

Teaching Matters

News & Information from CTE

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There are many stories to tell about student learning



Howard Graham, Carrie LaVoy and Karen Jorgensen (l-r) collaborate on a story as part of the Student Learning Symposium in February.

For thousands of years (well before *Aesop's Fables*) and for various ages (from *The Little Engine That Could* to *Les Misérables*), people have used stories to instruct, persuade and inspire learners.

Higher education has a story to tell. By sharing what happens in our classes, labs and studios, we demonstrate the value of our work and its importance. In this issue of *Teaching Matters*, we share stories about some of the exemplary work our colleagues are doing. Doug Ward sketches out ways that nine KU instructors are developing innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Meagan Patterson describes some of the work that CTE Innovation Coordinator Kaila Colyott is doing with graduate students. Dan Spencer narrates how the student learning experience has changed during his tenure at KU.

Stories are a way for us to help those outside the academy connect with what happens inside. We hope the reports we're detailing here will prompt you to share your story, too.

COMING UP

CELEBRATION OF TEACHING AND POSTER SESSION

CTE is hosting the annual Celebration of Teaching and Poster Session on Friday, May 10, from 3 to 5 p.m. It will be held in Beren Auditorium in Slawson Hall.

This year, 55 faculty members will share posters that illustrate how they have transformed their courses and improved student learning with evidence-based and inclusive teaching practices. All faculty and instructional staff are welcome. Questions? Contact Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu.

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Student learning is a story worth telling

Doug Ward, CTE

Higher education has many stories to tell.

Finding the right story has been difficult, though, as public colleges and universities have struggled with decreased funding, increasing competition for students, criticism about rising tuition, skepticism from employers and politicians about the relevance of courses and degrees, and even claims that the internet has made college irrelevant.

One top of that, students increasingly see higher education as transactional. Colleges and universities have long lived on a promise that time, effort and learning will propel students to a better life and the nation to a more capable citizenry. Today, though, students and their parents talk about return on investment. They want to know what they are getting for their money, what sorts of jobs await students and at what salary.

All of this has put higher education on the defensive. The Association of American Colleges and Universities has focused its last two annual meetings on telling the story of higher education. I led a workshop and later a webinar on that topic, and participants were eager to learn from each other about strategies for making a case for higher education. At one of this year's sessions, a workshop leader asked participants whether their universities were telling the story of education well.

No one raised a hand.

All too often, universities use their color brochures and websites to explain how prestigious they are and to sell students on an ivory tower fantasy. Both of those things have a place. By focusing on education as a product, though, they overlook what college is really about: challenges, disappointments, maturity, opportunity, growth, and, above all, learning.

Teaching and learning rarely make their way into the stories that universities tell. If they did, here are some of the things students (and their parents) would learn about:

- Kim Warren (below), associate professor of history, who has rethought the language she uses in her classes. In helping students think like historians, she treats everyone as English-language learners so that no one leaves class confused by terminology or expectations.



- Prajna Dhar (below, standing right), associate professor of engineering, who has made sure that students with disabilities can participate in the active learning at the heart of her class.



- Genelle Belmas, associate professor of journalism, who has created a “whack-a-judge” game to help students learn about media law and a gamification class that helps them learn about things like audience, interactivity and creativity.
- Mark Mort (below, center), associate professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, who has transformed once-staid 100-level biology classes into vibrant hubs of activity where students help one another learn.



- Matt Smith, a GTA in geography, who has created an interactive sandbox that allows students to create terrain and use virtual rain to explore how water flows, collects and erodes.
- Lisa Sharpe Elles (below left), assistant teaching professor in chemistry, who has increased the use of open-ended questions in large chemistry classes by using artificial intelligence for grading.



- John Kennedy (above, standing right), associate professor of political science, who draws upon his expertise in international relations to help students work through negotiation scenarios that diplomats and secretaries of state struggle with.
- Phil Drake, associate professor of English, who uses peer evaluation to help students improve their writing and practice giving feedback.
- Sarah Gross, assistant professor of visual art, who uses self-assessment as a way for students to improve their pottery skills and to learn from peers.

I could go on and on. The stories of innovative techniques and inspirational approaches to teaching and learning at KU seem limitless. All too often, though, they go untold. That’s a shame because they are perhaps the most important stories that students and prospective students need to hear as they make decisions about college and college classes.

The stories we tell remind us of who we are and where we are going. One of our roles at CTE is to tell the stories of the inspiring teachers who form the heart of learning at KU. Another is to bring those teachers together in ways that allow them to inspire and learn from one another.

Great teaching is crucial to the future of higher education. It takes time, creativity and passion. It is important intellectual work that deserves to be celebrated and rewarded.

That’s a story worth telling.

Uncover your philosophy of teaching by using the power of storytelling

Meagan Patterson, CTE

Like many faculty members, as I was completing graduate school and preparing to enter the faculty job market, I sat down to write a statement of teaching philosophy. Although I typically enjoyed writing, I found the task of drafting a teaching philosophy to be quite challenging. I had worked as a GTA throughout my time in graduate school but had taught my own course only once, and that hadn't gone very well. (Like many first-time teachers, I had confused quality with quantity and overwhelmed my students with material.) I knew how to write a lecture and grade papers, but I had no real idea what my philosophy of teaching was.

Fortunately, an additional 12 years of teaching experience, accompanied by six years of work with CTE, have helped to develop my philosophy of teaching quite a bit. When I talk with graduate students who are working to write their own teaching statements, I tell them that developing a personal philosophy of teaching takes time. In addition, the term "teaching philosophy" can feel intimidating, conjuring visions of men in powdered wigs debating the nature of knowledge. Reconceptualizing the teaching philosophy as "telling the story of your teaching" can help these statements to feel more approachable and personal.

One way to reframe a teaching philosophy through the lens of storytelling is to do just that—tell

Talking about teaching with other members of our campus and scholarly communities provides an opportunity to reflect on our teaching goals and priorities.

the story of your teaching to someone else. In a recent presentation at the POD Network Conference, Kate Flom Derrick and Lauren Woods of Northwestern University discussed how to use generative knowledge interviews to create reflective teaching statements. In the generative knowledge interview process, individuals work in small groups, using a structured process to uncover implicit knowledge and attitudes and achieve greater awareness of these tacit understandings. One participant serves as the storyteller, one as the interviewer, and one as the note-taker. Following the interview and storytelling process, group members reflect on and synthesize each story to identify key ideas and themes.

CTE Innovation Coordinator Kaila Colyott has developed an adapted version of the generative knowledge interview to work with GTAs who are developing their first teaching philosophy statements. This process includes having participants in the storyteller role answer questions such as: What teaching methods do you use? How do these methods relate to your goals for student learning? How do you create an inclusive learning environment? Participants talk with a partner about their answers to these questions, and the storyteller and interviewer work together to identify and clarify themes regarding the storyteller's approach to teaching.

Although teaching is often thought of as primarily an individual activity, talking about teaching with other members of our campus and scholarly communities provides an opportunity to reflect on our teaching goals and priorities. Whereas thinking of oneself as a philosopher can feel like a stretch, we all function as storytellers throughout our daily lives, and we can use these stories to better understand and improve our teaching.

In the spotlight: Dietrich Earnhart and M'Balia Thomas

Dietrich Earnhart, professor of economics, is one of CTE's longest-serving department liaisons (a group we call our Ambassadors). In that role, he has helped guide the Center in the development of our programs, communicated information about CTE to his department faculty, and advocated the University's teaching mission within his department.

As an Ambassador, Dietrich led a peer triad to mentor new faculty, and he received a Department Action Team award to support a project on revising the economics doctoral program.



Dietrich Earnhart

His work with assessment has been particularly significant. Joshua Potter, CTE's Documenting Learning Specialist, notes: "Dietrich has made significant contributions to the study of undergraduate learning in economics, where he recently led the department to its first campus-wide assessment award. By collaborating closely with the CTE, he designed a project that combined data on student success, utilization of lab time, study behaviors and broader biographical characteristics to pinpoint whether and how students were succeeding in introductory courses. The project is one of the foremost examples of empirical learning analytics at KU and directly informs decisions about course offerings and formats in economics."

M'Balia Thomas, assistant professor of curriculum and teaching, has been an active participant in CTE programs. She attended the Best Practices Institute in 2015 and was selected for the Faculty Seminar in Fall 2017. She presented posters on her work in those programs at the CTE Celebration of Teaching in 2016 and 2018. She has also completed two e-portfolios on her work in teaching; they are available at cte.ku.edu/cte-portfolio-poster-gallery.



M'Balia Thomas

M'Balia has presented her teaching work on campus via the Teaching Summit, nationally at conferences such as the Women in Educational Leadership Conference, and internationally at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

From teacher-centered to high engagement: How the student learning experience has changed

Dan Spencer, Business

I arrived at KU's School of Business as a newly minted assistant professor in 1979. At that time, with regard to teaching, there was an overwhelming emphasis on lecture. The student learning experience was one of students passively receiving information from the instructor via overhead projectors, then scribbling notes by hand, possibly engaging in a little discussion, followed by regurgitating what they had learned on a multiple-choice exam ... which was then quickly forgotten. Such teacher-centered pedagogy focused largely on content delivery, with little or no opportunity to engage in learning that is vicarious and experiential, that is, learning that would result in developing knowledge that is deep, tacit and likely to be retained.

In the 1980s, there was a movement toward student-centered pedagogies that aimed at actively engaging students via group-based learning. Student involvement was typically operationalized by randomly pulling together groups of students and having them do experiential exercises (perhaps role playing or a simulation) or engage in problem-based learning (usually revolving around a case of some type). The result was a more positive learning experience for students as they moved from the lower rungs of Bloom's Taxonomy—remembering, understanding—to the higher level of applying the explicit knowledge they were exposed to in their reading and lectures. The inclusion of richer group application experiences, in turn, allowed engagement of the highest levels of the taxonomy: analyzing, evaluating and creating. An additional benefit of group work was the opportunity for students to learn vicariously from their student col-

leagues and begin to practice a range of behaviors related to communication, conflict management, working in teams, and creative/critical thinking, to name a few. Unfortunately, group-based learning did not allow students to systematically practice and develop these skills over time.

Team-based learning emerged in the early 1990s to address these and other shortcomings. Student teams with intentionally diverse compositions were assembled, and they remained together throughout an entire semester. Students regularly rotated through all team roles and were provided feedback from their teammates on their role performances. Teams were delegated authority to manage their processes and



Dan Spencer monitors group work in a class. Photo Doug Ward.

systematically reflected on and continuously improved those processes throughout the semester. Toward the end of the semester, these fully developed teams were assigned larger scope projects that they would pursue outside of class.

In the late 1990s the first learning management systems (such as Blackboard) appeared. Instructors were now in a position to provide a significant range of

learning materials—including information on which they would otherwise lecture—that students could process outside of class and free up significant amounts of time in the classroom for active learning. Some of the first flipped courses were emerging at this time. Courses began gravitating towards 100% active learning and zero lecturing. Instructors shifted to a facilitator role with a primary emphasis on promoting dialogue and critical thinking in the classroom as teams briefed each other on the outcomes of their learning activities.

In the 2000s service learning started to hit its stride; students engaged in team projects that allowed them to pursue real and meaningful service-related experiences outside the classroom. Students, interacting with an NGO in the community, were now exposed to complex/uncertain learning environments that promoted much deeper learning than attainable in the classroom. The highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were even more thoroughly addressed as students problem solved, strategized and strengthened their ethical-practical wisdom.

High engagement student learning opportunities

such as these are increasingly taking root at KU thanks to the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Center for Online and Distance Learning, and the Center for Service Learning. With respect to course design, CTE's workshops, Best Practices Institute, and many other course transformation programs have played a central role in improving student learning across KU for the past two decades. In recent years, the emergence of the C21 Consortium (a community of practice) has been integral in boosting the rate of significant course redesign implementation throughout the university.

Clearly, over my past 40 years at KU, our focus on student learning has been trending in the right direction, and it was exciting to be part of that. It has been a pleasure working with my colleagues in all the departments named above, and I will dearly miss all of them as I head into retirement.

Dan Spencer is one of the first members of CTE's advisory board, the Teaching Excellence Advisory Members (TEAM), serving since 1999. We are indebted to Dan for the guidance he's given the KU teaching community.

Jody Brook named new CTE Faculty Fellow

Jody Brook, associate professor of social welfare, began as a CTE Faculty Fellow this spring. Jody was in the first cohort of Diversity Scholars in 2016-17 and is completing an e-portfolio based on her work in that program (posted soon in CTE's Gallery, cte.ku.edu/cte-portfolio-poster-gallery).

"We're excited about ideas that Jody will bring to CTE's work and collaborations related to inclusive teaching and promoting equity in student success," said Andrea Greenhoot, CTE director. "Being a Faculty Fellow will give Jody an opportunity to extend some of her work as a Diversity Scholar, both on the Lawrence and Edwards campuses, which will impact teachers and learners more broadly."

Diversity, equity and inclusion are key elements of Jody's teaching interests. She created online modules related to DEI and teaching for faculty on the Edwards campus, and she describes DEI as her passion. She will assist with CTE's Best Practices Institute this spring and with new GTA orientation and other programs next year.



Available Fall 2019: A modular course on Being an Effective College Teacher

Being an Effective College Teacher was originally designed as a semester-long course about teaching for graduate students. It has been taught as an LA&S course through the Center for Teaching Excellence and as a course in the Journalism program.

Because the material is so important to CTE's mission, we wanted to make the course as widely available as possible. To reach this goal, we split the course into 11 modules, all available through Blackboard. You may use all the modules or choose a few to create your own course on teaching, adopting any mixture that will help you reach your goals.

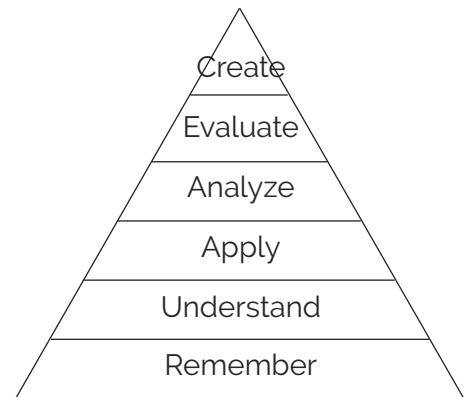
The modules focus on many practical skills to help students prepare, teach and evaluate courses. The modules will help you and your students meet the challenges of preparing good assignments, grading student work, working with difficult students, using class time effectively, and preparing for a teaching career. Some material will allow you to delve into theories, while others will guide you through the practicalities of teaching and learning.

This course is rooted in the Center for Teaching Excellence's philosophy of teaching as an intellectual and scholarly activity, and it draws heavily on approaches that have proved effective for learners of all types. This course is set up to guide instructors—GTAs in particular, though faculty and instructional staff would also find it useful—through discovering more about teaching, learning, and the interaction between them.

How do I get access?

The materials have been designed and organized so that facilitators can use them in a course or a working group. If you are interested in using some or all of the modules next fall, contact Kaila Colyott at kcolyott@ku.edu for assistance.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY



Modules include:

1. What is good teaching?
2. How do we learn?
3. How do we get students to read deeply for understanding?
4. How do we motivate students?
5. How do we design effective courses and assignments?
6. How do we evaluate student learning?
7. How do we create an inclusive learning environment?
8. How do we use class time effectively?
9. How do we use out-of-class time effectively?
10. How do we document our teaching?

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
