

Teaching Matters

News & Information from CTE

Fall 2019

Vol 23, No 1

Hard work is paying off for KU teaching community



Participants in the GTA Book Club discuss *Small Teaching*: Tayla Slaw, communication studies (standing); Alysha Griffin, theatre; and Ghiyong Patrick Moon, media studies

For the last several years, many people in KU's teaching community—tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty members, teaching specialists, teaching professors, administrators, staff, graduate teaching assistants, and undergraduate teaching assistants—have been part of an effort to improve retention and graduation rates, two markers of student success. And that work is showing signs of paying off. Both rates have improved, quite significantly. Retention of last year's first-year students is up eight percentage points from ten years ago. The latest four-year graduation rate is up over 15 percentage points from ten years ago.

Most importantly, the improvements do not appear to have come about because the bar was lowered; instead, the changes that faculty have made in their teaching have improved learning. We are doing a better job teaching the students that we have.

This issue of *Teaching Matters* highlights just a few of the ways that individuals have made a difference in student learning, as well as some of the programs that have contributed to greater student success.

The work is not done, but it's a really good start.

COMING UP

Applications for spring funding due December 4

Faculty are encouraged to apply for CTE's Spring 2020 programs:

- Faculty Seminar: On inclusive & equitable teaching practices.
- January Jumpstart: A course design institute for new faculty.
- Curriculum Innovation Program: For departments to design and implement innovations.
- Benchmarks for Teaching Effectiveness: For departments to improve teaching evaluation.

Details and applications are at cte.ku.edu/calls-applications

IN THIS ISSUE

CTE VIEW—Andrea Greenhoot discusses contributions that faculty members and programs have made toward improving student success, pp. 2-3. Doug Ward profiles a transformed course, p. 4.

SPOTLIGHT—Karna Younger describes the impact of renewable assignments, p. 5.

FACULTY FOCUS—Phillip Drake considers the importance of personal connections, pp. 6-7.

CALL FOR PROPOSALS—You're invited to lead a Faculty Learning Community, p. 8.

Faculty make a difference in student success

Andrea Follmer Greenhoot, CTE

I'll admit it: Sometimes I get so excited about my students' performance on an assignment that I cheer out loud in my office. I felt much the same way earlier this semester when the Chancellor announced some good news about our students. Several key indicators of undergraduate student success have climbed to record-breaking levels. Retention of last year's first-year students reached 86.2%, up from 77.8% ten years ago, and first-year student academic performance has improved steadily across that same time period. The latest four-year graduation rate is just shy of 50%; ten years ago, less than one-third of students graduated in four years.

These changes follow the university's strategic efforts to enhance students' educational experience in ways that touch nearly every phase of their careers, from recruitment to graduation, both within and outside the classroom. Faculty members have played a critical role in this transformation, and our goal in this issue of *Teaching Matters* (aptly named!) is to highlight some of those contributions. Here are some of the ways they have made a difference:

21st century course transformations

One of the most important channels through which faculty enhance student success is by providing high-quality learning experiences in their courses, and KU faculty have been quite active in exploring effective ways to do this. For example, in the last five years over 250 faculty members, representing 57 departments, have incorporated innovative, evidence-based, and inclusive pedagogies in their courses through CTE programs and grants. Particularly compelling data on the impact of these teaching practices come from the 21st Century Course Transformation Initiative, which has promoted the re-design of large undergraduate courses with more

student-centered, evidence-based methods (e.g., active and collaborative learning). This multi-faceted initiative included:

- Postdoctoral teaching fellows embedded in several departments to support faculty course transformations in their early stages;
- The C21 Course Redesign Consortium to foster intellectual community and idea exchange;
- New infrastructure such as the Center for Online and Distance Learning and active learning classroom spaces; and
- The multi-institutional NSF-funded TRESTLE project to enhance the initiative and expand the community across a network of seven universities.



Esmeralda Valdiviesco (standing) works with students in Psychology 333

The results demonstrate the power of these practices in supporting student success at KU: we have observed a 34% drop in unsuccessful course completions (i.e., grades of D, F, or W) in a sample of over 80 redesigned KU courses, relative to a group of similar courses not in the program.

Enriching first year experiences

Faculty have also been a critical part of KU's First-Year Seminar program, which is also linked to improved student success. First-Year Seminars are small enrollment courses designed and taught by faculty around stimulating and innovative topics. These courses give new students early engagement with the intellectual life of the university, scaffold deep learning and thinking skills, and create connections to a faculty member. University data consistently show that KU students who take First-Year Seminars are more likely to persist in their studies at KU beyond the first year. These benefits are particularly strong among first-generation students and students from underrepresented groups.

Creating experiential learning opportunities

Yet another way in which KU faculty have contributed to better student success is by creating experiential learning opportunities, such as research or community-engaged learning, that enable students to apply their learning to authentic forms of inquiry or problem-solving. These high-impact practices have an established track record of increasing student learning, retention, and timely graduation.

Recent efforts at KU have focused on increasing student access to these high-impact learning opportunities so that more students can benefit. For instance, in the last three years, 42 faculty have worked with the Center for Undergraduate Research to develop and scaffold research and creative projects in almost 70 courses, allowing many more students to acquire hands-on research experience than ever before. The impact of faculty mentorship for experiential learning is particularly visible in the results of the Emerging Scholars program, led by the Center for Undergraduate Research. To date the program has matched faculty mentors with almost 200 first-year students with high financial need; the students are hired to do research with their mentors through Federal Work Study. The program is resulting in huge gains in student success: retention rates for Emerging Scholars are nearly 15% higher than those for students with similar backgrounds who are not in the

program, and the benefits are particularly pronounced for students from underrepresented groups.

Moving forward

Here are some ways you, too, can make a difference in student success:

- **Adopt more inclusive and effective pedagogies.** Incorporate active and collaborative learning to prompt deeper processing, and enable you and students to identify and address points that are not well understood, and help students get to know you and one another. Add structure to out-of-class preparation and provide transparent expectations for successful work.
- **Connect with students and flag risk.** Explore strategies to individualize instruction and embed academic resources, to help students to feel valued and supported and identify those who are struggling. Develop a pre-course assessment to learn about your students' backgrounds and experiences. Familiarize yourself with student support resources.
- **Contribute to students' out-of-class academic experiences.** Help students see their academic experiences as connected and relevant to their post-graduate goals, and identify opportunities to apply their learning and develop skills in other contexts.
- **Plan, assess, and improve your curriculum.** Articulate program/curriculum learning goals and measure success within courses and across courses to identify gaps, redundancies, or bottlenecks to student progression. Examine evidence of student learning to inform refinement of courses and sequences to help students better meet objectives.

KU's most recent metrics show that we are moving in the right direction, but there is certainly room for improvement. Faculty will be critical agents in ensuring that improved student success is achieved through high-quality teaching and learning, rather than at the expense of it.

From train wreck to model for student success

Doug Ward, CTE/Journalism & Mass Communications

Jennifer Roberts doesn't hold back when describing her first attempt at active learning in a large lecture course.

"It was a train wreck," said Roberts, a professor of geology who is now chair of the department. "It was bloody. Students were irate."

This was in Geology 101, a required course for geology majors and one that typically draws a large number of engineering students. Starting in 2013, Roberts worked with a post-doctoral teaching fellow, Kelsey Bitting, to transform the class. They cut back on lecturing and devoted more time to group discussion and guided inquiry, with worksheets and in-class problem-solving. They introduced weekly reading quizzes and in-class questions to gauge understanding. They had students do more out-of-class writing. They also adopted two-stage exams and eliminated multiple-choice questions.

Essentially, she said in an interview in 2014, they made "this a class about the work students put into it and not necessarily about who had the old test that they memorized or who was good at taking tests."

Geology 101 is just one of hundreds of classes that have been transformed over the past few years as the university has emphasized the importance of retaining more students and helping them graduate. It illustrates, though, a shift toward a teaching philosophy that emphasizes learning for all students. It also illustrates the importance of shared responsibility and community building in the success of students.

For instance, Roberts' remake of Geology 101 involved a teaching fellow, a second instructor, graduate teaching assistants and several undergraduate teaching assistants. This approach allows for group work, makes it easier for students to ask questions and get help with challenging course material, and makes large classes much more personal.

A second instructor has been crucial for maintaining continuity because that person becomes the lead instructor in the ensuing semester. Noah McLean,

Andreas Möller and Craig Marshall, among others, have been instrumental in maintaining that continuity and in continuing the evolution of Geology 101.

The approach has worked. Despite student complaints, many of the students who had been getting D's started moving up to C's. More significantly, underrepresented minority students made substantial gains, with the number who received D's or F's or withdrew falling 5.6% between 2009 and 2016 even as more underrepresented students took the class.



Jennifer Roberts, center, in GEOL 101

More impressively, women in the class began performing significantly better in that same metric (a decline of 9.5%). Roberts said that women often accounted for 80% of the students who withdrew from the class or received D's or F's. In 2017, she said: "We now have equity between men and women."

So we should definitely celebrate, but we still have to keep pushing. A year after remaking Geology 101, Roberts offered this reflection:

"The advice I have been giving the people who have started, especially in designing courses from scratch with this, is to make sure that they are choosing topics that they are really excited about because this can be a grind," Roberts said. "And if you're not really excited about going to class and sharing that information with the students, I don't think you're going to do it very well."

Open your course with renewable assignments

Karna Younger, Open Pedagogy Librarian

If you have never heard of open pedagogy, it may be more familiar than you realize. If you have publicly shared student work or taught using experiential, active, or service learning theories, then you have already experimented with elements of open pedagogy.

Examples of open pedagogy include presentations to community members, creating or editing Wikipedia pages, or helping local organizations solve real-world problems. Implementing such assignments can motivate students to produce a final product that can benefit their community or supply them with a portfolio sample to show potential employers. Open pedagogy is not simply making student work public; rather, it is an effective and inclusive pedagogy that challenges educators and students through authentic learning experiences.

Open pedagogy is not simply making student work public; rather, it is an effective and inclusive pedagogy that challenges educators and students through authentic learning experiences.

Open pedagogy practitioners believe student learning should benefit individuals as well as their classmates or larger communities by “killing the disposable assignment,” as David Wiley, a leader in open education, has explained.

Wiley’s “disposable assignment” is the typical end-of-term project that students complete solely for their course and only for their instructor. Once the term is over, both student and professor dispose of the assignment and, possibly, the knowledge acquired.

These short-lived assignments find new life through the use of an open license, the same building block of open educational resources (OER). As Wiley explains, working with students to apply a Creative Commons license to their work allows it to be retained, reused, revised, remixed, and redistributed, or what he calls the 5 R’s of OER. This allows you and your students to create and continually improve a body of knowledge from which they and future students or even community members can learn. For example, if you use an OER, then your stu-

dents can create entries, tutorials, or other elements to keep the OER current. Doing so allows you to turn an end-of-term project into a peer-to-peer learning opportunity spanning semesters.

Open pedagogy does not man-

date that you immediately make all student work publicly available. To ensure the pedagogy is student-centered, it is important to consider students’ educational and privacy needs. For guidelines, consider the 5 R’s of open pedagogy developed by Rajiv Jhangiani, an open pedagogy researcher and practitioner:

- **Respect** student agency, students’ right to privacy, or desire not to participate in public scholarship;
- Be mindful of the **risk** students and educators take in publishing their work or trying a new technology;
- Consider how your class can **reach** informal learners beyond your classroom;
- **Reciprocate** knowledge gained from the open pedagogy community by sharing your work and experiences to help others develop their teaching craft;
- **Resist** forces that may “pit increasingly precarious faculty against increasingly precarious students,” such as racism, colonialism, and the commodification of education and privacy.

In addition to the resources noted above, interested instructors should visit Jhangiani and DeRosa’s Open Pedagogy Notebook (openpedagogy.org), an online community of practice, or contact me at karna@ku.edu.

The importance of personal connections

Phillip Drake, English/Environmental Studies

Retaining students and improving graduation rates can seem like it's too big a task for one person to do much about. Phillip Drake, associate professor of English and environmental studies, shared with CTE Graduate Student Fellow Derek Graf his views of how each faculty member can make a difference.

How have you changed your teaching to motivate students?

I believe that my ability to provide effective instruction depends on consistent reflection, from quick, five-minute lesson notes to longer post-semester write-ups that explore lessons, themes, sessions (etc.) that were particularly successful; those that didn't work as well as anticipated; and unexpected events/issues that arose during the semester.

Since joining KU, my teaching has evolved considerably. In a general sense, I've learned the importance of flexibility in both assignments and classroom activities, which help prepare me for the contingencies that inevitably arise in a given course. These contingencies keep materials (literature, ideas, debates, etc.) alive, illustrating their history, and enable students to identify the deeper relevance of coursework in their lives. My teaching makes explicit that by engaging with course materials and participating in various learning activities, students are participating in the ongoing evolution of ideas. In this way, I hope to illustrate the stakes of coursework, not only to advance them educationally and professionally but also personally—as citizens in an interconnected world in which their political and ethical decisions matter.

What are some ways that individual KU faculty can help improve student retention rates?

At the risk of repeating my earlier comments, I think it is crucial to illustrate to students that they have a stake in the issues we discuss in the classroom. From assigned texts to research projects, I find student buy-in is strongest when they're able to make that per-

sonal connection to coursework. Because these stakes tend to be quite evident in English and environmental studies courses, I might have to do less work to make these connections. But there occasionally are students who, for one reason or another, might feel alienated by my course material. When these issues arise, I mention friends, families, companion animals—kinship networks that might spark some engagement—and note how issues related to social justice, safe and healthy environments, jobs, and representation all factor into these broader lessons.

How do you promote equity in your courses?

The pursuit of equity motivates me personally and professionally, particularly in my research and teaching. While all my classes look deeply into questions concerning violence based on race, gender, class, species, religion, and ethnicity, the matter of equity also factors into second-order issues like teaching and learning about issues related to equity. I am always careful to position myself in the classroom as an imperfect interlocutor with a very specific embodied experience of the world that gives me insight to certain viewpoints, but that also blinds me to others. In this way, I generally acknowledge certain biases (e.g., social justice, health environments, safety, and equity), but also recognize that my biases are shaped by bodies, ideologies, cultures, histories, etc. Inevitably, my knowledge and students' knowledge is always partial and limited. While this may be frustrating to think about for some students, I try to convey to them that these limits indicate that there are always opportunities to learn more. By making oneself open to these experiences, by acknowledging our intellectual limits and being willing to be open to the world beyond what we know, there arise more frequent and diverse opportunities to experience wonder via new insights and alternative perspectives.

—continued page 7

Three faculty named new CTE Faculty Fellows

CTE welcomed three new Faculty Fellows this fall:

Carl Luchies, mechanical engineering, has been active with the C21 program and has received several course transformation grants. Carl's work has been featured at CTE's Poster Sessions, and he contributed to an issue of *Reflections from the Classroom*. As a Fellow, Carl will focus on consulting with faculty who are working on course transformation projects, and he will assist Andrea Greenhoot with special projects.

Ward Lyles, urban planning, served as his department's Ambassador to CTE and was in the first cohort of Diversity Scholars. His work in that program resulted in a syllabus tool faculty can use to evaluate DEI in their courses (cte.ku.edu/creating-inclusive-syllabus). Ward's work as a Fellow will center on DEI and follow-up with the Diversity Scholars cohorts, as well as new outreach programs to departments.

Kim Warren, history, and women, gender, and sexuality studies, has a long record of contributions to CTE, from our early efforts with supporting service learning to the Collaborative Humanities Redesign Project. Kim has three e-portfolios in CTE's Gallery (under "Warren" in cte.ku.edu/cte-portfolio-poster-gallery). As a Fellow, Kim will help lead Faculty Seminars and will develop outreach programs to humanities departments.



Carl Luchies



Ward Lyles



Kim Warren

The importance of personal connections *(continued)*

How do you make connections with students to keep them motivated and moving toward graduation?

Beyond encouraging students to explore topics and themes that motivate them personally, I'm careful to acknowledge that everyone has somewhat different needs and interests in their pathways through KU. I try to make myself available as a resource to all my students. Often this involves advising about various career options, from international consulting work to academic careers. I also work with the Office of Fel-

lowships, which provides information and advising on an array of fellowships for students at all levels. I am most excited by fellowships that support students from underrepresented groups, which focus on developing support systems for talented students rather than simply rewarding those with high GPAs. Finally, I frequently put students in touch with colleagues in other departments (e.g., WGSS, American studies, history) when useful.

Connect with colleagues by facilitating a Faculty Learning Community next spring

CTE will begin hosting Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) in Spring 2020. These will be groups *for faculty* (including teaching specialists, teaching professors, and multi-term lecturers), *led by faculty*, on any facet of teaching and learning in higher education. FLCs can meet five or six times a semester, or they can run across one or more academic years. Details below:

What kinds of topics could I propose?

Really, whatever interests *you*. Ideas we've kicked around are:

- Teaching KU Core classes
- Groupwork/ team-based learning
- Women in the academy
- Teaching large classes
- Phasing into retirement
- Do's/ don'ts related to students' mental health



What resources will CTE provide?

- Materials for your group (books, other supplies)
- Meeting space (and we'll throw in lunch if you meet at noon)
- FLC leaders will receive a \$250 fund each semester; they can use the fund for travel or materials

How do I apply?

Write a short (one-page) proposal that includes:

- Brief description of your FLC topic
- Why you're interested in it
- What you hope colleagues will learn from participating in the FLC
- What resources you need
- When (specific times/ dates) your FLC would meet, and how long (one semester? more?) you plan to meet

Where should I send my proposal? And what's the deadline?

Send it to Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu. Priority will be given to proposals received by December 8.

Questions?

Contact Andrea Follmer Greenhoot at agreenhoot@ku.edu or Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu.

Teaching Matters is published by CTE and edited by Judy Eddy. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

KU Center for Teaching Excellence
1455 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 135
Lawrence, KS 66045-7573
785-864-4199
cte@ku.edu
