

Teaching Matters

Center for Teaching Excellence

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Teachers face challenges to the profession within and without

This issue of *Teaching Matters* focuses on challenges to our profession, particularly in regard to teaching well the thousands of students who come to KU each semester. Throughout the newsletter, you'll see reviews of books that address issues confronting higher education from the outside.

Within the University, we face additional challenges. Last year, the strategic planning work group on Energizing the Educational Environment evaluated input from more than 1,000 students, faculty members, staff and alumni. As a result of the feedback and analysis, the EEE group has established an overarching goal: to strengthen recruitment, teaching and mentoring to prepare undergraduate students for lifelong learning, leadership and success.

To meet this goal, the group has devised five strategies:

1. Establish a new KU core curriculum for undergraduate students
2. Strengthen the pipeline of undergraduates to and through KU
3. Invest in first-year intellectual experiences
4. Enhance experiential learning opportunities
5. Redesign courses to enhance student learning

What the group hopes will be achieved are:

- Students empowered to make informed decisions about their learning through consistent, high-quality advising and mentoring
- Students connected to KU intellectually and emotionally, from first year through capstone experiences
- Enriched educational experiences for students through experiential learning and redesigned courses
- Students initiated for lifelong learning through renewed, goal-based general education curricula

As part of strategy 5, KU is making a commitment to redesign courses around high-impact and evidence-based practices that promote active learning. In addition, the University will support faculty members who develop courses that take advantage of new pedagogical methods and technologies.

Next semester, CTE will offer programs for faculty and instructional staff who are redesigning courses. Contact your department Ambassador for details.

—J. Eddy

For the full report, see www.provost.ku.edu/planning/implementation/

All things to all people?

Dan Bernstein, CTE

There are many challenges facing our profession, including the reality of steep declines in public funding in higher education. Among the many, three stand out and require our attention if we are to avoid further deterioration in the prospects for support of higher education: managing access, quality, and success in higher education; public articulation of our work; and balancing the time demands of research and teaching.

We have been asked to make higher education more accessible, so people in general can attend college and obtain the advantages of post-secondary education. Educational leaders are clear, however, that access alone is not sufficient; students need to complete degree programs and also demonstrate high levels of achievement. It will take a major overhaul of how we teach to simultaneously graduate a high percentage of students and demonstrate top quality academic performance among most graduates. KU's strategic plan for teaching and learning proposes just such a transformational culture of teaching on our campus, putting that challenge squarely in front of us.

As part of the expectation of quality educational achievement, we have also been asked to be more public about how well students perform. This fall the campus has embarked on widespread inquiry into the quality of written communication, as a first step toward examining other academic skills in the future. Two dozen departments have also taken significant strides toward meaningful measurement of how well their majors demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding. Some of them are making that work visible for KU colleagues, and others present their evidence to disciplinary accreditors. It is wise for us all to acknowledge the substantial investment of tuition and public funds in the full range of our

work; the very least we can do is be forthright in demonstrating how the teaching portion of our job helps students grow while also developing informed citizens and productive contributors to economic activity in Kansas. CTE has made examples of this work visible on our website (www.cte.ku.edu/gallery), under the heading "Department Analysis of Learning." We also offer a guide to excellent procedures and examples at www.cte.ku.edu/resources/department_analysis.

Many faculty members have the enormous privilege of a job that provides time for both teaching and research; those of us with friends in non-research-intensive institutions know how challenging it is for our colleagues to sustain a full range of intellectual work. It has been customary for decades that academic leaders defend our privilege by saying something like "Our best researchers are also [or often] our best teachers." If you believe that both activities are mostly a product of academic talent, then that statement might make some sense; certainly we all know people who are really good at many things.

In the last 30 years, however, the landscape for both activities has radically changed. The nature of research in many fields now includes broad collaboration, sometimes across disciplines and institutions, and promotion is based on substantially higher levels of publication and funding than were typical even half a generation ago. At the same time the nature of teaching in higher education has shifted. With a very different population of students, it is not sufficient to be an effective lecturer; there are engaged learning practices to acquire and many forms of technology to use in the service of learning. There is also a growing expectation that a range of students should show

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Peer triad workshops set for January, travel funds awarded

Peer Teaching Commentary program

Next semester, CTE will again offer the PTC program. PTC triads meet for about five hours over a semester and give feedback to each other on teaching and learning. Participants can come from the same department or a related field of study, or teach a similar form of class (graduate seminar, large undergraduate class).

If you join a PTC group, you and your peers will exchange syllabi for a course, discuss learning goals, observe each other's classes, and review samples of student work. At the end of the semester, triad members can summarize what they learned, and you can use this material for reviews or keep the material for yourself.

To become part of a group, attend a PTC workshop at CTE, 135 Budig, on January 23 (12–1 PM) or January 24 (12:30–1:30 PM). By January 19, RSVP to cte@ku.edu; lunch will be provided.

- Before the workshop, think about teaching questions you'd like to explore.

- Come with your own group, or identify topics to address in a group we'll help you form.
- Bring a syllabus from a class you'd like others to visit, as well as your calendar.

For more information, contact Dena Register at register@ku.edu, Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu, or call CTE at 864-4199.

Travel funds awarded fall and spring terms

This year, CTE is awarding \$8000 to faculty members through its new Teaching Related Education and Travel (TREAT) Fund. Fall award recipients were Philip Barnard, English; Barbara Barnett, journalism; Cheryl Lester, American Studies; and Michael Moody, physics and astronomy. Spring recipients will be announced late December.

Funds for the TREAT program are possible because of generous contributions to CTE's Endowment account. To support TREAT or other CTE programs, donate online at www.cte.ku.edu and click on the link "Support Teaching Excellence."

All things to all people?

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deep learning, and instructors have some responsibility for that additional attention and technique. With emerging expectations for both a lot of richly developed research and sophisticated teaching of a very diverse student body, it has become impossible for the very best in either portion to also meet top national standards of the other. Hiring designated teachers is the solution *du jour*, but that will not address the challenge we face. To get instructors who meet national standards of excellence, we will have to follow other major universities in creating fully privileged positions focused on the teaching of a discipline. This change truly challenges the received culture

of this and many other universities.

These are significant challenges to the way we have done business for the last generation. It is especially difficult to address such issues at a time when financial support is flat in dollars, but actually declining in purchasing power. All our professional missions cannot be supported equally for all faculty members, and decisions have to be made. Priorities among academic options will need to be sorted out, as they are on KU's business side through Huron Consulting. Unless we make some hard decisions, the whole enterprise could gradually slide into a state of peaceful ordinariness. Few of us would want that as our future.

Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses

Review by Kris Bruss, Communication Studies

KU's new core curriculum includes a list of six goals, the first of which is to "build core skills of critical thinking and quantitative literacy." Goal number two is to "strengthen written and oral communication." These goals are widely embraced by institutions of higher education, but as Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa report in *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), college students aren't gaining much in these areas. In an ambitious longitudinal study of 2,322 students from 24 diverse institutions, Arum and Roksa measured learning gains in the areas of critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing by comparing students' initial scores as freshmen on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to scores at the end of their sophomore year. The result? Scores improved by an average of only seven percentile points, with 45% of the sample showing no statistically significant gains (pp. 35-36). These findings, argue Arum and Roksa, underscore the degree to which college students today are academically adrift.

The book paints a largely gloomy picture of higher education and has been criticized for a number of reasons, including its reliance on CLA scores. Nonetheless, it opens up an important conversation about desired learning outcomes of undergraduate education and the means of achieving them. Although many students in Arum and Roksa's study showed no gains in core skills, others made progress. Those gains were attributable in part to the level of academic preparedness at the outset, but college experiences—time on task, courses with a strong emphasis on reading (40+ pages per week) and writing (20+ pages per semester), college major, and faculty with high expectations—also made a difference. In their conclusion, Arum and Roksa offer ideas for reform, urging colleges and universities "to take seriously their responsibility to monitor and enhance the academic requirements of courses" (p. 129). Their findings suggest that colleges have not been taking this responsibility seriously enough, which is worth considering as we prepare to energize the KU educational environment.

Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work

Review by Doug Crawford-Parker, English

In *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, Matthew Crawford presents a critique of both culture and education, in part through examining the spread of standardization. Crawford, a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Virginia, makes a case for the cognitive value of the manual trades by way of his own experiences as a motorcycle mechanic. He wants readers to see knowledge as embodied in real things in the physical

world, where the exercise of knowledge produces concrete, observable results. Crawford knows that he has solved a problem with a motorcycle engine when it runs well, when he can watch the owner ride off on a now-running machine.

For Crawford, too much activity within education lacks such concrete results. Students are asked to perform tasks where they are unable to assess their success, unlike the kinds of tasks he

performs as a mechanic. Crawford argues that the cognitive challenges of the trades resist codification, and to him that is their value. The trades represent a body of practice where larger cultural forces that push toward the creation of rules that suppress individual judgment do not hold sway. The tasks demand creative thought and supply external, objective validation of success. As Crawford argues, however, office work is losing the opportunity for creative thought as it becomes codified, subject to those forces that aim to regularize performance and remove the idiosyncrasy and unpredictability of human judgment in the same way that the assembly line regularized craftwork.

While I can sympathize with Crawford's critique of the cubicle and the standardization of office work, I think that it's not completely reasonable to contrast intellectual work with trade work. Trade work is vital, and it may be that very bright people would choose that career path if we did not promote the college-for-all model. But if we apply the standards of assessing success that are manifested within the manual trades to all kinds of tasks, what are we unable to assess? After all, when he finished writing *Shop Class*, did Crawford know if he had succeeded? Was it as obvious as fixing an engine?

For me, as a teacher of writing, those questions are central. Not everything I ask of students can be obviously defined in terms of success. Recognizing success in writing is itself a skill that requires knowledge and experience that resist systematic codification. Students' approach to writing often comes bound up with a history of viewing its evaluation as utterly subjective. They

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want to "write the way the teacher wants." Writing is, for them, much the same as the office worker trying to please a superior. This view suggests, however, that writing could be assessed entirely objectively but only ends up being assessed purely subjectively. These are not the only two options.

I appreciate Crawford's desire for work that creates observable results, and I appreciate his articulation of the cognitive demands of the manual trades. Yet I question presenting this view as an alternative to the kinds of intellectual work that college, at its best, demands of students. Such work cannot always apply wholly objective standards of evaluation, but neither are those standards wholly subjective. However, those standards can be made more transparent, with some effort. And the exercise of

that effort forces teachers to understand what informs their judgment and how they apply it. I take Crawford's cautions about the standardization of office work to heart, inasmuch as testing and scoring student work that aims to reduce such practices to the application of rules seeks to remove individual judgment. It is in our judgment as teachers, our individual points of view, where we bring what is of most value to our students, modeling precisely what we hope for them: that they develop their own judgments and insights, informed and shaped by what they have learned and continue to learn.

The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything

Review by Chris Brown, Environmental Studies

Society is facing problems on an ever-expanding scale: high drop-out rates, high suicide rates, high unemployment, exploding global population, climate change, among others. Particular individuals face their own challenges, from paralyzing injuries and disease to socio-economic disadvantages. If you look around, though, countless people seem to find a way to have fulfilling, happy lives, pushing beyond structures that dampen imagination, creativity, and a sense of worth and purpose. These fulfilled lives show the possibility of personal transformation and transformation of our world. It's being in your "element" that can lead to this transformation, and it's the title of Ken Robinson's book that is designed to put you in touch with times when talent meets passion, when people find their true, best self.

Robinson describes what the element is and the different ways people find it, by giving many examples of mostly famous people and how they came to discover and act on knowing their own elements. By finding groups of people with similar passions, and through the help of mentors, we should ignore roles society often makes for us in favor of pursuing where the element, our talent and passion, takes us. Robinson believes that finding the element is essential for people to have rewarding lives. But he also believes that we have little chance of meeting the challenges we face today if society is not comprised of people leading rewarding lives. The problem is this: our educational systems around the world are beating out of us the very talent and passion we need to lead happy lives and to solve problems.

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Robinson's book is a great, quick read for anyone who needs some inspiration. It's a reminder how powerful individuals are when their imagination, creativity, talent, and passion all come together. One of the examples in the book may cause you to think more deeply about what it is you really like about your job. With the right support, you too might be able to find ways to focus on that part of your work that makes it all worth it for you and those around you. But for insights on transforming our educational system to get there, Robinson doesn't provide much explicit direction, except briefly at the very end.

For anyone who has been following developments in KU's efforts to Energize the Educational Environment, Robinson's ideas may sound familiar. From that standpoint, if Robinson is right, we have a chance with EEE to help students find their element. Robinson would agree that students don't need a specific set of class "subjects" to get through life and be productive. Students should have the chance to meet broad learning goals in individualized fashion, and teachers should be encouraged to redesign courses and to deliver them in new ways. Yes, a new structure will be in place, but ideally this structure actually expands opportunities for students, instead of narrowing them. In the end, reading about so many different people finding their element is compelling, and I'm left wondering that if we are not purposely and passionately designing an educational environment to help others find where their talent and passion meet, then perhaps we should find another line of work.

Teaching today's students: Challenges to the professoriate

Angela Lumpkin, Health, Sport & Exercise Sciences

If you have ever been disappointed with students' lack of class preparation or participation in discussions, maybe it is time to rethink who our students are and how to educate them better. When describing good practice in undergraduate education, Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified the importance of active learning and time-on-task. Bok (2006) suggested that for college students to learn, the foci should be on communicating effectively, thinking critically, developing moral reasoning, preparing themselves as citizens to live with diversity in a global society, facilitating a breadth of interests, and preparing for work. Extending these insights to the professoriate, Bain (2004) suggested that the best college teachers shared seven common principles: created a natural critical learning environment; got students' attention and kept it; started with the student rather than the discipline; sought commitments from students; helped students learn outside of class; engaged students in disciplinary thinking, and created diverse learning experiences.

With the goal of how best to facilitate student learning, understanding more about Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2002) seems essential. Research suggests that many, but not all, Millennials demonstrate these characteristics:

- Tech-savvy, "digital natives" (Prensky 2005) who thrive on multitasking
- Confident, success- and achievement-oriented
- Prefer casual and informal working styles
- Team-oriented
- Thrive on praise (DeBard 2004)

Most professors understand that "student engagement is the key to academic motivation, persistence, and degree completion" (McGlynn 2008, p. 20). Our challenge is bridging the gap between this highly socially connected generation of stu-

dents and the perceived tedium of reading, writing, thinking critically, and attending class. To help professors build on students' strengths and what motivates them, here are a few suggestions from the literature:

- Use technologies to help students educate themselves.
- Make what is learned relevant; for example, use a blended or hybrid course design for learning fundamental disciplinary content.
- Engage students in group activities and projects using collaborative-learning techniques.
- Allow students to design their own projects (within parameters) to extend their learning.
- Create a learner-centered classroom, such as teaching students to write and speak clearly, think critically, and develop an appreciation for lifelong learning.

Teaching today's students holds great promise, because they are committed to engaging in meaningful work and are willing to be held accountable. It will be challenging, however, because professors need to ensure relevancy in learning opportunities offered to tech-savvy Millennial.

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END NOTE

Three predictors of student growth on learning outcomes

In 2006–09, the first Wabash National Study followed more than 3,000 students at 19 institutions to measure students' learning during their first year of college. Researchers asked students many different questions about their experiences in college. Leaders of the study clustered student responses and identified teaching practices and institutional conditions that appear to influence student growth.

Three scales predicted growth on a wide range of outcomes:

1. Good Teaching and High-Quality Interactions with Faculty Members

Faculty interest in teaching and development: To what extent do you agree that most faculty with whom you have had contact are genuinely interested in students? In teaching?

Prompt feedback: How often have faculty informed you of your level of performance in a timely manner?

Quality of nonclassroom interactions with faculty members: To what extent do you agree that your nonclassroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on your intellectual growth and interest in ideas?

Teaching clarity and organization: How often have faculty given clear explanations? How often have faculty made good use of examples and illustrations to explain difficult points?

2. Academic Challenge and High Expectations

Academic challenge and effort: How often have you worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations?

Frequency of higher-order exams and assignments: How often have exams or assignments required you to argue for or against a point of view and defend your argument?

Challenging classes and high faculty expectations: How often have faculty asked you to point out any fallacies in basic ideas, principles, or points of view presented in the course?

Integrating ideas, information, and experiences: How often have you worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources?

3. Diversity Experiences

Diversity experiences: How often have you attended a debate or lecture on a current political/social issue during this academic year?

Meaningful discussions with diverse peers: How often have you had discussions regarding inter-group relations with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, values, religion, political views) while attending this college?

Retrieved from <http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/study-research/> See link to Overview of Findings from the First Year of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (pdf).

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