Teaching Matters

IN THIS ISSUE: ENGAGED LEARNING

KU CENTER FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE
The University of Kansas

Engagement leads to deeper understanding of courses and curriculum

It is easy to see that focused and continued attention on a task will yield better results almost regardless of the activity, whether it is playing music, translating language, playing a sport, reading a book or solving a puzzle. Even when holistic, creative activities involve letting go of a concrete point of attention in favor of a more general perspective, an artist still needs to stay with a work long enough to bring a project to fruition.

Typically we use the term "engaged" to describe someone who is genuinely interested in his or her work and stays involved in developing and refining it. For both students and faculty members, academic life is more enjoyable and productive when we are all engaged by our studies, by our learning and by our teaching.

The impact engagement has on learning is well documented, and it can take on various forms within a course and within a students' university experience.

Accounting professor Raquel Alexander's course portfolio illustrates the impact engagement can have. Alexander implemented service learning in her graduate course on tax research to help students contribute to the university community and better understand how to apply their knowledge of the tax system.

One project required student teams to present tax and financial planning workshops to performing arts students at KU. A student who completed the project described its effect this way: "The service learning project for performance artists has helped me in several ways as a student, a public speaker, and a tax professional. First of all, it was a wonderful learning experience to be engaged in a group project of this magnitude … Unlike previous group projects, this particular project had a true purpose and realizable goal. I noticed that my personal goal … became less and less focused on a grade and more and more focused on the people who we would be presenting to and trying to help. … It has helped me to look at each assignment as a means to become a better professional, rather than simply a letter grade."

In this issue of *Teaching Matters*, we invite you to consider ways you might deepen students' engagement in your courses and in your department's curriculum.

Note: Alexander's course portfolio is available on the CTE web site. See www.cte.ku.edu/teachingInnovations/gallery; look under "Community-Engaged Learning.")

A new vision of engagement that benefits teachers and students

Dan Bernstein, CTE

The National Survey of Student Engagement found that KU students are more engaged in intellectual and campus life than is typical of students at institutions like ours (Danny Anderson discusses this finding in the Perspectives column in this issue—see page 4). Some of that focus can be found in the four programs that Danny highlights—service learning, undergraduate research, global studies and learning communities—and they are first rate examples of organized contexts in which students seem as much motivated by intrinsic interest as by requirements. Often students also find a similar directedness through independent readings, special seminars and honors courses.

The larger challenge, however, is how we capture that same energy and initiative in the regular portions of our curriculum and in the co-curricular parts of students' lives. It's easy to see that studying in Barcelona and traveling in the Iberian peninsula might be more engaging than spending hours in even the most scintillating lecture or library, but that high-end version of engagement is not sustainable over four years of study. In an optimal educational environment, students will also be engaged by their general education courses, by their large enrollment lower division classes, and by foundation classes required by their areas of concentrated study.

We are all familiar with standard recommendations to make class time interactive rather than passive, and that helps students begin to construct their understanding rather than simply receiving it. There are a variety of new forms of engaged learning appearing in the world of college teaching that are also worth considering in the appropriate circumstances. As noted by

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Amy Rossomondo in this issue (see page 7), students take their work more seriously when they are creating it for their peers, whether in the same class or in another identified community. She assigns projects in which students construct videos of dialect samples for use by other students in the same program, students write essays intended for fellow students rather than the professor, and students analyze cultural artifacts in collaboration with students at another university. These approaches are sometimes called social pedagogies because the work has an intended audi-

ence of peers, and some faculty members are treading lightly into online social networks as the location for some of this work.

Collaboration among students through reading each others' work, solving problems together, and sharing work can also engage students' attention and interest. One collaborative method of teaching physics has yielded improved performance on standard measures of physics knowledge and skill, and it is especially good at generating understanding among students with a history of not learning science in a solo listening mode. Some instructors get rapt attention and involvement from a segment of students by constructing learning activities in an online digital environment such as Second Life; students who find gaming environments appealing will pursue a wide range of academic content when it is embedded in a familiar and engaging context.

Similarly, some instructors use live simulations of historical moments to engage students who find debate or role-playing an enjoyable context for research and discussion; KU will soon have a few courses using the Reacting to the Past format and materials. The Honors Program recently hosted a professor who has success engaging students by inviting them into a contemplative mode of experience and
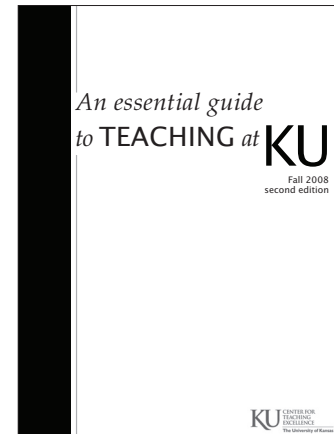
Second edition of *Essential Guide to Teaching at KU* published

This fall, CTE distributed to new faculty members the second edition of a workbook designed to serve as a guide to teaching at KU. Primary authors of the text were Paul Atchley, psychology, and Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology. CTE staff members Sarah Bunnell, Cathy Collins and Judy Eddy also served as authors; Meghan Kuckelman served as the primary editor.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter addresses essential teaching practices, such as aligning course goals, assignments and practices, developing assignments and evaluating learning, engaging and motivating students, and using technology. The second chapter suggests ways faculty members might represent their teaching, particularly for reviews. Chapter three covers more advanced topics: helping students think like a scholar in your field, mentoring students and advising independent work, working with GTAs, and teaching in a variety of settings—large classes, studio or one-to-one classes, science laboratories and graduate classes. The last chapter summarizes KU policies and procedures related to teaching.

To obtain a copy of the workbook, contact Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu or 864.4100.

An essential guide
to TEACHING *at* KU
Fall 2008
second edition

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A new vision of engagement that benefits teachers and students

discourse; these courses engage students who like to decrease distractions and be intensely mindful about a subject.

There is a very big difference between all of these examples, taken as a whole, and much of the teaching that we routinely deliver. We are clear, organized, and expert at presenting a coherent and integrated account of the knowledge and wisdom of our field, appropriately matched to the average level of students and the topical goals of the course. We presume (or more often, we desperately hope) that students arrive with sufficient motivation to read, write and study the field we hold so dear. Even if they are not so motivated, we hold to the view that they should be motivated, so we are justified in building a course on that perhaps optimistic presumption. In any of the engaged teaching methods that are emerging in our field, the instructional design includes strategies to generate and capture students' interest, attention and time. There is no necessary change in the ultimate goals or content of the courses, but the activities of learning are framed in a context designed to draw from students a form of motivation other than (or in addition to) pleasing the teacher or obtaining credit and superior grades.

No one is claiming that designing such a course is easier than producing lectures and homework within the conventional framework, but it is not necessarily more difficult or more time consuming. It does involve some change to adopt the framework that engagement per se is a part of instructional design and it should not (maybe cannot) be assumed that our learners are engaged in their studies. There is a wonderful late-night debate to be had about whether most of our colleagues in college were in fact more highly engaged and motivated than our students today, but in the end we actually teach today's KU students. It may be in all of our best interests to intentionally construct learning environments that will engage them.

Student engagement at KU: Directions for 2015 and beyond

Danny Anderson, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Where we've been

The April 2004 cover story of *The Oread* announced "National report lauds KU for educational practices." I read the story and felt pride in knowing about this recognition. In June 2008, my interest in that story took on a new significance when I became Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. Two of my responsibilities relate directly to practices discussed in the study: monitoring KU's progress on indicators of "engaged learning" for our performance reports to the Board of Regents, and implementing the Teaching and Learning recommendations of Initiative 2015.

With these new responsibilities, I turned my attention to research about high-impact educational practices and student engagement. I reviewed the report of April 2004 to identify what KU has been doing right. The 2004 Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) report commended KU for placing strong emphasis on the quality of its undergraduate teaching and learning (http://www2.ku.edu/~oirp/DEEP).

One year after the DEEP report, George Kuh and colleagues examined these practices of engagement in more detail in *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter* (Jossey-Bass, 2005). KU figures prominently in this book as an example of a four-year institution that engages students well. In a follow-up paper on the book (*What Campus Leaders Can Do*, NSSE Institute, p. 1) Kuh says,

> Graduating more students and increasing the quality of their learning are national priorities. Every college and university can improve in these areas by focusing on the educational conditions that matter to student success. Decades of research studies show that a key factor is **student engagement** [my emphasis]—the time and effort students devote to their studies and related activities and how institutions organize learning opportunities and provide services to induce students to take part in the benefit from such activities.

In the last few years KU has enhanced or initiated programs that encourage student engagement. Four of these programs are of particular interest to the Kansas Board of Regents: Learning Communities, Undergraduate Research Experience, Global Awareness Program and the Center for Service Learning. Each of these programs has expanded student engagement, and three of them result in a notation on a student's transcript. Faculty working in these areas have reached growing numbers of students, and we are increasingly more confident about how to engage students in undergraduate research, international experiences, and community-based learning. At the same time, we would like to reach more students.

The Center for Teaching Excellence has been a driving force for faculty seeking to explore approaches to student engagement. In 2005 I participated in a CTE service learning institute. In spring 2006 I experienced first hand how involvement in community service and reflection about that involvement energized student motivation; students in my course creatively integrated knowledge from their various majors with my course goals to carry out meaningful projects in Lawrence and Kansas City. Students identified personal commitments and missions that gave new urgency to their desire to become linguistically and culturally fluent. In my spring 2009 course for Spanish majors, I will take this earlier experience another step. Students in the course will select either the undergraduate research experience program or the service learning certificate as models for their course projects.

Where do we go from here?

There are a lot of great innovations that have prospered at KU. We must build upon these strategies that are working well; there should be many options available for our varied teaching styles,

course contents, and instructional goals. Beyond broadening the scope of engagement, the real challenge is to raise the analytical focus within KU to a higher level. Beyond knowing that our students are engaged, we need to have a better understanding of which strategies of student engagement truly increase learning.

Governance recently took the lead on that conversation and established a task force on learning outcomes. *Student Success in College* gives a wealth of qualitative information about engaged learning; we need quantitative data about our own teaching to help us know which practices improve student learning and what choices we can make to ensure the success of our institutional mission as a research university that values teaching. Beyond motivation self-reported as engagement, how can we know that students are able to integrate isolated skills and competencies? That such integration supports sophisticated approaches to critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem solving that can address real-world social problems and ethical dilemmas like those students will face after graduation? That they can communicate this knowledge effectively?

Last spring we were given an initial survey of the future terrain called Initiative 2015. I share with Heidi Chumley, Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education of the KU Medical Center, the responsibility for implementing the Teaching and Learning recommendations. After the August 2008 Teaching Summit,

a faculty and staff focus group met to brainstorm about the implications of recommendation 3 for "enhancing the educational experience":

The faculty of the University of Kansas will utilize teaching methods and learning strategies that improve the learning environment for all students. These are methods and

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strategies validated by research, and include:

1. incorporating required small-group learning communities into all KU programs,
2. integrating appropriate active learning strategies into the instruction of all disciplines,
3. promoting peer mentoring and instruction involving advanced students,
4. offering a diverse group of one-credit seminar courses that ease student transitions and promote academic engagement,
5. supporting professional development of faculty as

they reflect on and improve teaching practices. These strategies will strengthen the partnership among students, faculty and staff as they engage in the process of learning.

We viewed this recommendation only as a survey that we must now turn into a map that will help us navigate into the future. It is up to us as a community to identify the paths and roads that may help us reach our destination. Some of these may need to be highways that will serve larger numbers of students.

Seven years from now, in 2015, Kansas and KU will look different than they do today. Many of the students who come to KU will be Latinos, perhaps the first in their families to attend the university. A higher percentage of our students may transfer from community colleges or be immigrants. As we look to the future, national markers point very heavily to student engagement as the key to success for a diversity of students with a diversity of educational backgrounds. If diversity matters to us, then high impact educational practices that we know are working well at KU will be even more important for our planning.

Again, George Kuh:
What students do during college counts more in terms of what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are or even where they go to college. (*Student Success in College*, p. 8)

Hybrid courses yield more with less

Susan Zvacek, Instructional Development & Support

Is it possible for students to spend less time in class, but learn more? It sounds like a radical idea, but faculty members across the country are rearranging their courses to include fewer face-to-face meetings and using online tools and resources to engage students in meaningful learning outside the classroom. Over and over, results show that these students are learning just as much as (and usually more than) students in previous semesters of the same course taught in a traditional format. If that's not enough, more than 83% of those reconfigured courses demonstrated both higher completion rates and greater student satisfaction.

What's the magic behind these amazing results? *Student engagement.* In every example, courses were redesigned by incorporating active learning strategies, using out-of-class time and a variety of technologies to introduce content (information dissemination), and creating effective "in person" lessons for the reduced face-to-face time. The philosophy here is that some learning is best done individually (outside of class), some is most effective in a group setting (outside or inside of class), and some will be most effective when an instructor is present to coach, question and guide. No one would claim that these course reconfigurations were quick or easy, but the benefits have been obvious.

Maybe you're now wondering if there's a way to try out a few of those proven strategies without completely deconstructing your courses, and the answer is yes. By taking advantage of technologies available right now, you can gradually remodel one or more courses into a hybrid format (i.e., partly online and partly face-to-face). Let's look at a couple of examples.

In one redesigned course, students were expected to read textbook assignments and review online supplemental content prior to the class meeting. They were guided through this material with specific learning objectives, key concepts, and study questions that were provided online. Before coming to class, each student completed an online quiz that gave her or him constructive feedback. This quiz also provided helpful information to the professor about where students were struggling. During the face-to-face meeting, explanations and demonstrations were focused primarily on those trouble-spots, and students worked in small groups to practice solving problems and applying their new-found understanding.

Another example was a foreign language course in which the majority of class time had typically been spent on grammar and vocabulary. Recognizing that these tasks could be shifted to out-of-class time using printed text materials, practice quizzes,

and online games and puzzles, the instructor was able to use class time for speaking and comprehension sessions. These in-class activities gave students a chance to apply what they had learned in their grammar and vocabulary lessons and to move on to higher-level thinking. The instructor's time was used more effectively to respond to student difficulties, diagnose errors and offer help to small groups or individuals.

These learner-centered course designs are created based on what students will do to learn, rather than starting with what the instructor will do to teach. This reversal—putting learning first—means that students will be actively engaged (that is, doing something) with course content. It also helps determine when students need to be physically present in class and when they should be working alone or collaborating with peers outside of class.

If you're ready to make the move to a hybrid course format, contact IDS at ids@ku.edu or call us at 4-2600 and we'll get you started. (For more information on the course redesigns described here, look at the Center for Academic Transformation at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute: http://www.center.rpi.edu/)

Social pedagogies increase student engagement

Amy Rossomondo, Spanish & Portuguese

At a CTE workshop in the Spring of 2007 led by Randy Bass (Georgetown University), I was particularly struck by the professor's presentation of social pedagogies, defined as "a framework for teaching strategies that puts students in the role of representing ideas for others in social situations or intellectual communities." As co-director of the Spanish Basic Language program (along with Rosalea Postma-Carttar), I was intrigued by the idea of designing student projects that would engage audiences beyond their instructor. While group-work and presenting necessary information to classmates is already a fundamental component of our program's methodology, engaging an audience beyond the classroom would add authenticity and face validity to student work, elements which can motivate students to invest themselves more fully in their projects and achieve more successful and meaningful learning outcomes.

I structured final projects for a 300-level language course that, in the spirit of social pedagogies, would serve a purpose beyond earning a grade in the course. One video project explored regional linguistic variation in the Spanish-speaking world by interviewing a native speaker from each particular region; these videos were to be used as content in our 200-level classes. In another project, students researched the extent to which proficiency in Spanish facilitates career goals in the U.S. and wrote persuasive essays directed at 200-level students and prospective majors. Finally, some students chose to use a social networking site in Spanish for two months and reflect on the experience in a blog.

The students became very engaged in their projects, and the more successful final products are currently being used as content course-wide at the intermediate level, reaching over 300 students per semester. The highlight of this experiment with social pedagogies, however, was that all students were able to reflect and recognize their own learning as a result of having engaged in it.

Student engagement at KU: Directions for 2015 and beyond

The roads and highways for teaching and learning that we will build collectively are the map to 2015. Discussions about innovation and engaged learning as well as the gathering of clear evidence about what students learn are needed. One of my goals in academic affairs is to encourage the dialogue that has already begun, to help us discern the effectiveness of our programs and our graduates' mastery of KU's educational goals. We will undoubtedly continue to engage students in and out of the classroom in increasingly complex ways, and seek to ensure that this engagement continues throughout their lives. The dialogues about the best way to measure our own success will require a close partnership that includes all units in the university—academic units and Student Success, as well as student and faculty governance. Together we will be able to build a "KU Experience" that deeply engages students in all areas of their lives.

Seven steps toward deeper engagement: Integrating writing and critical thinking activities into a course

In his book *Engaging Ideas,* John C. Bean suggests steps teachers can take to integrate writing and critical thinking activities into a course, which will lead to deeper student engagement.

1. Become familiar with some of the general principles linking writing to learning and critical thinking.

   Bean quotes John Dewey, who proposed that critical thinking is rooted in problems. Not all problems are academic problems, however, so students must "develop the mental habits that allow them to experience problems phenomenologically, to dwell with them—to understand, in short, what makes a problem problematic" (p. 3).

2. Plan your course with critical thinking objectives in mind.

   Bean believes that "a good critical thinking course presents students with problems, questions, and issues that make a course assignment centered, rather than text or lecture centered, and holds students responsible for formulating and justifying the solutions orally or in writing" (p. 3).

3. Design critical thinking tasks for students to address.

   Developing good problems for students to think about is a crucial step. The kinds of questions you develop will depend on questions asked in your discipline and your own priorities in teaching.

4. Develop a repertoire of ways to give critical thinking tasks to students.

   These might include problems presented as formal writing assignments, as thought-provokers for exploratory writing, as tasks for small group problem solving, as starters for inquiry-based class discussions, as think-on-your-feet questions in class, as focusing questions for in-class debates or panel discussions, or as practice exam questions.

5. Develop strategies to include expository writing and talking in your courses.

   Bean suggests that good writing grows out of good talking, either with classmates or dialogically with oneself through exploratory writing. "To deepen students' thinking, teachers need to build into their courses time, space, tools, and motivation for exploratory thinking" (p. 7–8).

6. Develop effective strategies for coaching students in critical thinking.

   Critique students' performances and model the kinds of critical thinking you want students to develop. Use different ways to coach critical thinking, such as guiding discussions, holding conferences, breaking long assignments into stages, and stressing revision and multiple drafts.

7. When assigning formal writing, treat writing as a process.

   You'll get better final products if you design your course from the outset to combat last-minute writing, promote exploratory writing and talking, and encourage substantial revision.