setting.

After being divided, one student is chosen from each side to debate the issue for around three minutes. The process continues for additional sets of students from each side, up to two to three sets. This method allows for the students to critically think on their feet, to see a concept from various angles and allow a finer understanding of the concept, instead of passively attempting to grasp the vague idea of it. In this classroom example, students may

create arguments for why nature or nurture seems to be a more driving force in human development by arguing not only the theories of nature or nurture, but also coming up with more detailed examples to support their claims. The level of involvement used in learning the concept through this activity is beneficial to all students, even the ones who don't actively debate, as all of the students have to be ready to support their stances.

Stand your ground—Variation 2

This exercise begins exactly as Variation 1 did. The class is asked a question and then is divided into two groups based on which stance they choose. After this, each side is given five minutes to brainstorm convincing arguments to support their claim, including illustrative examples. Each member of each side must come up with their individual arguments and be ready to present them. After each side presents its case, students are asked which ones want to switch sides based on the arguments presented. The group that persuades the most members of the other side to change over receives points for the activities.

Order it up—Variation 1

This classroom activity begins with the instructor lecturing on a particular process. In the first variation of this activity, the students are divided into groups. Each group is given the steps in the process out of order on a sheet of paper and instructed to cut up each step on a separate strip of paper. The groups are then positioned around white boards or wall space where they can tape up the strips of paper. The instructor then calls each group to start at the same time taping up the strips of paper in correct order of the process. The first group to correctly tape the steps of the process up in the correct order wins the points for the activity. The students use analytical skills beyond strict memorization in trying to reason through the process. The activity also serves as an active memory aid when students later try to recall the process in studying and testing.

Order it up—Variation 2

This option also begins with the instructor's initial lecture on a process. However, after the lecture, students are not divided into groups but rather the instructor calls the first student up to a white board to write the first step of the process unassisted. After the first student correctly names the first step of the process, he/she hands off a marker to a second student to write the second step correctly. The process continues with different students for each step until the entire process is written out correctly on the white board. This exercise keeps the students engaged and thinking of the entire process, as they don't know which step they may be asked to recall.

CONCLUSIONS

These are just a few examples that educators can add to their repertoires. However, when implementing these models, it is critical that educators also follow up with explanations of the concepts presented. Students need these explanations in order to help retain the basic concepts. These activities can also be implemented to enhance concept connections since students often lack the capacity to make the necessary connections. In general, these activities provide yet another avenue for student comprehension and retention of the concepts.

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NPACE: A Service-learning Academic Outreach Model

Abstract: Columbus State University's Non-Profit and Civic Engagement (NPACE) Center is a subdivision of the Department of Communication and exists to help meet the communication needs of local non-profit organizations through the application of service learning in communication courses. For the department, it is enhancing the reputation of the program and aids in raising the department's profile and recruiting potential. For students, it is creating tremendous opportunities to build a stronger knowledge of the discipline, enhance personal efficacy and civic engagement, and to provide them with the opportunity to build strong professional portfolios and earn degree-relevant employment after graduation. For the faculty, NPACE is creating an efficient means of blending teaching, service, and research as they work towards tenure at a mid-size regional university. This paper is a case analysis of NPACE and the ways in which it serves the community, students, faculty, and its host department.

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2013, the Department of Communication at Columbus State University launched its Non-Profit and Civic Engagement (NPACE) Center on the ground floor of the Carpenters' Building in Uptown Columbus with a live broadcast and a press conference including local public officials, university administrators, and local celebrities. In the two years since its launch, NPACE has seen growth in recognition in the Chattahoochee Valley for the work of its faculty and students to enhance the quality of civic life in the region. Partnerships with local non-profit organizations routinely include a dozen organizations each semester and exceed forty different local non-profit organization partnerships. These non-profit organizations make use of NPACE resources to improve communication practices, develop promotional content, or to launch strategic communication campaigns that employ principles of public relations and political communication.

NPACE functions as an engine that cultivates these non-profit partnerships to support a growing service learning curriculum that constitutes the core of the communication curriculum at Columbus State University across its Communication Studies, Integrated Media, and Public Relations concentrations. The result

is that students obtain vital professional experience by learning best practices through service to local non-profits. This experience puts them on a competitive level with graduates from other programs and job seekers with intermediate job experience.

This paper is a case report that explores the benefits that NPACE provides to the Department of Communication at Columbus State University. The paper will explore the benefits to the academic program, its faculty, and the students who enroll in the classes that source NPACE partnerships to facilitate service learning projects.

Service Learning, Impact on Learning, and Civic Engagement

Service learning is a pedagogical approach applied to a wide range of academic disciplines that takes students out of the classroom and gives them the opportunity to apply principles and theories learned to real world situations, often working with local volunteer-based organizations, serving to enhance students' social problem-solving and interpersonal skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999). While there is a diverse collection of definitions of service learning, McCarthy (2002), succinctly states that service learning links academic instruction with community service guided by reflection.

Reflection is a critical component of the service learning process as it links student experiences with curriculum content or with more considered analysis of the social conditions giving rise to service needs (Artz, 2001).

John Dewey (1937) was the first to advocate for learning from doing, and this is the foundation for generations of arguments supporting service learning (Leming, 2001; O'Hara, 2001; Walstein & Reiher, 2001). A large body of scholarship explores the potential positive effects of service learning on students, including higher order thinking (Eyler & Giles, 1999); empathy (Lundy, 2007); cultural awareness (Bloom, 2008; Borden, 2007; Gutheil, Chernesky, & Sherratt, 2006); personal and interpersonal development (Gullicks, 2006); motivation to engage in social issues (Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, Donahue, & Weimholt, 2008); motivation to study (Flournoy, 2007); and life skills (Astin & Sax, 1998; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Gullicks, 2006; Lee et al., 2008; Prentice, 2007; Simons & Cleary, 2006). Warren (2012) found in a meta-analysis of cross-disciplinary studies of service-learning approaches that service-learning programs have a positive influence on student learning outcomes, irrespective of the method of learning measurement.

One prolific subset of study on service learning is of how it potentially impacts civic engagement. Putnam (1996) made the point that traditional community civic organizations were in decline during his "Bowling Alone" research projects, Schudson (1996) countered that grassroots organizations have supplanted traditional civic organizations and that rather than seeing young adults as disengaged, we should see them as "differently engaged." Van Benschoten (2000) found a strong relationship between volunteerism in nonpolitical organizations and an increase in students becoming better community-oriented with their college communities.

Many scholars have also identified a clear relationship among service learning, volunteerism, and increased political socialization

and engagement. Campbell (2000) stated that service learning is a vehicle for educating students on citizenship and a vehicle for cultivating social capital (Putnam, 1995). Owen (2000) identified a direct relationship between political socialization and service learning. Through bolstering young adult participation in community projects, scholars noted increased attention to political news and events. Allen (2003) explained that service learning amplifies students' personal investment in academic and civic life. Delli Carpini and Keeter (2000) stated that service learning can indirectly motivate and increase opportunities for political learning and increase likelihood for continued engagement in public life. Perry and Katula (2001), however, cautioned against concluding there is an outright impact on civic life, noting that increased concern for social ills in service learning does not always translate to direct action that promotes change. Cowan (1997) clarified the value of service learning to civic life by stating that service is a valuable part of community-building, but is not necessarily the direct bridge to political engagement.

Due to the diverse approaches to the study and implementation of these civic engagement programs (Eyler & Giles, 1999), researchers and educators alike encounter a wide array of approaches to service-learning initiatives meant to promote civic engagement among students. Prentice (2007) specifically called for clear definitions of civic engagement to guide service-learning programs. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggest that civic engagement typically falls under 3 different classifications: (1) cultivating personally responsible citizens who pay taxes, obey the law, give blood, and have a job, (2) participatory citizens who are active in community affairs and organizations, and (3) social reformers, or justice-oriented citizens, who seek to understand the causes of societal problems and address their root causes. It is because of the pedagogical benefits to not only student learning but also to the cultivation of engaged citizens that the Non-Profit and Civic Engage-



ment (NPACE) Center came to fruition. The next section explains the cultivation of NPACE, and its function as part of the Department of Communication at Columbus State University.

The Genesis of NPACE

In the fall of 2001, Dr. Danna Gibson joined the faculty at Columbus State University and initiated a curriculum that actively employs service learning as a root element of her coursework. Over time, she and her colleagues made more frequent use of service learning and student reflection reports as a strategy for reinforcement of principles taught in the classroom. As a result, since 2001, the Department of Communication has led the university in service-learning hours among all academic units, including the University's cross-disciplinary Servant Leadership Program. During the 2013-2014 academic year, the Department of Communication accrued over 12,000 total service-learning hours among class projects, student internships, independent studies, and activities sponsored by student groups such as the department's Public Relations Student Society of America chapter, its Lambda Pi Eta Honor Society chapter, and its growing student media outlets.

As time passed and the department moved to the River Park campus in 2009 and became a part of the College of the Arts, it became clear that to compete for resources, the department would have to cultivate a stronger public profile for its programs and the impact it was having on the community. The faculty went to work developing a storefront presence in Uptown Columbus that would cater to local non-profit organizations, city government, and small businesses. In 2011, the department acquired space on the ground floor of its current building and renovated to allow for studio production space for radio, audio, television, film, and digital platforms. By the spring of 2013, when the center opened, they had a functional television studio, radio bay, and two digital editing spaces on site.

The Purpose and Reach of NPACE

The purpose of NPACE is to develop a vehicle to support service learning initiatives

maintained by the department while enhancing the quality of life in Columbus. This begins with the culture of the location of the department in Columbus and the location of the center in the city itself. When the faculty began to define the proposed purpose of the NPACE Center, they found compelling evidence that the opportunities for community partnerships were only growing in the region. When developing the plan, the faculty discovered that according to the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, of roughly 6,000 local small businesses, 4,800 are non-profit organizations. Going further, the consolidated government of Columbus sits two blocks from the River Park campus and the NPACE office location.

At the center's opening in 2013, the Department of Communication had twelve local nonprofit partners. As of this spring, the department and its NPACE Center maintain roughly 40 partnerships with local non-profits, the city government, other academic units, and small businesses that have non-profit interests in the region. Prominent partners include The Muscogee County United Way, The Boys and Girls Club of Chattahoochee Valley, Columbus Regional Medical Center, Muscogee County School District, the Kohler Foundation, and the Chamber of Commerce. The increase in number and public profile of the non-profit partners also means that NPACE is not only growing in its capacity to serve the community and its department, but it is also adding value by raising the profile of the department at Columbus State University. As such, NPACE is quickly creating additional opportunities for the Department of Communication and its faculty to improve their reputation among colleagues and within the community.

How the NPACE Model Works

When developing the NPACE Center, the faculty adopted a model akin to many public relations firms, marketing agencies, or event economic development centers. The non-profit partner or non-profit organization interested in partnership will reach out to the center's director, who will coordinate a meeting with a couple of faculty members and sit down with the

organization. Typically, non-profit traffic comes to NPACE due to its ability to produce audio and video digital shorts, and the organization will typically be in search of a video or a public service announcement. The purpose of the initial meeting is to assess the broad needs of each organization.

Once the needs of the non-profit are clarified, they will begin to review the courses offered over the coming academic year. For example, Live Healthy Columbus approached NPACE in the spring of 2014 in search of a public relations campaign to promote a public health forum at the Columbus Convention Center. In discussing the Live Healthy Columbus and its goals, the faculty began to guide the organization to consider permitting a group of public relations students to research the organization and its services and to offer a clear, cohesive alternative in messaging and branding for Live Healthy Columbus that better coincided with its strategic mission. Once agreed upon, the faculty assigned project work for Live Healthy Columbus to the public relations management course in the spring of 2014.

Many non-profit organizations require multiple areas of support, which the faculty can identify and then work with the organization to pair in multiple courses. The Muscogee County branch of the Ferst Foundation for Early Childhood Literacy approached NPACE in the fall of 2012 after its initial launch the previous summer. At the time, the organization needed to understand the region it was seeking donor support from, promotional literature, and public service announcements to promote its new program. Appropriately, the faculty assigned that fall's video production, public relations campaigns, and integrated media design courses to address the needs of the Ferst Foundation.

At this point, the partnership moves from the NPACE Center into each corresponding course, and the non-profit partner begins meeting with the faculty member teaching the course addressing their needs. It is up to each faculty member to maintain the desired level of communication and contact with the respective

clients throughout the semester. Generally, this tends to come in the form of quarterly or end-of-semester email updates on team efforts on the organization's behalf. On occasion, organization contacts will maintain meeting-by-meeting contact as a way of keep the professor a part of the conversation. In keeping with the firm or agency model, the faculty members are *de facto* account managers, tasked with tracking the project progress and helping students stay on course with the organizations.

Carrying the model forward, the aim is not to present each non-profit organization with a "one shot" experience with NPACE, but to establish enduring partnerships. For example, the partnership with Muscogee County Ferst Foundation is now in its sixth consecutive term, and will progress into its first summer session in 2015 with the assignment of a year-long intern who will manage communication for the local chapter with local media and on social media with the public. Now that the process of NPACE is clear, a discussion of the benefits to the department, faculty, and students is in order.

Benefits to Program, Students, and Faculty

The value of the partnerships is multi-faceted. On one level, the partnership raises the profile of NPACE and the department with the public through media coverage that each project generates for the organization, in which it is common to reference the partnership in covering each event. This has value in establishing a stronger reputation for the department at the university and state level. On another level, word is spreading from satisfied partners who promote NPACE's work with other non-profit partners that bring in more opportunities to meet the needs of our students and ultimately, open the door for much more prominent partnerships in time. The growth in prominence and reputation provides the department with greater justification for additional resources and enhanced recruiting opportunities. In the fall of 2012, the department had roughly 175 full-time majors. As of Fall 2015, the department is projecting 400 full-time majors in roughly 3 years of enhanced presence as a program

providing a service learning approach to learning with students. This prodigious growth is enabling the department to make stronger partnerships in the University, make credible requests for additional resources, and increase our faculty and staff substantively on an annual basis.

The growth in appeal for the program among students becomes clear when the benefits to students of adopting a service learning approach are considered. First, most majors in the department encounter at least one service learning course per semester over two years of study in the program. In many cases, this is more like two courses per semester that include multiple facets of professional-grade production on behalf of non-profit clients. This translates to a student portfolio that often includes ten projects that students may show to prospective employers upon graduation, and in many cases, during their final semester as they prepare to graduate.

Couple this student achievement with the interpersonal, conflict resolution, and business and professional development course skills that they cultivate in the program, and it speaks directly to the learning benefits Gullicks (2006) argues are offered in a service-learning curriculum. Moreover, recent data from employers indicate that cultivated interpersonal communication skills are a sorely lacking asset among entry-level employees, according to 92% of executives surveyed on skills that new graduates need as they enter the workforce (Palmer, 2012). From this perspective, the NPACE model in our department is striving to provide our students with a competitive edge in comparison to some alternative learning models.

In addition to degree-relevant work experience through skills applied service learning and strong portfolios, our students are also able to cultivate stronger professional social networks. Adopting Granovetter's (1974) perspective on the strength of weak ties argument, our majors are able to better cultivate broad, diverse networks of acquaintances that open doors for better degree-relevant employ-

ment opportunities. One such example is the public relations and marketing office for Columbus Regional Hospital. What was once a staff of one is now a staff of three, two of whom are recent graduates who began networking with their employer through class assignments and through student groups like Public Relations Student Society of America. Also, two annually replenished interns provide skilled labor on communication tasks that current staff cannot execute. Another example comes from WTVM News Leader 9, who currently employs three of our majors part-time, has six intern slots open for majors, and has hired two of our graduates to entry-level reporter jobs in the past year. In both of these examples, we see a strong demonstration of how service learning promotes networking, which in turn is promoting degree-relevant employment for our majors. Anecdotally, in the past three years, 25 of this researcher's advisees graduating with communication degrees from Columbus State University are currently employed in degree-relevant positions (media, journalism, public relations, professional training, and development) regionally and locally.

In addition to the benefits to students, the faculty also sees tremendous benefits from the implementation of the NPACE model. The most obvious benefit to faculty members that employ service-learning course models is the ability of the NPACE center to bring viable service learning partnerships to the faculty, which is a tremendous time saver for faculty accustomed to searching for service learning partners in the community before each academic term (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). In this department's case, the faculty and staff meet before the start of each semester and identify one to five partners each would like to work with in respective courses. This researcher routinely takes advantage of the partnership aspect of NPACE to facilitate ongoing partnerships, almost entirely eliminating the need to pick from the list each semester.

One unforeseen benefit of employing the NPACE model associated with retention,

progression, and graduation emerged as we watched the program take off. In the state of Georgia, as well as many other states, there is growing pressure from the state legislature to demonstrate productivity and value in higher education. In a university with mediocre retention rates, the department enjoys a 73% retention rate, well above the university average. Much of this can be attributed to the strong sense of personal investment students derive from working with prominent local non-profits that address critical issues in the Columbus, GA, community. In terms of successful outcomes, our graduates are demonstrating a potential to illustrate the viability of our model beyond graduation by earning degree-relevant job opportunities.

Another benefit to individual faculty members is the potential growth in profile each faculty member can earn through using service learning in meaningful public venues. In each of the past three years, this researcher is averaging 6,500 total service learning contact hours from his students directly to organizations with strong ties in the community. These are not only enhancing the department's service profile, but also creating opportunities for faculty members to raise the profile of the department and individual work in the community at the University level. For example, since 2001, the department has been recognized with two Educator of the Year awards, one finalist for Educator of the Year, and two consecutive Outstanding Faculty Service Award nominations for the same faculty member in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. This all translated to an enhanced profile, which in turn facilitates greater opportunities to enhance a faculty member's teaching and service profiles, both key to tenure and promotion at most institutions.

Finally, faculty members are seeing tremendous value in the development of unique research opportunities. Access for students to non-profit organizations also generates opportunities for faculty members to cultivate research studies on the practices of non-profits within the community. A critical challenge in research is gaining access and trust among

research subjects (Denzin, 2009). The NPACE model permits our faculty to turn student service learning projects into faculty research projects on theoretical and applied skills and pedagogical platforms. For example, this researcher is currently balancing four ongoing pedagogical research papers with two case study projects derived purely from contacts developed through the NPACE model. In short, as much work as service-learning pedagogy can pose, the trade-offs are increased benefits to faculty reputation, service records, and research opportunities.

Summary

Service learning is a form of high impact learning through which students work with external organizations by putting theory and principles into practice and enhancing that practice through reflection. The body of literature indicates that there are many benefits to student learning, communication skills, and professionalism. Going further, the literature indicates potential benefits to students' civic knowledge and participation across multiple decisions. It is these benefits outlined in research that were the foundation for Columbus State University's Non-Profit and Civic Engagement (NPACE) Center.

Leveraging the strong service-learning foundation of the Department of Communication's service-learning curriculum and the strong surrounding community of non-profits provided the resources to make NPACE possible. NPACE is modeled on university economic development centers, and functions much like a public relations or marketing firm. Local organizations connect with our faculty, and based upon needs, we pair them with courses that will provide resources and advice that resource-strapped organizations need.

NPACE is providing some unique opportunities for the Department of Communication at Columbus State University. Chief among these are (1) the benefits that it provides to the curriculum, (2) departmental recruiting, and (3) the culture of student investment in the program and their own course of study. Going further, NPACE creates tremendous promotional opportunities for the program and is working

effectively to raise salience about our department as a positive social force in the community and within the University community.

NPACE also provides some impressive benefits for our faculty members. Access to non-profit organizations is alleviating the challenge of partnership cultivation that individual faculty members encounter. The unique learning environments and the diverse collection of discipline-specific problems also create substantial access to productive, valuable research environments for faculty that create an efficient way of blending teaching and research.

Going further, the on-going partnerships that NPACE enables our faculty to build help faculty develop a powerful community, regional, and national service record. Finally, the efforts of faculty with prominent local non-profits are raising the salience of our faculty with the public and within the university community, strengthening the perceived value of those faculty to the university and community. In short, NPACE is proving to be a highly effective resource for heavily taxed tenure-track faculty at a mid-size regional university to build a strong, three-pronged tenure portfolio.

NPACE also created opportunities of a similar value for our students. In terms of the learning environment, students are able to gain a much stronger grasp of the principles and practice of communication through service learning. Second, the opportunity to connect with prominent local non-profits that work in fields including ending homelessness, health care, disability access, early childhood literacy, cancer prevention and cures, and community improvement empowers students to establish a strong sense of personal investment in their community and in public affairs, reinforcing literature on the value of service learning to cultivating stronger citizens, at least at the participatory citizen level, if not the social reformer level (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Finally, the work that students complete on the behalf of non-profit organizations is providing them with invaluable professional experience that is directly translating to degree-relevant employment. While scholarship remains uncertain about the direct value of service

learning to civic engagement and democratic participation (Cowan, 1997; Perry & Katula, 2001), it is very clear that service learning is a strong reflection of Dewey's (1937) call for learning from doing. NPACE exists as a vehicle to promote service learning, and it exists to support the program, students, faculty, and community that support it.

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Using Rubrics to Promote Student Engagement, Critical Thinking Skills, and Motivation

Abstract: Rubrics can serve as an instructional, motivational, and assessment tool designed to promote student engagement in the teaching and learning process. Current research articles on the pros, cons and challenges of using rubrics were examined. This article presents information on purposes for using rubrics, design elements of valid and reliable rubrics, and how to use rubrics to promote critical thinking skills and motivation to complete work and ensure understanding of course content.

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Introduction

A rubric is an assessment tool or instrument that specifies a scaled set of evaluation criteria for a specific task. The criteria specifically describe each level of performance and identify values assigned to those levels for the purpose of evaluating and determining a grade for student work. Most importantly, a rubric serves as a communication tool to assist students in understanding the learning goal(s), in tracking their own progress on a specific task, and in celebrating successes in making progress toward and achieving academic goals (Marzano, 2007).

Use of rubrics as an assessment tool grew from an effort to encourage objective evaluation of student work. The first rubrics were proposed by Ernest Noyes as early as 1912 to provide a standardized method for evaluating written compositions (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). The Hillegas Scale, designed by Milo B. Hillegas, was one of the first rubrics formalized to evaluate written composition and “answered the call for a scientific tool that could eliminate teacher subjectivity for an objective and exact numerical measurement of student writing” (Turley & Gallagher, 2008, p. 88).

Current-day rubrics based on standards,

learning objectives, and assessment criteria evolved from efforts at the University of Minnesota Institute for Learning Disabilities to align curriculum-based measurement and performance tasks with objectives during the 1980s (Schneider, 2006). By the early 1990s, the rubric, a theological term used to describe an outline which may also be a plan of action, began to be used in the educational arena as a tool for grading tasks based on curriculum objectives (Schneider, 2006).

Design of Rubrics

How is a rubric developed or designed? Rubrics are created by stating learning goals based on curriculum standards. The teacher must then decide how the student will demonstrate the content and process skills that have been learned. The learning goals become the criteria of what the student is to know and be able to do, and the assessment task specifies the assignment the students are to complete to demonstrate learning that has taken place.

Once the evaluation task is decided and learning goals have been organized into content, skills, and processes, the rubric can be designed. By stating the learning goals in rubric format, the teacher is then able to use the learning goals for the basic criteria of the task or

assessment assignment (Marzano, 2007). The teacher then creates “a list of what is essential in quality work and “articulate[s] gradation of quality for the selected evaluation criteria. Begin by describing the best and worst levels of quality, and then fill in the middle levels based on . . . knowledge of common problems.” (Montgomery, 2000, p. 326). A simplified scale, using whole point values, is then assigned to each level of the criteria. The rubric can be scored analytically and holistically by scoring each criterion independently and then totaling those scores to determine overall level of performance on the assignment.

Validity of the rubric requires that the standards, learning goals, or objectives and assessment task are all aligned. Verifying the reliability of the rubric requires that colleagues participate in using the rubric to score student work. Ratings of student work based on the rubric must consistently fall within a reasonable, measurable confidence interval of the grading scale for the instrument to produce reliable results, given that individual raters bring a degree of subjectivity to the evaluation process. Designing the rubric is only the first step in the process. Once designed and used to complete the evaluation of student work, the rubric needs to be reviewed and tweaked to clarify wording and ensure that students clearly understand the evaluation criteria (Montgomery, 2000).

Benefits of Rubrics

Involving students in designing a rubric for a specific task, project, or assignment contributes to students’ developing critical thinking skills and “increases the likelihood that students will produce quality work (Montgomery, 2000, p. 326). Rubrics “created with students reflect their values, goals and language” (Turley & Gallagher, 2008, p. 87). Participating in the design of a rubric may also ensure that the students will use the rubric as a guide to completing the work and feel ownership of the work which can create motivation for completing the assignment. Students are also more likely to use the rubric to peer- and self-assess their progress as they complete the work, thus encouraging students to

self-monitor their progress toward the learning goal(s).

Rubrics specify the criteria on which student performance is judged and provide a format for more consistent grading by the teacher. Consequently, rubrics can be very helpful in objectively grading student work by specifying assessment criteria and providing consistent feedback to students in a timely manner. Rubrics are also useful as a basis for discussion when providing feedback to students to defend how specific work was graded (Wenzlaff, Fager, & Coleman, 1999).

Rubrics can ensure alignment of standards, instruction and assessment. Creating a rubric requires that the teacher thoroughly think through each component of an assignment to identify specifically what the student is expected to know and be able to do based on the curriculum standard. Consequently, assignments will be closely aligned to the standard(s) and thoughtfully planned, thus providing the student with a better understanding of expected levels of performance. The rubric serves as a guide for completing the assignment and provides a clear target for the assessment.

Rubrics serve as a tool for designing authentic assessments, which also aligns with the constructivist learning theory and places greater emphasis on cognitive processing, as opposed to traditional objective test design which primarily evaluates only the product of a student’s thinking process (Zane, 2009). Cognitive processing enables students to develop individual meta-cognitive skills that enhance their ability to make connections resulting in productive critical thought engagement as well as higher order thinking. Use of rubrics contributes to creating a learning community and assisting students in understanding all facets of a complex assessment by developing a shared vocabulary for talking about the content, process and evaluation of a specific task (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). The rubric outlines for students the requirements of the

authentic assignment and specifically how each component of the assignment will be measured.

Rubrics can be used as both an instructional and an assessment tool. As an instructional tool, a rubric is useful in helping students understand the requirements of a specific assignment. As an assessment tool, the rubric can be used formatively, as a basis for discussion, to help students understand how to improve their work while completing a specific assignment. Rubrics can also be used to encourage students to give thought to how to improve their own work by participating in peer- and self-assessment based on criteria outlined at (or in) each level of the criteria. Once the final product is submitted for the summative evaluation, the rubric is then used to grade the product and provide feedback to the student.

Rubrics serve as planning tools for aligning standards, instruction, and assessment. Creating a rubric requires that the teacher unpack the content and process standards to determine what the student will need to know and be able to do and how the student will be expected to demonstrate content and process learned. Thus, instruction and assessment are a result of thoughtful and intentional design. As students work on assignments, the rubric serves not only as a guide, but also as a basis for ongoing discussion and feedback between the student and teacher as well as between peers. When used for summative evaluation, rubrics provide the teacher with a basis for more unbiased and consistent evaluation of student work (Andrade, 2005).

Rubrics “co-created” by students and the teacher provide an extra bonus to students by ensuring the goal and procedures of an assignment are more clearly understood (Andrade, 2005, p. 27). To participate with the teacher in creating a rubric, the students must fully understand the standard and objective of the lesson, determine how they can demonstrate what they have learned, and design a task (project) that will allow them to demonstrate what has been learned. Participating in the process of creating the rubric actually gives students a degree of control over their learning because students are involved in designing their own work and in determining how it will be

ggevaluated by establishing the specific criteria on which the summative assessment will be based.

Possible Drawbacks to Rubrics

While there are many benefits associated with the use of rubrics as part of the teaching and learning process, there can be drawbacks. Rubrics are tools and should not become the focus of instruction or a replacement for effective instruction. While using a rubric to evaluate student work can help the grading process be more consistent and efficient for the teacher, the goal of meeting the target may interfere with the students’ being more creative in their work. Individual students may not fully understand the criteria, resulting in their performance being judged as substandard even though the student has learned and understands the content.

In completing the task, the specified criteria may contribute to students’ feeling confined and controlled. Simply having to specifically follow the rubric to obtain a proficient score may contribute to students’ becoming focused on doing well versus learning the content. Overuse of rubrics might even contribute to students’ losing confidence in creating projects to demonstrate what they have learned because they have become accustomed to having criteria so specifically spelled out for them to follow (Kohn, 2006).

Use of rubrics may confine student creativity by requiring that all students complete the same type of work to demonstrate mastery of content, thus eliminating the differentiation of instruction and assessment that is necessary for accommodation of individual learning styles. Even though the task may be aligned with the constructivist learning theory, complex thought is not guaranteed. The student may simply follow the steps the rubric outlines to complete the task and place more emphasis on the skill than on the thought process and mastery of the content.

Determining and posting grades can be a challenge when using rubrics if the grading scale of the rubric does not align with the required grading scale required by the institution. For example, a rubric built on an analytic point system would require that the point system be converted to a holistic percentage system or letter grade depending on the specified grading system of the

institution.

Above and beyond the drawbacks, there can be more serious mistakes made by overuse of rubrics in the teaching and learning process. Over-standardizing assessment procedures can lead to comprising the intrinsic value of learning. Students begin to focus solely on the extrinsic reward of doing what is required to obtain a good grade. “Issues of validity, reliability and fairness” (Andrade, 2005, p. 29) may also emerge. Creating rubrics that are valid and reliable requires that each rubric is aligned to specific standards, objectives and assessments.

The work of initially creating aligned rubrics can be time-consuming and requires ongoing revision of the rubric once evaluation of student work has been completed, as well as review by colleagues to ensure validity and reliability of the instrument. Each rubric must be tweaked when it is determined that the language is unclear or the criteria outlined do not support meaningful learning aligned to the standards and objectives of the content. Colleagues must be involved in “co-scoring” student work using the rubric to determine if the design of the rubric produces valid and reliable results (Andrade, 2005). While the rubric is a tool for efficiently and consistently scoring student work, it does require expending the time up front to thoughtfully design the task and specify detailed criteria. Time must also be allocated to revising and verifying the validity

and reliability of the instrument as it is used in the teaching, learning and assessment process.

Conclusion

The pros of using rubrics for formative and summative assessment far outweigh the cons. While developing valid and reliable rubrics is a time-consuming process, the benefits of using rubrics justify the time investment. Rubrics benefit the teaching and learning process by facilitating communication between the teacher and student. For instruction to be effective, alignment of standards, objectives, and assessment must exist. Creating rubrics that are based on standards and objectives and are valid and reliable requires thoughtful planning and offers many benefits to students by communicating and clarifying what they are expected to know and be able to do as well as how they are to demonstrate their learning. Rubrics serve as a basis for discussion with students by establishing shared vocabulary for providing both formative and summative evaluation feedback. By providing a format for efficient and consistent grading, time invested in initially creating the rubric pays off during the summative grading and feedback process.

Rubrics serve as a road map for getting from one point to another in the teaching and learning process. What is learned along the way, as well as how that information is processed to demonstrate understanding of content, is the real point of the journey.

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Accommodating Angst and Anger in the Quest for Accessibility: A Learning Center's Story

Abstract: As part of a university-wide Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI), the staff of the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning has worked to develop templates, identify resources, and facilitate faculty understanding, evaluation, and adoption of accessible materials. The aim of the ATI is to improve the cultural inclusion and physical and technological access for students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. The initial effort to address the accessibility initiative was to design a fillable accessible syllabus template, and this was made available to faculty in Spring 2015. This paper will highlight the efforts and challenges of the Walker Center to help create an environment at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga where “everyone achieves.”

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Approximately 56.7 million Americans have some kind of disability (Brault, 2012). Until recently, many universities have been remiss in proactively moving towards creating a completely accessible curriculum. As news sources more frequently report penalties brought against colleges and universities for instances when persons have been denied access, university administrators have begun to take notice and action (University of Minnesota Duluth, 2015).

The tide is turning on many fronts in American higher education. One aspect that has been brought to the forefront of our collective conscience is that of accessibility for all on college campuses and in college courses, both online and face-to-face. By embracing the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), we will not only be able to address those with disabilities (such as visual or hearing), but also recognize that this type of design is effective for everyone. UDL is defined as “an educational framework that guides the design of learning goals, materials, methods, and assessments as well as the policies surrounding these curricular

elements with a diversity of learners in mind” (“UDL on Campus,” n.d.). By allowing more than one way for students to receive materials, we create a course with more engaged learning opportunities for all. Following is a brief history of the federal government's regulations and the efforts we have taken at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to create a campus where all are able to take part in our activities, courses, and experiences.

Federal Government Regulations

The rights of disabled persons have slowly been recognized, protected, and expanded over the past forty years through three federal laws:

- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1973)
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended in 1998)
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended in 2000).

Title II and Section 504 possess essentially the same requirements that institutions must be responsive to the needs of individual students and make programs and services accessible to them on request (Edmonds, 2004; Katsiyannis, 2009). Typically, these requirements have been made with institutions offering accommodations to students on a case-by-case basis. However, recent trends have seen Section 508, which is more proactive in nature, becoming the requirement adopted by many institutions (Edmonds, 2004). Section 508 is remarkably different as it requires that all educational technology purchased must be accessible whether it is initially intended for use by a disabled client or not. Simply put, the era of accommodations is ending.

In a “Dear Colleague Letter” (2010) to college and university presidents, the U.S. Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division) and U.S. Department of Education (Office for Civil Rights), outlined their concerns about accessibility on campus, writing:

Technological innovations have opened a virtual world of commerce, information, and education to many individuals with disabilities for whom access to the physical world remains challenging. Ensuring equal access to emerging technology in university and college classrooms is a means to the goal of full integration and equal educational opportunity for this nation’s students with disabilities. . . . we appreciate your consideration of this essential educational issue and look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation’s colleges and universities are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities (Joint – Dear Colleague Letter, 2010).

The Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education issued a FAQ letter in May 2011, in response to questions from the 2010 “Dear Colleague Letter:

According to this document, “Innovation and equal access can go hand in hand.

The purpose of the DCL is to remind everyone that equal access for students with disabilities is the law and must be considered as new technology is integrated into the educational environment” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

In recent years, numerous higher educational institutions have faced complaints, lawsuits, and settlements in regards to inaccessible materials. Examples include:

- Louisiana Tech University who, under a settlement agreement, agreed to adopt a number of disability-related policies, including the requirement to deploy learning technology, web pages, and course content that is accessible in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA standard in the university setting.
- Florida State University who, without admitting liability or wrongdoing, agreed to pay each of the student complainants \$75,000 in settlement of their claims and to continue its efforts to make courses accessible to all students. (ADA One, 2015).

UTC’s Accessible Technology Initiative

The Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) was implemented to guide the campus in ensuring that information technology resources and services are accessible to all students, faculty, and staff (The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga [UTC], 2015). The core principles of this initiative are based on the premise that technology accessibility is an institution-wide responsibility. The initiative requires commitment and involvement from leadership across the enterprise (“Accessible Technology Initiative,” 2015).

Dr. Jerald Ainsworth, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, outlined his vision for UTC’s accessibility efforts by writing, “that ‘accessibility’ is more than access to educational tools, it more closely resembles a basic educational right. . . . access must be equally effective for all of our students, much

more than a level of basic accommodation” (Ainsworth, 2014). UTC recognizes that technology access for individuals with disabilities must provide comparable functionality, affordability, and timeliness and should be delivered in as seamless a manner as possible. If this was not the case before, UTC will focus on it now and make strides to improve each semester until we are successfully implementing Universal Design in all of the university’s courses and websites.

In addition, the implementation of Universal Design principles should reduce the need for, and costs associated with, individual accommodations for inaccessible technology products. This has been the way the university has operated: by being reactive to students as they present themselves. This is huge shift for all who create and facilitate content on the UTC campus. This has been and will be an ongoing process for the whole campus.

The Role of the Walker Center for Teaching and Learning

As the center on campus most aligned with faculty’s pedagogical and academic technology resources, the Walker Center staff has become the first stop for faculty requesting assistance to get course materials to meet requirements outlined by the ATI. Our role has been to identify and develop resources for faculty to make it more manageable for them to revise their current course material. Sometimes these changes include creating templates or sample files, such as was done for the campus-wide required syllabus. It was created so that a faculty member could open the template and just copy and paste info from their own syllabus file into the proper spaces. The template itself is accessible through the use of styles in MS Word. By making it easy for faculty, we are able to allay their fears that their materials will not be usable or will not meet the requirements expected of them; however, these efforts have often been met with anger and angst.

A small percentage of the faculty at UTC have adopted the syllabus template. Most prefer to use their own syllabi, are not comfortable

using the template, and/or believe that the process to copy and paste their syllabi content into the syllabus template is tedious. The university has begun to address textbook and course material adoption, and the faculty has been informed that all course material must be accessible. The Walker Center staff has also been involved in the campus-wide efforts to implement these changes and assist however needed to make the ATI successful. The faculty have been able to rely on our staff when they sit down to create accessible materials, and we are learning with them along the way. It has been a great partnership and will continue to be a large part of our mission, to help the campus move towards a more accessible campus for all.

Conclusion

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga penned and then put into action an initiative to address the issue of accessibility of course materials and web information for our students. The Walker Center then chose as step one to create a form for faculty to create an accessible syllabus. For some, this exercise may have been their first experience with recognizing a file as “accessible.” This initiative will not resolve all issues within courses or on our campus. In fact, the initiative itself must be seen as only a starting point for coming into compliance. UTC will need to be able to expand and change the initiative as time goes on so that UTC can make the best use of current technologies and skills. By starting this process, however, it is recognized that the Universal Design for Learning style can be beneficial for all and therefore should be continued to be adopted and promoted campus-wide.

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Making an Impact through Scholarly Teaching: A First Look at the Learning Communities Faculty Scholar (LCFS) Program

Abstract: The Learning Communities Faculty Scholar (LCFS) Program, currently being offered for the first time at Kennesaw State University, provides an opportunity for faculty teaching in learning communities to engage in professional discourse on scholarly teaching and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) within the context of learning communities. This paper describes this fully online program, which launches at Kennesaw State in Summer 2015 and may be adapted for use at other institutions

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Learning communities are among the ten high-impact practices (HIPs) identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as experiences that lead to greater student outcomes (Kuh, 2008). Students who participate in learning communities programs enjoy a smoother transition to college, closer relationships with faculty and peers during their first semester, and an appreciation of cross-disciplinary connections among their courses (Love, 2008). Learning communities also benefit the faculty who teach in them, helping them build their own connections outside their areas of expertise and offering opportunities for professional growth (Jedele, 2010). Additionally, at a time when many faculty are expected to produce more scholarship while maintaining progressive and rigorous classroom practices, a learning community can provide an ideal situation in which to implement Scholarship of Teaching and Learning initiatives to study the impact of innovative teaching techniques.

Training in curriculum design, the principles of effective pedagogy, and the scholarship of teaching and learning is rare in many academic disciplines (Halpern & Hakel, 2003). Often we expect faculty to seek out these opportunities for professional growth on their own. However, if we are to promise high impact practices to our students, training of all faculty who teach in such programs is essential. The Learning Communities Faculty Scholar program encourages this type of professional growth

among learning communities faculty through an online course delivered via the Brightspace by Desire2Learn learning management system. This developing program will be offered as a pilot program at Kennesaw State University (KSU) in 2015, with the goal of expanding to other institutions in subsequent years.

Learning Communities at KSU

The Learning Communities Program at KSU follows a faculty-driven, linked-course model. Faculty interested in teaching in learning communities propose a theme that unites two to four general education or first-year courses, at least one of which has 25 students or fewer. In Fall 2015, the newly consolidated KSU will offer more than 80 learning communities for first-year and transfer students, some of which are geared toward a specific major, program, or group (such as athletes or HOPE Scholars), and others of which are of general interest. In order to meet KSU's first-year requirement, students entering with fewer than 15 credit hours must choose either a stand-alone first-year seminar or a learning community. In addition to the learning outcomes of individual courses, the Learning Communities Program encourages faculty to promote integrative learning—helping students see connections among courses—as well as campus engagement in their learning communities.

Faculty who teach in the Learning Communities Program at KSU are given no extra incentives; many return to teach in the Learning

Communities Program because of the recognizable benefits learning communities have for students. As such, the LCFS faculty development course described in this paper has as its central goal for faculty-participants to be able to apply what they have learned to their own learning communities, with the ultimate outcome being increased learning and engagement for students. However, an additional important aim of the LCFS program is to provide faculty with a professional development opportunity that has direct implication for their growth as scholarly teachers. In other words, the LCFS Program seeks to encourage faculty to commit to *scholarly teaching* and *scholarship of teaching* as they maximize the impact of these efforts on the classroom.

Program Scope and Future Directions

Offered as an optional, asynchronous, and fully online course for learning communities faculty, the LCFS program has several learning outcomes that are met through readings, discussions, and activities. First, participants study the science of learning, creating learning goals for their learning communities based on an understanding of principles of educational psychology and course design. Second, participants learn about the unique challenges faced by first-year students and students in transition and demonstrate how these challenges will be addressed in their own classrooms. Third, participants learn more about different learning communities and cohort models, developing an understanding of the benefits learning communities provide to faculty and students.

Fourth, participants study research on curricular integration and use this knowledge to create integrative assignments to be used in their learning communities. Finally, participants design an empirical research study of their own for implementing Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in their learning communities, and learn more about the process of applying for Institutional Review Board approval for this research. While the Assistant Director of the Learning Communities Program serves as the facilitator of the LCFS course, the course also relies heavily on peer review and feedback.

Products and assignments are posted publicly for other participants to view, and critical discussion is encouraged. This practice reflects the spirit of the Learning Communities Program at KSU, which is highly collaborative and cross-disciplinary.

Discussions with colleagues at other institutions have revealed a national need for professional development opportunities designed specifically for learning communities faculty, and evidence suggests good outcomes for universities that have them (Graziano & Kahn, 2013). Currently, a national survey to determine the faculty development needs within learning communities programs at other institutions is under development (Steiner & Pipe, 2015). Data from this survey, as well as data from the pilot offering of the LCFS program at KSU will help determine the future direction of this program and its impact on faculty and students.

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Engaging Students Using Research Exercise Projects

Abstract: The topic of engaging students in course activities has acquired attention as it gives ideas about making the classroom more exciting and more motivating to students to participate in course activities. Recognizing the importance of “doing” shifts the center of attention in the classroom from lecturing instructor to engaged, motivated, and excited students.

In sociology courses, there is an emphasis on how sociologists conduct their research. A faculty member in sociology developed a series of assignments to teach students how to conduct their research like a sociologist. It became an effective way for students to learn about the topic and be more engaged in the course activities. Students learn about the researched topics in more depth through literature review as well as through conducting interviews with people who are relevant to the topics. This activity has become an exciting experience for students and an effective way to engage them in class activities through class presentations of their projects and through the class discussions that follow. The project is conducted and reported on in four stages with specific deadlines; the faculty member reads students’ posts and gives them feedback, after which students post their final revised reports and give class presentations. This paper is organized in three sections dealing with why and how research exercise projects are used, stages of conducting projects and reporting on them, and some of the challenges that may arise as a result of using this method of engaging students.

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Introduction

The topic of engaging students in course activities has acquired attention as it gives ideas about making the classroom more exciting and more motivating to students to participate in course activities. The importance of doing that is shifting the center of attention in the classroom from a lecturing instructor to engaged, motivated, and excited students.

Sociology courses emphasize how sociologists conduct their research. I found that a student research exercise project became a very effective way for students to learn about the topic and be more engaged in course activities. Students learn about the researched topics in more depth through the literature review as well as through conducting interviews with people who are knowledgeable about and relevant to the topics.

This activity also turned to be an exciting experience for students and an effective way to engage them in class activities through class presentations of their projects and through the class discussions that follow. This paper discusses how the project is conducted and reported on in four stages, with specific deadlines. I read students’ posts and give them feedback. Students then post their final revised reports, after which class presentations begin. The paper is organized in three sections dealing with why and how research exercise projects are used, stages of conducting projects and reporting on them, and some of the challenges that may arise as a result of using this method of engaging students.

Literature Review

Several researchers and authors have written about the topic of student engagement. Bean (2011) suggested that for effective

engagement in course activities, students need to submit drafts or part of their written work before the final versions. He also suggested that there need to be due dates for both the drafts and the final versions of written assignments. The importance of draft or progress reporting is that it allows professors to give feedback to their students, which helps them do better in their final reporting or written work.

Laskowitz, Drucker, Parsonnet, Cross, and Gesundheit (2010) examined results of the forty years' worth of practices adopted by the Schools of Medicine at Duke and Stanford Universities about student research. The faculties of these two schools have encouraged or required students to engage in scholarship as a way to broaden their education and attract them to careers in academic medicine. Preliminary data from these two schools suggest that student research experiences instill an appreciation for research, impart research rigor and methodologies, and may motivate students to pursue careers in academic medicine.

Junco (2010) argued that using emerging technologies helps to engage students and enhance their success. He mentioned that professors cannot ignore the popularity of social media and content creation websites such as Twitter, Facebook®, YouTube®, Flickr, Last.fm, and blogs. Therefore, professors need to be on social media and the Internet with their students, in addition to the irreplaceable face-to-face interaction in the classroom.

Trigwell and Shale (2004) emphasized in their paper "Student Learning and the Scholarship of University Teaching" that for effective university teaching, students need to be part of developing a scholarship of teaching. In particular, they argued that pedagogic content knowledge, scholarly activity, and pedagogic research should have the element of engaging students.

Bulger, Mohr, and Walls (2002) argued for using four methods of effective teaching in favor of students. These are outcomes, clarity, enthusiasm, and engagement. They gave

instructors their concluding advice about student engagement, which was as follows: "Don't lecture for more than 30 minutes before running an activity that involves all students. People learn what they DO, so have students DO everything that you want them to learn."

Why Should Professors Use Research Exercise Projects and How?

Engaging students in course activities makes the classroom more exciting and has many benefits for students and for the learning process in general. As a method of engaging students in course activities, the research exercise projects I have used have the following six benefits:

1. Using research exercise projects as a teaching method has the benefit of engaging students in course activities, classroom interaction, and discussions.
2. It is also an educational opportunity for covering topics in more depth and for covering topics not covered otherwise. Students learn more in depth about the researched topics, through the literature review, and through interviews with people who are relevant to the researched topics.
3. It represents motivational and enthusiastic aspects of the educational process. By deciding on the specific topics they research, students become motivated to do them with enthusiasm, not just as another required assignment.
4. It has the benefit of creating an atmosphere of student excitement. Student excitement comes from the feeling of being active in the educational process. So, instead of just sitting on the receiving end of the process, students are producing knowledge through their research exercise projects, writing reports on them, and presenting these reports to their classmates.
5. It allows students to experience the thrill of the presentation. Being on the central stage in the classroom, in itself, is a thrill for

students. That's why they look forward to their presentation day and come prepared not only with their thumb drives but also in their appearance for that presentation.

6. It changes the class from its traditional silent atmosphere to a lively and engaged class. Students become actively engaged while listening to the presentations and participating in the discussions afterwards. Thus, the classroom becomes a much more interesting place of learning.

Stages of Conducting and Reporting on Projects

Students are introduced to this course activity during the very first day of classes, when I go through the syllabus. They are referred to the detailed information about it, which is available through the Content section in the learning management system.

The sociological scientific research model is discussed in detail in the second chapter of the textbook. Students are asked to follow it in conducting their research exercise projects. While students learn about and apply the nine steps of the scientific research model, they are expected to report on the progress of their projects in four main stages with specific deadlines.

As students post their reports on the Discussion section of the online learning system, I give them feedback on their reports. Then, they report the revised steps together with the new steps of the research model. The four stages of conducting and reporting on the research exercise projects are as follows:

1. Choosing a topic and defining it.
2. Literature review
3. Formulation of hypotheses, choosing a research method, and writing the research questions.
4. Data collection, data analysis, and conclusions

When students complete their reports, they post them to a link titled, "Final Report of the

Research Exercise Project." Then, I prepare a schedule for presentation dates and students sign it. Then, presentations start during the second half of the semester.

Challenges

Despite the many benefits attained by using the research exercise project as a method to engage students in the course activities, it still has several challenges. Here are three of them:

1. Presentations may affect the course content if not limited strictly in time. One way to address this challenge is for the presentations not to exceed about 15-20 minutes, about seven minutes for each student, at the beginning of the class time, during the second half of the semester.
2. Some students may not do the project at all, or even drop the course because of this requirement. This poses the challenge of finding an alternative for them. One way to address this challenge is by adding the grade value of the research exercise project to the weight of unit exams.
3. Although presentations represent a very gratifying experience for most students, some of them may not feel comfortable presenting their reports in front of the class. One way to address this challenge is encouraging them to do their presentations with help from the instructor, who shows the report on the overhead projector screen, while students talk about it while remaining seated. This removes the uncomfortable feeling of standing in front of the class for them. Another way is by giving some extra credit points for students who present their reports, which gives motivation for presentations and does not penalize students who choose not to present their reports.

Conclusion

The quest for new teaching methods is always needed to achieve the best results for the set educational goals in any institution of higher education. Engaging students in course and classroom activities is one of these effective

teaching methods. It motivates students to participate in the course activities in an active way.

Using the research exercise project to engage students has the benefit of putting students at the center stage, thus motivating them to do their best. The diverse topics chosen by students broaden the scope of the course and address areas of interest to students no textbook can include. More importantly, students go through the experience of being knowledge-generators instead of being always at the receiving end of the educational process. This leads them to appreciate the work of researchers and hopefully to apply the scientific method of research in their life in general.

The main challenge this method of teaching poses is the possibility that class presentations may take more of the course time if a strict time-limit rule is not adhered to. Another challenge is the possibility that some students may not want to do this course activity or may not feel comfortable presenting. Alternatives can range from presenting while sitting on their chairs to transferring the project grade to unit exams.

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About-face: Interactive Group Activities to Enhance Traditional Lectures

Abstract: “Flipping the classroom” is an instructional strategy that seeks to transform students from passive learners to active ones. Flipping has several benefits for instructors and students, although some instructors are reluctant to attempt the flip because they lack knowledge and examples and because students may lack reliable Internet access. This article explains the philosophy behind flipping the classroom, four approaches, and some simple ways to begin enacting the flipped classroom.

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Introduction

Do you feel you are not ready for a complete flipped classroom? I will show you how to incorporate interactive group activities into your classroom time. I use these activities with material students find the most challenging. For instance, instead of telling students the properties of water, I allow my students to discover water’s properties in groups. For material that hinges on the understanding of many terms, I have the groups construct concept maps. A *Harry Potter* genetics simulation gives students a tangible exploration of Mendel’s rules. By using active learning strategies, students do not just memorize facts and rules. Instead, these activities result in the mastery of complicated concepts through group exploration. Although my examples are from a biology class, they can be modified for other subjects and for use in your own classroom.

What is Flipping?

Flipping gives instructors a way to transform their role of “talking at” students to a role of “tutoring” students directly during class, transforming students into active learners (Hake, 1998). This shift allows for higher-order learning during class by moving some information transfer outside of class (Prunuske, Batzli Howell, & Miller, 2012). In addition to

allowing for face-to-face scaffolding interactions between instructor and student, flipping the classroom also allows students to revisit prerecorded information as a study tool.

Another benefit of this classroom transformation is that if students are absent for illness or school-related functions, the material is available for these students to review at their convenience (Buchwitz et al., 2012). Flipping the classroom encourages students to step up and take responsibility for their own learning in an engaging manner instead of depending on their instructor to give them knowledge (Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). When students are required to take initiative outside the classroom, in class, students take the initiative to lead discussions that include the integration of outside material and topics leading to critical thinking not typically obtained in a traditional lecture format. Challenging each other, student learning leads to unprompted collaborations and student-directed tutoring. Once this spontaneously occurs, the instructor shifts from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side” (Prunuske et al., 2012).

Both students and instructors have misconceptions about what flipping the classroom means and its potential outcomes. These misconceptions need to be addressed and understood in order to encourage more educators to make the switch and help students

welcome the change. The flipped classroom is most definitely not just a synonym for videos replacing teaching; it is student-teacher engagement through the use of active learning strategies. Instructors can use the flip as a stepping stone away from traditional lecture alone. Hesitant instructors fear a flipped class could lead to a less engaged classroom that only watches videos. Instead, student participation and face-to-face interactions increase.

There is also a fear that requiring preparation outside of the classroom will impede those with limited access to the Internet. If you have this situation, use a DVD or flash drive to allow those students access. Lastly, instructors worry students will work in isolation with little classroom engagement through the flip. The opposite is actually true. Flipping the classroom gives instructors the freedom to use class time for more personal interactions and active learning strategies with their students (Fink, 2003).

If an entire flip of the classroom seems overwhelming, try incorporating the flip for a few topics within the course. It is well known that student attention is limited; students only pay attention 60% of the time during lecture, of that time, 70% of information is retained from the first ten minutes and 20% from the last ten minutes of a lecture (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Therefore, as instructors who want their students to interact in class and retain information, we must be willing to try something different. Previous research also showed that students retain information best not through traditional lecture but through group interaction and consistent recall (Fink, 2003). Choosing topics that are usually taxing for your students for a flipped experience could greatly improve student knowledge retention.

Flipped Classroom Experiences

In my biology course, I use the flipped experience for especially challenging material. My students struggle to fully understand controls within the Scientific Method, properties of water, and Mendelian inheritance. I designed miniature flipped classroom activities for each of these

concepts. Your flipped classroom does not need to be complicated.

Students prepare for the Scientific Method class by reading the chapter, answering reading questions and taking a quiz. After their before-class preparations, students use the class period to design their own experiment in groups. I scaffold the experience with a guided worksheet. We wrap up the exercise with each group sharing their experiment. As a class, we decide if their experiment includes all the proper parts of the Scientific Method, leading to great classroom discussions and questions. Students use the Scientific Method for the duration of the semester in lab, which allows for constant recall through social interaction.

To understand water, I have my student groups explore water's properties in class. After quizzing students to access their competency level from at-home preparation, each group uses the following materials: a cup of water, paper-clip, oil, penny, capillary tubes, and wax paper. They spend the class period using a worksheet as a guide to help them discover water's properties, including adhesion, cohesion, hydrophilic, polar, and capillary action. Students remember and understand these properties better on exams than in previous semesters where I told the students the properties through lecture alone.

A more complicated flipped experience I designed is for understanding Mendelian genetics. After a reading and a mini lecture, students use a *Harry Potter* genetics activity I created to work inheritance problems. I assigned each character alleles for his or her physical and magical traits. Student groups begin by selecting a witch and a wizard to mate. My worksheet then guides students through problems with increasing difficulty. Students refer back to this exercise on their exams, which helps them work similar genetics problems.

Designing Your Own Flipped Classroom Experiences

There are several approaches to designing a flipped experience. Miller (2012)

outlines four of the common approaches. The first, called the traditional flip, involves instruction at home, then a classroom application. The explore-flip-apply method starts with an in-class introduction to the material, then homework clarification, and then classroom application. The mastery flip resembles the traditional flip in its structure, with the exception of asynchronous instruction to allow for self-paced training for mastery of the material. The final method described is the pre-training flip. Instead of instruction at home, students work example problems, and then come to class for instruction and clarity.

To design your own flipped class, you must first determine what topic your students have difficulty learning. What do you expect your students to do with their knowledge and understanding of this topic? Certain material works better than others in a flipped classroom. Types of learning goals that lend themselves to flipping as suggested by Miller (2012) include “interactive questioning, content and idea exploration, student content creation, student voice and choice, effective differentiation in instructional strategies, and collaboration with other professionals with the same goals.”

Once you have selected the topic you wish to flip, then decide what type of flipped approach works best for your material. Next, it is important to choose various resources accessible to students “whatever-when-ever-wherever” (Miller, 2012). Accessibility grants students the freedom to set their own learning pace and makes resources available for future study. After gathering resources for support, clearly state why your students need to know this material and connect the activity directly with your learning objectives (Roehrig, Michlin, Schmitt, MacNabb, & Dubinsky, 2012).

The most challenging piece for instructors is the design of the activity or application itself. Many already exist, so it is in the instructor’s best interest to first search for existing activities. Even if nothing specifically related to your topic exists, it is often possible to

fine-tune something. As a last resort, the instructor can build an active learning experience. There are many types of activities an instructor can use as models. These models include, but are not limited to, inquiry-based learning, project based learning, service learning, small group learning, writing to learn, simulation, case studies, and problem solving. It is vital to the students’ success that each activity has clear guidance and a connection to their worlds and engages them personally (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005).

All activities must be concluded with reflection. The last step in executing an effective flipped classroom is to devise an appropriate reflection for your activity. Reflection allows students to critically think about the material, critically process the activity, and make connections between course goals, the topic and the activity. Often, independent reflection can be followed by group or classroom discussion. Expanding the reflection similarly to the think-pair-share model gives students the opportunity to hear other students’ perceptions and incorporate different perspectives into their own.

Conclusion

Flipping the classroom gives millennial students a chance for a personalized education, even if it is with more work on their part. Flipping the classroom might be easier to do in some majors than others, but the approach applies to most majors. Using the flipped experiences I described above, I have received positive feedback from my students, even those not majoring in biology. On my midterm evaluations, students frequently request additional in-class activities. However, students do not realize all material is not conducive to the flipped approach and designing these experiences is often time-consuming. Once an instructor takes the initial time to flip classroom material, the same activities can be used during future semesters. Giving students the opportunity to recall repeatedly though social interactions increases the likelihood students will retain knowledge (Fink, 2003), which is a goal of all instructors.

Additionally, today's students will graduate and enter a workforce where skills gained through flipping the classroom will be expected. Companies expect employees to work collaboratively to solve problems or enhance corporate initiatives. Employees must have broad perspectives and see the global impact their solutions may have. Introducing even a few flipped classroom experiences into a course will improve the quality of learning and the value of exiting students (Fink, 2003).

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Journal Submission Guidelines and Editorial Policies

1. Faculty members (and professional staff) may submit the following:

- Book reviews on scholarly works on higher education administration or issues, college teaching, or adult learning published within the last two calendar years.
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning research. This is defined as a study in which an activity, strategy, approach, or method that reflects best practices or evidence-based research is tried in the classroom. The faculty member sets up an intervention, executes it, and assesses the impact, employing quantitative or qualitative methods. Articles should indicate that IRB process was followed where applicable, with documentation.
- Literature review that synthesizes, in a relevant and interesting way, the evidence, theory, and/or research on a particular aspect of higher education, college teaching, adult learning, brain research, etc. Professional staff could write about issues in student services or advising, for example.
- Essay of personal reflection of a classroom incident or phenomenon with an evidence- or theory-based approach to interpreting the incident or phenomenon.
- Articles should have applicability across disciplines.

2. Style Sheet

- Submissions should be in APA VI format and Times New Roman 12 pt. font. Use APA guidelines in terms of margins. The writer should try to preserve his or her anonymity as much as possible. The editor will redact the name of the writer from the document's title page before sending to reviewers.

3. Review Process

- The submissions will be peer reviewed by three faculty members, whose identity will be known only to editor and not to each other. One member of the review committee will be a faculty member in general discipline represented in the article, one will be a faculty member with an advanced degree in education, and one will be drawn from the advisory committee or other volunteer reviewers.
- Articles will be returned to the writers in a timely manner with an indication of rejection; conditional acceptance (revise and re-submit, with suggestions for doing so), and accepted (possibly with request to edit or make minor changes). A rubric will be used for assessing the articles. It will be available to potential submitters upon request. If none of the members approves the article, it will be rejected. If one of the members approves the article, it will be considered a conditional acceptance. If two approve it, it will be returned for the necessary editions and published when finished. If three approve it, it will be published as is or with minor corrections.

4. Submissions should be sent as Word files to btucker@daltonstate.edu

5. Published articles will appear in the *Journal for Academic Excellence*, which will be available on the Center for Academic Excellence's website and thus accessible by Internet searches.