

Teaching Matters

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Universities must act to close gaps in student achievement

The Supreme Court’s recent decision to uphold race-based admissions affirms many principles and practices important to university educators. Justice Sandra Day O’Connor added a warning at the end of her opinion, though, that many find troubling. She wrote, “We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today.” Derek Bok considers this warning in his article “Closing the nagging gap in minority achievement” in the October 24 *Chronicle Review*. He calls for universities to engage in more research to discover the causes of the gap in academic achievement and standardized test scores that separate African-American and Hispanic students from Caucasian and Asian-American students.

Bok notes the success of one organization, the Posse Foundation, that works with inner-city high schools to identify minority students with “personal qualities that would allow them to overcome modest grades and test scores and succeed in college,” which is in line with another step he recommends that universities take. The Posse Foundation sends groups (“posses”) of students to selective colleges, where they have remarkably high graduation rates.

Furthermore, Bok suggests that colleges help minority students overcome underperformance. He reports that a few colleges have created successful programs to address this issue. Details vary, but all the programs have high expectations for participating students, encourage group solidarity and cooperation, provide enough financial aid to avoid economic burdens to students, and establish mentoring programs for students with faculty. KU’s Multicultural Scholars Program (see pages 4 and 5) attests to the power of programs like this.

Bok reports that these efforts have often overcome underperformance entirely, but they are rare. He then says, “Although almost every college catalog boasts of a commitment to help all students ‘realize their full potential,’ few institutions have even made a serious effort to discover whether their undergraduates are performing up to their capabilities.”

What would happen on college campuses if this approach were used for all learners—rural or urban, physically or learning disabled, academically talented or underprepared, minority or Caucasian? Bok believes that “if colleges did make that effort, they might be surprised by the results.”

—JE

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Inclusive teaching opens wide the gate to learning

Dan Bernstein, CTE

At a literal level, inclusive teaching seems straightforward. One might teach to include all students in the trajectory for success. Or at least include all students who deserve to succeed, where success need not mean being the very best. Given that caveat, it is easy to imagine everyone endorsing inclusive educational goals—all who learn more than required for agreed upon competence receive credit for understanding. No one is systematically excluded from success.

Words, however, sometimes take on extra meanings. Since some categories of students are often excluded from success, institutions ask how those differences can be addressed. Thus we have programs to assure that students with disabilities are included in all learning activities, and we include many kinds of cultural experience in the curriculum. It is ironic that the term “inclusive” is sometimes perceived to refer to practices targeted at sub-groups rather than in support of all students.

In reality, teaching practices designed to promote maximum learning are truly inclusive because they make a course better for all learners. Consider the goal of remembering what is learned in a class. A lot of content and many skills are not remembered six months afterward. Unlike memories we have from even decades ago, the forgotten items did not get connected into the structured web we call long term memory. The key to long term memory is connection with our existing understanding of the world.

Consider a hypothetical art history professor who has observed that students from rural backgrounds typically do worse in her course than students from urban areas. Some rural students do not find her examples easy to remember or to generalize to new works. The examples were in settings familiar to people from high density areas. If the teacher expanded her examples to include a range of settings natural to all her students, then the advantage of connecting to existing organized memory would accrue to all, not just those who shared her urban background.

Teaching practices designed to promote maximum learning are truly inclusive because they make a course better for all learners.

Our students also arrive with greatly varied academic backgrounds, interests and talents. It is the dominant tradition of American higher education to use teaching practices that match the skills of top drawer students, even though they represent a distinct minority in typical public university classrooms. Many practices recognize that students progress at different rates, and course methods do not grant exclusive privilege to one rate of learning. There is a higher priority on having a larger percentage of students attain a foundational level of competence than on differentiating fast learners or discouraging students from continuing study.

Consider a hypothetical mathematics professor teaching a lower division course that is a prerequisite for engineering and other mathematics courses. The professor is sure he covers material well because some students always do well. Just as consistently, a cohort of students struggle to keep up, fail exams and manage to pass by extra credit based on effort. In this setting, personalized instruction would be valuable because students work at individual rates; they learn thoroughly each topic in a cumulative curriculum.

Self-paced personalized methods have obvious advantages for the typical student; there is less failure due to accumulating lack of preparation. Advanced students also benefit; they can work rapidly and achieve their intellectual goals quickly and efficiently, without risk of boredom. There is freedom for all in disconnecting competence from time spent in class.

As we discuss inclusive teaching at KU, it is important to include a wide range of students. When teachers increase ways that students can achieve success and demonstrate learning, everyone benefits. Having multiple contexts and methods simply allows all students to choose routes to understanding that make the best connections with their lives and that reward them with maximum intellectual return. There is more to inclusive teaching than providing special teaching to a small group of designated students. It is rather a way of opening the gate to learning as wide as possible.

“Professors Speak Out” conference set for Nov. 14

On Friday, November 14, the Center for Teaching Excellence will host a conference titled “Professors Speak Out: Challenges in Undergraduate Teaching and What Can Be Done to Meet Them.” Rick Snyder is the conference convener. The conference begins at 8:30 a.m. and concludes at 4 p.m. All KU faculty and instructional staff are welcome.

The conference will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the challenges of teaching at the undergraduate level, as seen by “in the trenches” instructors. Talks and related discussions will reflect ideas for improving instruction and emphasize solutions to the challenges addressed.

The schedule for the conference follows.

Registration (8–8:30 a.m.)

Welcome (9 a.m.)

Session 1: “The Challenge: The Students Seem to Be Getting Younger ...”—C. R. Snyder (9:50–10 a.m.)

Session 2: “Must the Medium Be the Message”—Earle Knowlton (10–10:45 a.m.)

Session 3: “Confronting Issues of Student Engagement”—Joseph Heppert (11:05 a.m.–12 p.m.)

Lunch—complimentary

Session 4: “The Paradox of Explanatory Power”—Janet Bond-Robinson (12:50–1:45 p.m.)

Session 5: “Content Without Context: Are We Doing Enough?”—Paul Atchley (1:45–2:40 p.m.)

Session 6: “Engaging Students in the Voyage of Learning: Challenging the Prevailing Winds”—Sheryle Gallant (2:50–3:45 p.m.)

Steve Shawl, physics and astronomy, will provide commentaries about each talk, and each presenter will serve as a discussant for one of the other papers.

Participants are asked to register for either:

- Morning session and lunch (9 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.)
- Afternoon session and lunch (12 to 3:45 p.m.)
- Full conference with lunch (9 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.)

However, you can come and go as you need during the conference. Space is limited to 25 per session. Registrations should be made before Tuesday, November 11.

To register, contact CTE at 785-864-4199 or cte@ku.edu.

Applications for CTE spring programs due November 17

During the spring 2004 semester, CTE will offer three programs to support faculty as they explore ways to facilitate students’ learning.

The Faculty Seminar Program supports full-time, tenure-track faculty members who want to explore with colleagues ways to represent the intellectual work they do in teaching. Participants will read and discuss examples of reflections on learning in three seminar meetings during Spring 2004, leading to the development of their own representation of the intellectual work they do in teaching. Participants receive a \$1,000 instructional fund for materials,

travel or hourly help for any teaching project, including research on teaching and learning.

The Faculty Fellows Program is designed to support full-time, tenure-track faculty who are developing innovative, collaborative or interdisciplinary course curricula, instructional materials, teaching methods or classroom-based projects. Faculty Fellows identify a learning goal for students that they wish them to achieve, and they explore ways of enhancing their teaching to reach that goal. They receive a \$1,500 instructional fund for uses similar to the Faculty Seminar.

Teaching Grants provide funds for full-time faculty members to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching. Funds could be used to purchase instructional materials (books, videotapes, software) or classroom demonstration materials designed to produce a particular enhancement in student learning. These funds could also be used for hourly help for development of teaching, if there is an articulated goal in student work.

For more information about these programs and for program applications, check CTE’s web site at www.ku.edu/~cte; look under “Special Announcements.”

Mentoring students of color

Renate Mai-Dalton, Business

Mentoring programs for college students, especially for the retention of students from diverse backgrounds, have been implemented during the 1980s and 1990s in relatively large numbers. At the University of Kansas, the Multicultural Business Scholars Program (MBSP) was founded with seven students in the fall of 1992. It has grown significantly and, during recent years, enrollment ranged between 30 and 38 students. The program is privately funded, and its growth is kept in line with incoming donations.

Over the past 11 years, the MBSP has had a retention rate of 85 percent. This compares to an institutional retention rate of about 46 percent over a six-year period for students from similar backgrounds. The graduation rate for six 6-year cohorts is 77 percent. Group grade point averages ranged from 2.8 to 3.3 on a 4.0 scale per semester.

So far, 95 students have been admitted and 50 of these have graduated since 1996 (the year of completion of four years of studies since inception). Most graduates were placed with prestigious corporations. In addition, many alumni have completed advanced degrees or are currently enrolled in selective graduate schools. As of Fall 2003, the program is being replicated in seven other units at KU (African and African-American studies, architecture, education, human development and family life, journalism, languages and the humanities, and pharmacy). One business school

at another university has adopted most components of our MBSP and began operations in fall 2002.

There are at least four components in each of the Multicultural Scholars Programs (MSPs) that make them successful:

- The program is directed by a faculty member who receives full backing from the dean/department chair.
- Students sign a contract and fulfill its conditions in order to be eligible for scholarships.
- Students attend regular one-on-one faculty-mentee meetings.
- Students attend monthly business meetings with all group members, followed by attendance at events of the arts.

Faculty director: When a tenured or tenure-track faculty member heads up the mentoring program, with the explicit support of the dean or department chair, the program is more likely to be perceived as important to the performance of the school or department and will more easily receive the backing of faculty colleagues and donors, who are needed to make the programs successful. The program director must communicate the results of the program, such as recruitment and retention rates, semester grade point averages and placement of graduates to demonstrate the program's progress.

Program contracts: All scholars must sign a contract that outlines their responsibilities. The contract content can vary from semester to semester and from unit to unit, in line with the needs

of the program, and it is signed by the student each semester before the next scholarship is awarded. Currently, the contract commits the student to regular class attendance, one-on-one meetings with the faculty director and monthly group meetings. More advanced students are required to assist newer students in the program. The contract clearly documents the director's expectations for the student and sets the tone for high academic achievements.

One-on-one faculty-mentee meetings: These meetings are, initially, conducted weekly or bi-weekly for 30-minute periods. They enable the faculty director to become well-acquainted with the students in the program and to develop the level of trust that is necessary for a productive mentor-mentee relationship. Since students come from widely varying backgrounds, the topics discussed during the one-on-one meetings must be specific to the needs of each student.

The dynamics that develop during the meetings are different for each student, and generally meetings are more difficult during the student's early semesters than during later ones. The faculty mentor must be prepared to provide the student with feedback about his or her academic reality at the time. Frequently, similar to all freshmen on campus, the student has to face the increased workload from high school to college studies. In addition, the student must learn to overcome isolation because of his or her eth-

Students benefit from mentoring

Becky Candelario, Business student

The Multicultural Business Scholars Program is one of the greatest groups I have ever been a part of. Without this group, so many wonderful benefits would not be available to a number of deserving students. The program has not only assisted students financially by providing scholarships, but it has also helped each student to become the best person he or she can be. One-on-one attention as well as group workshops have given me the opportunity to enhance my academic skills and prepare for my future.

I came to the Multicultural Business Scholars Program in the fall of 2001. I had just graduated from Sumner Academy, a college preparatory high school, and I knew of the program because my two older brothers were both alumni of the group. After learning about their experiences with

it, I knew that I wanted to be a part of it, too.

As a member of the MBSP group, I have had personal meetings with the director, Professor Mai-Dalton, to ensure that I am on track with all my major requirements, that I am keeping up in my classes, and that any concerns or problems I may have are heard and addressed. I have also been assigned a mentor who shares my professional interests and can advise me on any professional or school-related inquiries that I may have.

In addition to having a mentor and interaction with the group's director, MBSP also has cultural events and workshops once a month which all members must attend. Workshop topics range from resume writing and obtaining internships to etiquette in business situations. These work-

shops are hosted by companies and individuals who are donors to the program. There have been numerous times when I have learned vital information from the presentations. Cultural events are a way for our members to learn about others and to enrich our lives. Past events have included the Broadway musical "Rent," a KU theatre department play, "The Royal Family," and KU women's basketball games.

It is truly unbelievable how much this program has given to so many students in a short period of time. I know that I, as well as those before and after me, will always be grateful for the support we have received from the program and those who believe in it.



Mentoring students of color

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nic/racial heritage on a predominantly white campus. The mentoring relationship, if done sensitively and with sincere concern about each student, will help significantly to make the student comfortable with the new environment and will become the foundation for successful college studies.

Group meetings: Monthly meetings have several purposes and generally follow the same format: feedback about group results and academic and career issues, team building among group

members, presentations by successful role models in the major, attendance at events of the arts.

Mentoring of students in the Multicultural Scholars Programs is an all-encompassing system that enables them to become successful and results in their enthusiasm for the program. As students complete their program, they transform themselves from dependence on the MSP components to independent young people who either enter careers or continue in graduate schools. Once they progress,

they in turn become alumni mentors to current students and advocates of the program. At this time, about 20 alumni have contributed their own funds to the program, and alumni scholarships are beginning to be awarded to incoming scholars. With continued support, the MSPs will continue to support students from varied backgrounds in their various units at KU.

Note: Special thanks go to Judy Eddy who worked from a current manuscript to create the structure for this article.

Universal design facilitates effective instructional planning

Susan Zvacek, IDS

This issue's theme of inclusion fits neatly with a school of thought often referred to as "universal design." When applied to the process of instructional planning, universal design suggests that we develop materials and activities to benefit *all* populations, not only *special* populations. Fortunately, Web-based teaching tools and resources are making that easier every day.

It's increasingly obvious that students need to adopt ways of accessing course materials, demonstrating content mastery and communicating with others by using a variety of technologies, and that teachers need to adopt ways of integrating those technologies into their courses effectively. Working on the assumption that environments (physical or virtual) should meet the needs of the learners, and not the other way around, teachers can begin thinking inclusively without having to redesign their courses from the ground up.

For example, in-class discussions can be spontaneous and dynamic learning experiences. They can also be frustrating for those students who may feel uncomfortable speaking out in class. Those students might appreciate the opportunity to express their ideas in an online discussion board, where they can think about what they want to say, dictate their responses or manipulate the keyboard at their own pace.

Online "chat" sessions more closely resemble in-class discus-

sions, but they can be structured to avoid a chaotic and potentially overwhelming flurry of messages that are difficult to follow. One instructor organizes chat sessions around a series of questions, and "calls on" students (two or three at a time) to respond, then opens up the floor for other students to react or ask follow-up questions. This "speak when spoken to" method reduces the advantage for faster typists or those who are more (immediately) articulate. Early on in the semester, the instructor may choose to distribute the topics in advance, to help students prepare and learn what is expected in the chat setting.

Another way to help all students deal with information overload is to model strategies for organizing content. Obviously, students should be able to use these skills in many subject areas, but learners frequently arrive in postsecondary classrooms unable to identify key concepts, take productive notes or organize ideas effectively. Posting lesson outlines in a course Blackboard site before class is one way to assist students with these skills, as is gradually revealing content materials (readings, notes, etc.) rather than posting—and making available—everything at once. As the semester progresses, the outlines could be less robust to allow students greater flexibility, and more materials made visible simultaneously. Additionally, content that is sequential in nature can be presented online in a specified order, using a slideshow mode, to avoid

possible confusion when students (who may be accustomed to randomly jumping around on the Web, or who have difficulty creating cognitive structure from an all-at-once display) view material.

Digital media—text, graphics or video—offer many advantages for inclusive teaching. It can be:

- Easily transformed—Print can quickly convert to audio, for example;
- Easily networked—That is, linked to other resources; and
- Easily annotated—For example, highlighting important terms in a text passage.

Many KU faculty have also adopted the use of online quizzes to give their students out-of-classroom practice with test-taking. For students with test anxiety, these quizzes offer a less-threatening environment in which to validate for themselves how well they're mastering course material, and to become better acquainted with the types of questions they're likely to encounter on a midterm or final. In addition, instructors can have students take the "real" exam online, using Blackboard in conjunction with a software package that provides a secure browser configuration (no printing, no Web surfing, no instant messaging, no e-mail access, etc.).

For more ideas on ways to use technology resources to improve the education of *all* of your students, contact IDS at ids@ku.edu or 4-2600.

Accommodating special needs students doesn't need to be overwhelming

Accommodating students with special needs may seem, at first, to be a difficult task. Faculty who went to K-12 schools prior to “mainstreaming” may be particularly uncertain about how to interact with students who have physical or learning disabilities.

Allowing these students to participate fully in our classes is their right and our responsibility, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

A few years ago, I observed a faculty member who had a hearing-impaired student in her class. The student's participation in the

class was seamless. An interpreter signed lecture information and discussion points to the student. A film shown in class was close captioned. The teacher wrote key points from the lecture and the film on the board, which helped all students to follow the material covered that day. The faculty member also established a positive classroom environment so that everyone, including the hearing-impaired student, was comfortable participating in class discussion.

This faculty member successfully integrated this learner into her

class. I don't know whether she realized how much she accomplished, though. I'm sure there are many other faculty members who are doing good work like this but are uncertain whether they're effectively accommodating students with special needs.

CTE is actively seeking faculty who will share their experiences with this type of inclusive teaching. If you are interested in doing so, contact me at 785-864-4100 or jeddy@ku.edu, or contact Dan Bernstein at 785-864-4193 or djb@ku.edu.

Faculty go deep with Faculty Seminar, Best Practices Institute

Some programs at the Center for Teaching Excellence are short-term and focus on one or two facets of teaching. Other programs, particularly the Faculty Seminar and Best Practices Institute, offer faculty members opportunities to explore deeply their own teaching and ways they might better facilitate students' learning.

The Faculty Seminar brings together faculty who want to reflect on their students' learning and consider how various teaching strategies might affect it. They read, review and discuss accounts of university teaching with a group of colleagues. The seminar culminates with members developing their own representation of the intellectual work they do in

teaching. In the last two semesters, 18 faculty members have participated in this program. It will be offered again in spring 2004 (see page 2).

The Best Practices Institute is an annual two-day seminar held in May. It includes both shared readings and individual planning and exploration of teaching.

Participants examine course designs, instructional approaches and innovations that enhance learning. They develop a planning document for adding new features

to their teaching and tracking their implementation.

One faculty member who attended the institute last spring commented that it gave him or her an “opportunity to be reflective about teaching in a deeper way than I typically am.” Another noted that he or she appreciated “the opportunity or ‘occasion’ to read about, ponder and discuss good teaching practices with others who value teaching as intellectual work.”

Last May, 29 faculty participated in the program. Watch for a call for applications in January 2004 for the program next spring.



Teaching academically diverse students

As Barbara Gross Davis describes in her book, *Tools for Teaching*, all classes include students with a range of abilities, interests and goals. Facilitating learning for all our students, whether they are very bright or less capable, is a challenge. Davis suggests these 17 strategies to help instructors meet this challenge.

General strategies:

- Determine entry-level knowledge students need to succeed in your course; make your expectations clear.
- Indicate to students whether they have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the class. On the first day of class, give a pretest over material you expect students to know already. Direct students who lack skills to other courses or give them supplementary work early in the semester.
- Develop a reading list that reflects the academic diversity of the class. Divide the list into three categories: background reading for students who need to review or to acquire skills or knowledge, basic reading essential to the course, and in-depth reading for students who want to study particular topics more.
- Identify early students who may have difficulty. Schedule the first test in the first few weeks of class, so you and your students will know how they're doing. Watch attendance, too—lost students may stay away.
- Plan a variety of assignments appropriate to various kinds of learning styles. Some students prefer individual work and others interpersonal, for example. Give students opportunities to do what they do best.
- Teach to the level you expect students to reach. Students tend to learn more when a course is set just above the level at which they are functioning.

Student learning observations:

- Get to class early. Talk to students to find out how well they're understanding the material.
- Collect students' lecture notes at random. This will help you know how well the class is following you.
- Ask students to list key concepts or summarize main ideas to help you check student understanding.

For students who are having difficulty:

- Hold review sessions during office hours.
- Show students how to do the tasks you assign.
- Hand out copies of good (B or B+) papers, lab reports or book reviews for models.
- Refer students to campus resources.
- Encourage students to learn from each other.
- Write "See me" on the papers or tests of students who are doing poorly.

To encourage your best students:

- Prepare supplementary materials.
- Use office hours for advanced exploration of a topic.

Reference: Davis, B. G. (2001). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Teaching Matters is published by the Center for Teaching Excellence and distributed to KU faculty at no charge. Its purpose is to disseminate information to faculty about teaching, learning, and faculty enrichment opportunities.

The staff welcomes your comments and suggestions. We will upon occasion invite the submission of articles of special interest to the academic community.

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