Chalk Talk II
Teaching Academy Fellows
2011-2012

Promoting Excellence in Teaching and Learning at The University of Georgia
Edited by Fran Teague and Peter D. O'Neill
# Table of Contents

## Foreword
Loch Johnson, Regents Professor of Public and International Affairs & Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor, School of Public and International Affairs & Inaugural Winner of the Southeastern Conference Professor of the Year Award

## Introduction
Josef Broder, University Professor & Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

### I. Managing a Class

- **Jenny Atkinson**
  Managing and Motivating Larger Classes: Survival Skills When You Are Outnumbered 300 to 1

- **Maria M. Viveiros**
  Shared Expertise in “Team-Taught” Courses

- **AnnaMarie Conner**
  Engaging Students in Productive Discussions

- **David Okech**
  Online Teaching for Beginners: It is not the Technology, It is the Instructor

### II. Engaging Students

- **Belinda A. Stillion Southard**
  Appealing to the Millennial Generation: Offering Freedom within Constraints

- **Lily Wang**
  Making Statistics Fun with Games and Simulations

- **Neelam C. Poudyal**
  Classroom Engagement Through Student-led Discussion of Real World Stories

- **Susan Bennett Wilde**
  Really Active Learning

### III. Making It Personal

- **Natasha M. Ganem**
  Teaching through Circles

- **Peter D. O’Neill**
  Teaching Diversity at UGA

- **Timothy Gupton**
  All in a Day’s Work: Dealing with Student Crises

- **Nanette Spina**
  Finding Your Own Style as a New Teacher

- **Sonia M. Hernandez**
  The Joys (Really) of Co-Teaching
Forward

Loch Johnson
Regents Professor of Public and International Affairs, Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor, & Inaugural Winner of the Southeastern Conference Professor of the Year Award
School of Public and International Affairs

As the editor of the first edition of Chalk Talk (2010), I was thrilled to see that sufficient interest exists in this method of passing along teaching tips to produce a new edition. And what a lovely, interesting sequel it is! I have enjoyed, and benefitted from, reading each of the essays in this volume and I commend the editors and authors.

These two editions of Chalk Talk offer a deep reservoir of ideas for our teaching colleagues, whether they are just getting started or have been around for a while. I can’t wait to try out many of the suggestions I have found in these pages. I think that anyone with the sacred duty – and immeasurable joy – of pursuing knowledge with a classroom of students will feel the same way, if they take the time to read the heartfelt, enduring reflections in these pages.

Here is a teaching tip that I’ll take the opportunity to pass along in this foreword. At the beginning of each semester, I suggest to my students the following maxims (passed along in this foreword. Here is a teaching tip that I’ll take the opportunity to pass on for their students. Ethos, Experience and Expectations; Sharing one’s teaching techniques and reflecting on their own teaching experience gives our Fellows an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching experience. Sharing one’s teaching techniques and enthusiasm is central to the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The Teaching Academy Fellows Program was developed as a recommendation from the 2013 Faculty Affairs Symposium, Understanding our Students: Ethos, Experience and Expectations. In exploring the challenges of teaching millennium students, the symposium participants explored faculty support and development opportunities that are available to early career faculty at the University of Georgia. The period between when faculty members are hired and when they are promoted and tenured is critical to their growth and development as teachers. Yet opportunities to develop teaching support networks are limited for many early career faculty. I believe the larger question for the University is how well we support and retain our early career teachers. I have been struck by the number of Richard B. Russell Teaching Award recipients that leave the University, early in their professional careers.

Jere W. Morehead, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, sponsored the initial Chalk Talk venture; now, as he assumes the Presidency at our great University, I have no doubt he will be proud of this latest edition and all those who contributed. I offer my congratulations and admiration for this fine effort.

- Loch K. Johnson

Introduction

Josef Broder
University Professor & Josiah Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor,
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences;
Executive Committee Chair, UGA Teaching Academy

I am pleased to write this introduction to Chalk Talk II, teaching tips from the Teaching Academy Fellows, inaugural Class of 2012. The idea for this book was motivated by the success of Loch Johnson’s Chalk Talk: Teaching Tips from the UGA Teaching Academy and gives our Fellows an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching experience. Sharing one’s teaching techniques and enthusiasm is central to the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The Teaching Academy Fellows Program was developed as a recommendation from the 2013 Faculty Affairs Symposium, Understanding our Students: Ethos, Experience and Expectations. In exploring the challenges of teaching millennium students, the symposium participants explored faculty support and development opportunities that are available to early career faculty at the University of Georgia. The period between when faculty members are hired and when they are promoted and tenured is critical to their growth and development as teachers. Yet opportunities to develop teaching support networks are limited for many early career faculty. I believe the larger question for the University is how well we support and retain our early career teachers. I have been struck by the number of Richard B. Russell Teaching Award recipients that leave the University, early in their professional careers.

With this concern in mind, the UGA Teaching Academy offered to develop an early career mentoring program whereby seasoned Teaching Academy members would serve as mentors to faculty in their first and second years at UGA. The vision to establish an extended orientation and enrichment experience for new faculty was motivated by the success of the First Year Odyssey for students. This proposal received the endorsement and financial support of Provost Jere Morehead and was launched in the Fall of 2011 as the Teaching Academy Fellows Program. Chalk Talk II became the class project for the inaugural class and a way to share their trials and tribulations with early career teachers across campus.

The UGA Teaching Academy is dedicated to promoting excellence in teaching and learning and to creating a community of scholars. The Teaching Academy Fellows program and Chalk Talk II are prime examples of the Academy’s contributions to the teaching and learning mission at the University. The Teaching Academy is indebted to Provost Jere Morehead for his generous support of Chalk Talk, Chalk Talk II, and the Teaching Academy Fellows Program. We owe a debt of gratitude to Loch Johnson for his leadership in producing the original Chalk Talk. I would also like to thank Trish Kalivoda, Paige Carmichael and Mark Huber for designing and launching the Fellows Program. Finally, I want to thank the Inaugural Class for their sharing their teaching experience with participants of the 2013 Academic Affairs Symposium. I am sure these essays will serve as a guide and inspiration to future early career teachers at the University of Georgia.
I. Managing A Class

Jenny Atkinson  
Risk Management and Insurance, Terry College of Business

Managing and Motivating Larger Classes: Survival Skills When You Are Outnumbered 300 to 1

The other day, I ran into a young man in a coffee shop. He smiled and greeted me as if we knew one another well. When he did not see the same recognition on my face, he generously offered that he was a student in my class last semester. He then said that my class was one of his favorite classes. He then said that my class was one of his favorite classes and that he was considering changing his major because of it. Moments like that fill me with a mix of emotion - great joy and pride that I could have a positive impact on a student's educational experience, but also, regret that I do not know this enthusiastic young person. It is one of the great challenges of teaching large classes.

Each semester, I teach two to three sections of an introductory class. With an average of 110 students per class, each semester I have approximately 1,310 exams to administer, 4,910 assignments to grade and 330 individual projects to individually educate and inspire. The task is simultaneously daunting and rewarding. Over the last few years, I have acquired some survival skills to engage and educate students while maintaining classroom standards and my own sanity.

I offer you just a few of the tips and tricks that I have found particularly useful. Feel free to incorporate any of these ideas into your own classroom.

Engaging Students

Even the most attentive students may find their thoughts drifting in the anonymity of a large classroom. Therefore, I use a variety of techniques to keep the students engaged. Two of my favorite techniques are described below.

My class lends itself well to discussing events – both current and historical. Throughout the semester, I show short videos applicable to the various lessons. I then ask students to break into small groups and answer a series of questions. This gives the students a chance to consider the practical application of the material in the safety of a small group. We then discuss the video and questions as a class. Having discussed the issues in a small group, the students are more confident to speak about the material that they understand and more confident to ask questions about complex material that may have stumped the entire group.

Simple demonstrations can add some fun to the class lecture while providing opportunities for extra credit (and students love extra credit!). For example, when discussing probability, I have several student volunteers flip a coin a few times in front of the class. The coin toss must be a lost art as most students drop the coins as often as they catch it. The coin toss must be a lost art as most students drop the coins as often as they catch it. However, it is possible to offer a rewarding educational experience by introducing a variety of methods to engage students, maintaining authoritativeness and consistency in your classroom management and offering options for students to direct their own learning experience.

Managing Consistently

I aim to educate, engage and inspire students. I encourage questions and open discussion within lectures. But first, the framework of the class must be clearly stated and rather strictly enforced. If you bend or break the rules for one student, you can be assured that a dozen more will expect the same courtesy. As with many lessons, I learned this one the hard way.

I do not allow students to leave the room for any reason until they have completed the exam. I simply do not have the manpower to monitor out of class activities, and with multiple sections of the same class, improper communication is far too easy. Still, one exam day, a student had a particularly pained expression on his face and I allowed him to use the restroom. One by one, six other students insisted that they too must use the facilities. Once the parade of students leaving the room began, it was hard to tell other students that I would allow no more. Therefore, it is important to be consistent with all rules.

As I already use volunteers for demonstrations and panels, I can also use this technique to encourage students to be on time. When late students come bursting in through the door behind me, I ask them to come help me out. They are reluctantly willing souls and the rest of the class finds this very entertaining. In fact, I often encourage me to do it again. Once the late student is “volunteered”, I try to make it a pleasant experience. I normally ask him/her to answer questions that are a matter of opinion so that they cannot get the answer wrong. While most of the “volunteers” head to their seats with smiles on their faces and a little extra credit on their grade sheets, no one wants to be an unexpected volunteer. Therefore, this is surprisingly effective. Tardiness drops to near zero for a week or two and is reasonable for the remainder of the semester.

Offering Options

Projects and homework assignments are wonderful tools for assessing student knowledge and effort. However, it can be difficult to grade so many assignments in a large class. Fortunately, this generation of students responds well to options in the classroom. Therefore, we can simultaneously appeal to the student’s preference for options, reduce our grading requirements and reward students who demonstrate effort and participation.

I offer students the opportunity to complete several homework assignments. For those students who choose to complete the homework, the average exam score will be reduced by 5% of the final class grade and the average exam score will be reduced by 5%. Since the homework is open book, students typically have a higher grade on assignments than on the exams. Therefore, this option is an opportunity for students to improve the class grade and to be rewarded for their efforts. The fact that, at least, half of the students will choose NOT to do homework reduces the number of assignments to grade.

In a large classroom, it can be difficult to get to know many of your students. However, it is possible to offer a rewarding educational experience by introducing a variety of methods to engage students, maintaining authoritativeness and consistency in your classroom management and offering options for students to direct their own learning experience.
Shared Expertise in “Team-Taught” Courses

I thoroughly enjoyed the unique opportunity of meeting and interacting with faculty from different disciplines and Colleges, in the Teaching Academy Fellows Program. I valued the sage advice that was generously offered by senior faculty, as well as the camaraderie of newer faculty, who like myself, had more recently joined the University. The levels of experience and individual fields of study were very diverse amongst the group members, yet our shared interest in teaching led to wonderful discussions. These discussions were always instructive, at times hilarious, and (at least for me) often reassuring as we talked about respective challenges or apprehensions in trying to effectively engage students. I truly enjoy teaching, but working in my noisy laboratory with its cluttered bench tops is more familiar territory. And, as a relatively new faculty member, still developing my teaching, but working in my noisy laboratory with its cluttered bench tops is more familiar territory. And, as a relatively new faculty member, still developing my own skills, I don’t feel particularly qualified to offer advice on effective teaching to others. Nevertheless, I appreciate the chance to share my thoughts on team teaching, which I consider a terrific experience.

Maria Viveiros’ current research on meiotic division and mammalian germ cell development is funded by the National Institutes of Health.

I coordinate a course on mammalian physiology for professional students in veterinary medicine. It’s a required course in the first year of the program – so it’s a large class of 100 students and is taught in a conventional lecture format. The students are all quite intelligent, very committed, and exceedingly eager to get into the clinic to treat patients. Consequently, as you might imagine, having to take a ‘basic science’ class does not generate overt enthusiasm in this group. A key challenge is to get them interested and motivated enough to appreciate and learn ‘basic’ physiology. I think one of the more effective approaches used to engage these students is team teaching.

Team-taught courses can provide a dynamic and stimulating learning experience for students. This collaborative teaching approach is also a crucial platform for multidisciplinary courses, which are increasingly needed in science. One distinct advantage is the high level of expertise that different faculty can provide. As an example, the physiology course I coordinate includes lectures from faculty with basic research and clinical expertise in the development and function of different body organ systems. The diverse perspectives presented in the course truly engage the students. Even exposure to the varied teaching styles of each instructor seems to be welcomed. Within a class of 100 there’s definitely an array of individual student preferences for teaching style (and instructors), yet overall there is a good appreciation for the variety. Students need to adjust how they learn from, and communicate with, different instructors. It’s a skill that serves them well.

Prior to joining the University of Georgia, Maria Viveiros completed her PhD in Canada, undertook postdoctoral studies at Cornell University as well as the Jackson Laboratory, and taught at the University of Pennsylvania.

Together with key advantages, there are some intrinsic challenges to team teaching – the primary challenge is ensuring cohesion in course content as well as assignments and exams. Team teaching requires a tremendous amount of planning, effective and constant communication amongst faculty, and conscientious organization. In the model we use, the coordinator is responsible for course design with essential input from all participating faculty. It works well when the course material can be ‘subdivided’ into relatively distinct, but related, units (or modules) for which different instructors are responsible. In the physiology course, the modules are based on different body systems (endocrine, reproductive, gastrointestinal, etc.). To promote cohesion in the course, instructors reference and integrate some material from other modules into their own lectures. Optimally, instructors need to be familiar with all the material taught in the course to some degree. All assignments are discussed and planned before the course begins, and putting together exams is a collaborative effort.

To help the course run smoothly I use some practical strategies. In addition to team teaching my own modules, as the coordinator I attend all the lectures in the course. This commitment is helpful on several fronts: (1) It assures the students that although there are multiple instructors, I am always available to address any of their questions or concerns with regard to the entire course. Students have never been shy about taking me up on this, and my office hours are often busy. (2) It also enables me to remain informed on the progress of all the sections taught, so I can make small adjustments if needed and provide constructive input into exam preparations. Before each exam, review sessions are scheduled with all participating faculty. It really takes commitment from everyone involved to work effectively as a team.

As an instructor, I also benefit a great deal from team teaching, as it provides me with a valuable opportunity to collaborate and learn from colleagues that work in areas outside my field of study. I have gained new perspectives on both teaching methods as well as my research. This team approach may not be ideal for instruction in all academic disciplines, or all undergraduate course levels. But I do think it’s exceptionally effective for graduate and professional students. Team teaching capitalizes on the diverse intellectual talents of the broader university community — and, notably, it encourages faculty to collaborate within and outside their disciplines to provide a dynamic learning experience for students.

Maria Viveiros
Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, College of Veterinary Medicine
Engaging Students in Productive Discussions

One of my goals for each of my classes is to engage my students in discussions that motivate students naturally to engage with me in class, asking questions, answering questions, and making thoughtful contributions. However, not all students are comfortable with the idea of speaking in class. Some may not speak because they feel they have little to contribute, because their grasp of the English language is shaky, or just because they have never really contributed in class. Other students may dominate the discussion, perhaps because they really enjoy the topic or like to hear themselves talk. Because I believe that all of us can learn from each other, it is important to make sure all students in my classes have the opportunity to contribute in various ways, and I have adapted several activities and techniques to foster student engagement in discussions.

“Our Clips in the Middle”

This particular technique works well for smaller classes, and it is particularly effective in a class that has one or two students who tend to dominate the discussion and several quieter students who might have important contributions. One of my colleagues, Denise Spangler, introduced this technique to me when I was struggling with student contributions in one of my classes. The only extra materials needed are paper clips or other small objects, enough so that each student can have the same number (3-5 is a good number) per student to start.

At the beginning of class, each student is given a set of paper clips. Each time a student contributes to the discussion, he or she turns in one of the paper clips. When a student has more clips left, he or she must let other students contribute. When everyone has used all of the clips, we start over, redistributing the clips, and the exercise seemed like a way to curb the tendency of some students to dominate the discussion. When the most talkative students have used all of their clips, however, the quieter students, ones who might dominate the conversation, having something to say in every sentence, have commented to me that they think more before they speak. When we use this technique, because they want to make sure that each clip “counts.”

The response from students about this technique has been overwhelmingly positive. Many students have commented that they learn from each other and appreciate both the opportunity to participate and the opportunity to hear from their peers, especially those who might not otherwise participate. Some students are intimidated at first by the requirement of participation, but they generally have used this exercise as a way to learn to contribute in class, and even the quietest ones have told me they think it is a good idea. At first the most talkative students usually find this technique frustrating, but they often speak about how it forces them to think before they speak, focusing on contributing when they have something substantial to say.

It may seem that this exercise creates a discussion with long pauses or gaps in the conversation, but that has not been my experience. While there may sometimes be a bit of quiet, this quiet wait time is useful for everyone to think about the question being asked or the comment that was just contributed and generally leads to a more thoughtful discussion.

“Readings Jigsaw”

This technique can be used in many different classes, and use it when I have several articles on the same topic that I would like my students to read. My students enjoy this activity as it reduces the amount of individual reading. One of my students this semester commented that “We read five articles by only reading one!” I like the activity because it increases student accountability for the readings and allows them to develop useful reading and leadership skills in addition to providing a way to read more than we otherwise would be able to.

I have done this activity in two different ways in courses for prospective mathematics classrooms. First, I decide how many articles we should read and discuss around a particular topic. I often use this activity when we are discussing appropriate uses of technology in mathematics classrooms. Alternatively, I have five different techniques. I rise up five different articles of five different technologies in mathematics classrooms. Then, I divide the number of students in the class by the number of articles to see how many students will read each article. In the case of a class with 20 students, 4 students will read each article. Each student is assigned to each group. Then students move to groups according to their assigned numbers. (In group 1, you should find one student who has read each of the five articles. The same should be true of group 2, group 3, and so on.) In these jigsaw groups, students take turns describing their assigned articles, summarizing the main points. Each group is then responsible for creating a synthesis of the articles, several sentences giving some theme that emerged from their conversation that they then share with the class at the end of the discussion.

I have been amazed at how, with very little prompting, students make connections between articles, building on other students’ descriptions of the important aspects of their assigned articles. I tend to use this activity only once or twice in a semester; I am not sure if some of the efficacy would be lost if it were less novel. It works well for between four and six readings; too many readings makes synthesis much more difficult, and fewer readings could just be read by everyone.

The description above accounts for everything but the reading to be done during class time; it is also possible to do the same article discussion by use of online discussion groups. In this case, I assign each person to a discussion group open only to those who read a particular article, and I usually specify a minimum number of posts per person to encourage interaction. Depending on the group of students this process can be quite effective, especially if you moderate the discussion and chime in to pose questions from time to time.

Occasionally different students emerge as leaders in these online discussions than have emerged during face-to-face class meetings. I still like to do the jigsaw group discussions during class time in order to facilitate communication and synthesis of the various ideas.

When a class is discussion-oriented, with many readings and an expectation for substantive participation from all students, I have found that it is often necessary to make my expectations for participation clear and to use multiple techniques to help students learn to participate effectively. I often ask students to discuss questions about readings in small groups and then to participate in whole-class discussions, but this format of class can get tedious if implemented week after week during the semester. Simply adjusting one or two aspects of the discussion can be a welcome change for some students, sometimes alerting you to strengths and ideas that otherwise may have remained hidden.

As a final thought, I occasionally use a “silent discussion” with my students. I take a quote from their reading (or related to their reading but from a different author) and print it in large letters on a sheet of paper. I place one of these papers on each table, and ask students to write their thoughts about it without talking. They can (and should) respond to each other’s writing, turn the paper so that they can read and respond to what other students write. While some students object to the slower speed of the discussion, many students say that they appreciate the time to think and respond to what a student has written and the ability to go back to what someone wrote and respond to it even when others have moved on.
It is not the Technology, It is the Instructor

As a new professor, I was as anxious as most new professors are, about just standing in front of students and telling them, “look at me, you all—I know it.” This anxiety, for me, was exacerbated by the fact that while teaching in the graduate program, I often got students who had many years of experience in the field and who were quite experienced in some of the courses that I taught. To make matters worse, I mostly taught what are considered “unpopular courses” in the Social Work discipline, i.e., research, community practice, and policy. A greater majority of social work students prefer courses that deal with practice with individuals and families, i.e., direct practice courses. However, the thing that got me most anxious was not being new to teaching or even teaching the less popular courses. What got me neurotic was the fact that I had to teach an “unpopular course” via an “unpopular method.”

In the spring of 2010, I found myself teaching two sections of a community practice course, one online and the other one face-to-face (f2f). Given the notice, the time to prepare for the online course was relatively short, and a number of the students who had to enroll in this section were not happy to be constrained in this format of learning. These factors just heightened my anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. After 2-3 weeks, however, the online students got into a nice learning mode and teaching in this form gradually turned into some unexpected joy—it actually was another classroom! This opportune development should not conceal the fact that there were many bumps and hiccups along the semester. In fact, some weeks were filled with fire-fighting as well as explaining and re-explaining assignments and course contents. It felt like teaching two and a half courses with just the online section!

David Okech comes to UGA after close to a decade in community-based, national, and international relief and development work in Kenya. In 2011, David won a department teaching award for the graduate program at his school.

I nearly disliked online formats with my first experience; I knew however, that I needed to become better at it, using more advanced technology and being sensitive to the students’ own anxieties and perceptions of the mode. Most, if not all, of this generation of students are very comfortable with online technology and I needed to make the format a comfortable space as well as a place for critical learning and sharing of ideas. What I learned from my first online teaching is that it is not just the technology when it comes to online learning. There is a lot a lot that the instructor can do to make the format desirable and to lessen anxieties for those students who may initially have misgivings about online courses.

Specifically, I learned that while most students take online courses because of convenience and assume that the formats probably mean “less work,” students may discover that online courses take a lot of their time and are laborious. The instructor can help the students know that time spent online is merely perceived as greater than the time one would spend preparing for a similar class within an f2f format. Since I was teaching the same course in two sections, I reminded the students that their f2f counterparts were just spending as much time preparing for the course, and I needed to do this several times earlier in the semester. Second, the role of the instructor and the learning environment in an online format relate directly to student learning and comfort in the format. Students liked prompt responses to any issues and began to express a feeling of being in a “classroom” towards the end of the semester, thereby, reducing anxieties for both myself and the students. As one student in the online section noted, “I enjoyed the course, but it was difficult. After the kinks [with technology and asynchronous communication] are worked out, I think this class would be great. If asked, I would say I enjoyed the course and learned a lot but put a lot of work in and it was difficult.”

After listening to the students and improving, with greater success on subsequent online course, I have come to the conclusion that it is not just online teaching. It is still the INSTRUCTOR directing the course using online technology. Final course evaluations corroborated this insight and showed that students appreciated the instructor’s role in the online format more than anything else. Honestly, I am now less anxious with teaching “unpopular courses” using “unpopular formats,” and indeed, these courses and formats are now becoming not only popular with me, but also attractive to a greater proportion of the students I meet every year.
Early on, Get Early Feedback, and Be Sure to Do It Early

For new professors teaching new classes in new institutions, early student feedback can seem a mixed bag. We want our classes to be the best they can be, of course, and we know student feedback can provide helpful data. But there are reasons for ambivalence too. Because we are teaching new material in a new environment, we can often see problems without collecting formal feedback. It takes time and energy to collect, evaluate, and respond to formal feedback—time and energy that are in demand on many fronts. And feedback can often be critical. Why, it is easy to ask, should we spend limited time and energy to risk discouragement when we already know what needs to be improved? Why not just wait until the end of semester for the required student evaluations?

I’d like to suggest a few underappreciated reasons early feedback is worth collecting despite these concerns, and then provide a couple of techniques that have helped me collect it quickly and effectively. When I first started collecting early feedback I did not appreciate how effectively it harnesses student self-interest to produce the kind of honest, accurate, and detailed responses that are most useful to teachers. UGA students are a generous lot, and I have found much of their end of semester feedback helpful, but the realization that they can make problems go away by identifying them in a precise, thoughtful, and constructive way produces a new level of focus.

Logan Sawyer earned his PhD in history at the University of Virginia where he won the Finger Teaching Fellowship for stimulating and organized classroom teaching.

Early feedback also improves the learning environment, even if all you ever do is ask for it. Asking for feedback shows students you care about their learning. Students who feel cared for are happier and happy students, I’m convinced, learn better. They are a lot more fun, too. And, finally, for early career teachers trying to make their way in a new institution, a self-interested reason to collect early feedback: early feedback heads off bad feedback. It’s hard to fix problems you don’t know about and the place to learn about hidden problems is not the same evaluations your department chair will read.

Recognizing the value of early feedback is only the first step, however. It needs to be collected in an efficient and effective manner as well. Here are three techniques I’ve found productive.

The lightning survey

Especially when teaching a class for the first time, it’s often hard to know how much time needs to be spent on a particular concept. Is description enough? Would one example be enough? Are three too many? The lightning survey can help solve that problem. In a lightning survey, I ask my students to tell me how well they understand a particular concept by raising their hand on the count of three and holding up one, two, or three fingers: one finger if they think the concept is crystal clear; two if they think they understand it and believe it will be crystal clear once they have a chance to go over their notes; three if they are confused and want more discussion. For me the most important question is how many threes do I see? If I see enough—maybe 10 to 25% of the class—then I give another example, or describe the concept in another way. If I see only a few threes, I encourage the threes to come see me after class then move on.

I do not understand...

Part of the trick in getting good early feedback is using protocols that generate honest and helpful responses. When I’m worried about substance on a scale broader than a single concept—at the end of a conceptual unit of the course, for example—I hand out note cards to the students and write on the board, “I do not understand…” I then ask the students to complete that sentence on their notecards. I do this right at the beginning of class to try to encourage the students to think beyond any concepts that confused them that day to broader questions about the course as a whole. The results, of course, are not uniform. But often there are themes that reveal shared blind spots. If those blind spots are big enough, I address them the following day and take note of how I can improve my lectures for the next year.

Logan came to UGA following a two year Fellowship at Georgetown University Law Center.

What’s working?

Lightning feedback and “I do not understand” address confusion about substance, but courses, like everything, are both form and substance. To get feedback on teaching techniques I use a different approach. I hand out note cards and ask students to answer the three questions I put on the board:

1. What should I change about this course because it interferes with your learning?
2. What should I not change because it helps your learning?
3. What else ought I know about this course?

Five minutes is generally enough time. Though one might think that the ground covered by questions #1 and #2 make #3 unnecessary, I’ve found the answers to #3 are the most helpful, perhaps because it forces students to think just a bit harder or perhaps because they are more comfortable with its non-normative format. I do this survey at the end of class, in part because here I do want their impressions of my teaching to spark memories about what has worked in the past and what has not. I have found these ideas useful, and I hope you do, too. But however you find them, please do know I’d love to hear your feedback.
II. Engaging Students

Belinda A. Stillion Southard
Department of Communication Studies

Appealing to the Millennial Generation: Offering Freedom within Constraints

Reflecting on my year as a Teaching Academic Fellow, one working dinner sticks out the most in my memory: the meeting when Gayle Robbins, Director of Counseling and Psychiatric Services, spoke about how to deal with students in distress. To ground her discussion of UGA’s many resources and strategies used to deal with such students, she characterized the generation of students currently sitting in the seats of our classrooms. The “millennials,” as she characterized the generation of students currently sitting in the seats of our classrooms. The “millennials,” as they’re called, can best be characterized by the following behaviors. Typically, students of this generation:

- maintain close relationships with their parents – as friends more so than as children
- feel entitled to rewards without significant effort;
- are eager to take leadership roles and have a heightened sense of civic duty
- are more conscious of a local-global relationship
- are eager to participate in volunteerism and activism in their communities
- desire structure and constraints

The challenge in teaching the millennial generation then, is to address the paradox of entitlement and selflessness. Students want rewards and status symbols while they also want to civically engage the communities around them. In an effort to shape teaching goals and strategies to best fit these behaviors, Robbins recommended assigning highly structured course assignments, while allowing students the freedom to carry out the assignment in varied ways.

As a professor of rhetoric, this advice spoke to me. In the classroom, I aim to help cultivate ideal citizen-orators who can take a critical eye to the discourses that surround them. What better way to curb entitlement and promote democratic deliberation than to allow students the freedom to complete class assignments in a way that spoke to them? Moreover, as I planned my course, I asked myself: what better way to encourage students to model the activist and civic ideals of the orators we studied than for students to lead in the classroom?

To these ends, I structured in-class, everyday assignments with firm parameters that were also open-ended in terms of execution. To be successful, students needed to demonstrate leadership, creativity, and civic engagement. In what follows, I detail a few of these assignments to show how I attempted to strike this balance between structure and student engagement.

What Would You Do?

While studying how different groups led protests in U.S. history, students often ask me, “What would you do?” One particular reading featured a group of so-called “militant” women who decided to protest the president for the right to vote. To highlight the strategies employed by these women, students were asked to get into groups of five or six and, drawing upon the strategies employed by these militant women, write up and present a plan for protesting to the president of a university for the right to waive study body fees.

Belinda A. Stillion Southard is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and an Affiliate Professor to the Institute for Women’s Studies. Her teaching and research centers on how marginalized groups in society assert their political voices.

The structure: Students were given about fifteen minutes to freewrite in response to the following prompt: “On a sheet of paper with your name at the top, answer the following question: Are you a Carmichael or a King? If you were a social movement leader, which of the speakers would you emulate more in your speaking? Quoting either from the readings on or the speeches by Carmichael or King, identify three characteristics of the speaker’s rhetoric that you would model. Next, assume you are giving a speech on a student’s right to vote on parking services policies and write one or two sentences of a speech for each of the three characteristics you identified.”

After about fifteen minutes, I organized students into Carmichael-King pairs (usually the numbers are fairly even, but sometimes I wind up with a few trios, so long as each speaker is represented in each group), and instructed students to share with each other why they chose their speaker, the characteristics they identified with, and the text of the speech they drafted. After about ten minutes, I asked the class to share what they learned from the speeches.

The result: I found this activity highly effective for three reasons: 1. Within the constraints of the assignment, students engaged the readings and applied the strategies most interesting to them; 2. Students learned that, indeed, the militant and moderate strategies employed in the speeches they wrote could overlap; and 3. Students enjoyed hearing each others’ speeches and thus formed a classroom community; not only were they inspired by the speakers whose rhetoric they modeled, but at times they found it humorous to hear how they performed and appropriated the speeches.

Carmichael or King?

When reading about the rhetoric of the civil rights movement, we cover a spectrum of militant and moderate activists – embodying the “bookends” of this spectrum are Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King, Jr. To give students a sense for how neither of these speakers can be placed firmly into moderate or militant categories, and rather, how it’s more useful to think of these labels as a set of characteristics that speakers can appropriate, I devised the following in-class writing activity.

The structure: Students were given about fifteen minutes to freewrite in response to the following prompt: “On a sheet of paper with all group members’ names at the top, identify and quote three strategies employed by the militant women in the reading. Then, they needed to detail how their group would apply these strategies in a protest against the president of a university. In their presentations, they needed to be very specific about how the group would execute these strategies, identifying timing, place, media outlets, and the projected effect of the protest.

The result: Given the freedom to design their own protest strategies within the structure of the reading, students designed protests that included forming and organizing a student protest group, wearing uniforms to show unity, producing a film to circulate among students, protesting silently outside the president’s office, phone calling the president’s office non-stop for a number of designated time periods, and confronting the president at an open-mic night. Thus, while not encouraging students to actually protest, the activity was highly effective for pushing students to engage the reading closely, as well as each other as leaders and citizens, and to form an environment of democratic deliberation.

Carmichael or King?

When reading about the rhetoric of the civil rights movement, we cover a spectrum of militant and moderate activists – embodying the “bookends” of this spectrum are Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King, Jr. To give
I have been involved in teaching service statistics courses for five years. Teaching service courses can be very challenging as students who are required to enroll in these courses do not necessarily have any interest in the subject and may not wish to engage with any learning. From all these years of teaching experience, I feel that traditional methods of teaching statistics to non-specialists (students majoring in other fields) are not very effective. An effective statistics education must stimulate students’ interest.

Introduction to Statistical Methods (STAT 6210) is one such graduate service statistics course. STAT 6210 is usually the first statistics course that graduate students take in their graduate school study. Many of the students in this class have very little graduate school study. Many of the students take in their graduate school study. STAT 6210 is one such graduate service statistics course. Before a new lesson starts, I usually let students play a game or conduct a simulation experiment to elicit their interest, so they will have the desire for more, even craving discussion on the topic. For example, on the first day of class, we play a game called “count candy colors.” I usually use packages of M and M’s candy, Skittles regular, and Skittles sour. I will give a package to each group and have the students count how many of each color there is in a pack. The dataset collected can be used for making a simple pie chart, frequency table, histograms and also later for tests of hypothesis.

To improve participation in games, I often divide students into small “turn to your neighbor” groups to play games or simulations to present an idea and engage with others. These simple games help to set the mood to get the interest of the students and to make them eager to learn more about probability.

Making Statistics Fun with Games and Simulations

I have found that these activities in class not only create excitement and enthusiasm on the subject matter, but also enhance thinking and cooperation among the students.

As another example, part of STAT 6210 is “Probability.” It is well known that probability has its origins in games and gambling. Casino games are a good way to illustrate to students the practical application of probability and statistics. I have used very common casino games for teaching probability in the classroom with coins, dice, and cards. I usually start the probability chapter with a simple coin-flipping game. Pairs of students are asked to flip a coin 50 times; one student flips, and the other record heads or tails. I then let them tally the results so that I can summarize the data on the board with a table. Finally, I will introduce the concept of probability in terms of theoretical vs. experimental. The casino games are forms of entertainment. Students enjoy doing activities and interacting with others. These simple games help to set the mood to get the interest of the students and to make them eager to learn more about probability.

Bayesian statistics is one of the most difficult topics in STAT 6210 for many students. It is difficult to make students fully understand this theorem if I just let them watch me write the theory or solve problems on the blackboard. So I usually ask my students to participate in an experiment before the introduction of the theory. Last year, I had 36 students in my class. At the beginning of the lecture, I gave a die to each of 36 students. Each student was asked to throw the die 50 times noting down the number that showed up and to graph the distribution of the observations. Then I gave each student two dice and had them roll them both at the same time for 50 times and compute the average of each throw. Finally, I gave each student five dice and asked them to repeat the process. Once students get the idea, I then turn to a computer to simulate this experiment with the number of dice (sample size) increasing. This simulation is very helpful to demonstrate characteristics of a sampling distribution such as the relationship between sample size and the standard error of the mean.

Games can also be designed and played to check how well the students master the teaching materials at the end of a lesson or a chapter. For example, after students learn the descriptive statistics, I will let them play a game called “find the missing data”: a small dataset and their descriptive statistics are given, but some observations are missing. Students are required to guess the missing data observation(s) based on the descriptive statistics. These games offer good opportunities to review, exercise, and evaluate students.

Provision of these enrichment activities may entail some amount of time and effort for the class but if it will make the students appreciate and comprehend more the topic, then it is worth it. Before the game being introduced in the classroom, I usually ask myself three questions: 1) Is the game easy to play? 2) How long will the game take? 3) Have the learning objectives been integrated into the game play?

Learning becomes fun and interesting if we introduce games and simulations to present an idea and engage different ways to motivate the students. Students learn more if they are participating and understand the importance of what they are studying. It is important to extend it to teaching general service courses.

I prepare prizes for the games. The prizes for completing or winning a game include snacks, candies, dice, poker cards, markers and pens with interesting labels on it. I also encourage students to build, design and play their own games that everyone has a fair chance of winning.

Lily Wang
Department of Statistics, Franklin College of Arts and Sciences

Making Statistics Fun with Games and Simulations

Lily Wang joined UGA in 2007 after receiving a PhD in statistics from Michigan State University.

In the past few years, my colleagues and I have designed more than 50 games and simulations that were found very useful for teaching statistics service courses. Before a new lesson starts, I usually let students play a game or conduct a simulation experiment to elicit their interest, so they will have the desire for more, even craving discussion on the topic. For example, on the first day of class, we play a game called “count candy colors.” I usually use packages of M and M’s candy, Skittles regular, and Skittles sour. I will give a package to each group and have the students count how many of each color there is in a pack. The dataset collected can be used for making a simple pie chart, frequency table, histograms and also later for tests of hypothesis. I give a clear description of the rules of the game. For example, rule 1 is “do not eat your data.” This “hands-on” class game gets the students excited for more such “fun statistics.” I have found that these activities in class not only create excitement and enthusiasm on the subject matter, but also enhance thinking and cooperation among the students.

As another example, part of STAT 6210 is “Probability.” It is well known that probability has its origins in games and gambling. Casino games are a good way to illustrate to students the practical application of probability and statistics. I have used very common casino games for teaching probability in the classroom with coins, dice, and cards. I usually start the probability chapter with a simple coin-flipping game. Pairs of students are asked to flip a coin 50 times; one student flips, and the other record heads or tails. I then let them tally the results so that I can summarize the data on the board with a table. Finally, I will introduce the concept of probability in terms of theoretical vs. experimental. The casino games are forms of entertainment. Students enjoy doing activities and interacting with others. These simple games help to set the mood to get the interest of the students and to make them eager to learn more about probability.

Making Statistics Fun with Games and Simulations

Lily Wang
An Assistant Professor in the Department of Statistics.
Neelam Poudyal
Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources

Classroom Engagement
Through Student-led Discussion of Real World Stories

I had little teaching experience when I started teaching three years ago. However, I was fortunate to have a teaching mentor assigned by our school, and other colleagues who were very helpful and approachable when I needed their advice. I realized that making incremental adjustment to my teaching by incorporating students’ feedback was one thing I could immediately do to help improve my teaching skills. After the first semester, I went over all of my students’ comments and suggestions (from my teaching evaluations) to figure out what they wanted in classroom instruction, and how they suggested me to improve my teaching. Then, I read the Chalk Talk book looking for useful tips that would address my students’ concerns. I was so glad that there were many examples that I could simply adopt or modify to meet my teaching objectives.

Neelam Poudyal’s research interest includes human dimensions and economics of natural resource management.

One of the things my students wanted to see in ecotourism class was more in-class student engagement, which means a participatory and interactive platform to provide students with opportunity to express their views, to debate ideas and issues relevant to the course materials. I realized that teaching ecotourism is different from teaching an economics or basic science class. When students think of tourism, they think of visitors, travel, destination, attractions. The majority of the course deals with managing tourism resources (parks, natural resources, etc.) to maximize visitors’ satisfaction, to preserve the aesthetic beauty, and uniqueness of natural land- and seascapes, in many ways, a lot more about arts than science, and a lot more about managing resources while meeting visitor’s expectation, than memorizing facts or statistics. I also realized that taking a lecture approach could be monotonously dry, and less exciting to students majoring in recreation and tourism. Then, I came up with the idea of engaging students through a new item called “case in point,” which required students to come up with a story related to lecture on a given day. Here is how it worked.

Neelam is an Assistant Professor of natural resource recreation and tourism at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

In each class, two students each would get a few minutes to share a story. It could be a story published in a recent issue of a popular magazine, or academic journal or an oral report based on an agenda from a public hearing or town hall meeting. Students would be randomly assigned to share these stories throughout the semester. Students would turn in a written paragraph to the instructor, and also present the oral report to the whole class. Students were more engaged in class, and by semester’s end, I got some positive student feedback on this engaging approach.

Neelam teaches classes on ecotourism and sustainable development, social science methods in natural resources, and First Year Odyssey seminar.

This assignment, worth of 4% of total course grade, would be graded based on the relevancy of story to that day’s lecture, and the extent of the reaction/responses from the student audience. Any student absent on the day he or she was responsible for the case in point, would receive a zero grade. A presentation drawing a lot of interest, and questions from peers would be graded higher than a presentation receiving no questions or interest from the audience. These stipulations required students to make genuine effort to find something interesting and novel – something that could be of value to their peers. Written copies were collected so they could be included later in exams or quizzes, and that added extra motivation in students’ part to pay attention to these discussions, and remain active in class discussions. Also, some students waiting for their turn to present a story the following week sometimes witnessed their story being presented by somebody else before them, and were forced (or rather “encouraged”) to find some new stories to bring in the next week. It did not take a very long time for extra ‘case in point’ as they found even more relevant and interesting ideas to share in class, and by semester’s end, I got some positive student feedback on this engaging approach.

The enthusiasm generated among students in discussing those stories, and the sense of competition among them to bring in new and interesting material that both the professor and students would appreciate. Over the time, some students even requested time for extra ‘case in point’ as they found even more relevant and interesting ideas to share in class, and by semester’s end, I got some positive student feedback on this engaging approach.
Many high-energy students are drawn to classes in Forestry and Natural Resources because they are attracted to the “out of doors.” But when I started teaching FANR 1100 Natural Resources Conservation to 140 or more students, I had trouble keeping them engaged. Even when we were covering fairly controversial and relevant environmental topics, they were sagging in their seats for an exam – they slept through it the first time at normal speed – talking faster and covering more material really doesn’t help. Sometimes just moving around and talking about a topic with a small group helps bring back energy to the room. I use film clips and YouTube videos integrated into the lecture to diversify the message and regain their attention. I let them score me in real time; I got many useful suggestions when I requested verbal and written feedback on certain activities. They seemed to appreciate that I valued their opinion on my teaching effectiveness while it still mattered to them. Getting reviewed at the end of the semester is pointless to the students you just taught.

Warnell teaches many effective field classes, where students learn by hiking through the environment and holding diversity in their hands. One very good example is the Georgia Fishes Field Class that I have co-taught during Maymester for 3 years. We hike and camp, swim and float through the fishes’ environment, catching and releasing fish from mountain streams to the coastal ocean. Students learn the fish species quickly when they associate it with the environment by visual, sensory, and contextual cues. I tried to teach my new Fall Semester Aquatic Biology class the same way, but was sometimes hampered by class size (30) and scheduling conflicts. I did manage to bring the students to various aquatic sites by combining their field trips with my research effort and the help of a lot of patient graduate students. Students seem more compelled by being involved in unfolding science, and it gave additional graduate students an opportunity to teach.

Susan Wilde is an Assistant Professor in the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources. Her teaching and research in applied aquatic ecology bridge wildlife, fisheries and water resources.

I have frequently assigned complicated group projects as opposed to more limited and well-defined individual assignments. I am generally so impressed with all my students’ ability to coordinate group projects and presentations, perhaps in part because of the technological advances in social communication. Since much of scientific research is more effective in collaboration, I think they need practice and benefit from working together in disparate groups. They also seem more at ease presenting than I expected, and tend to pay attention to each other respectfully, especially if they are up next. Again the running theme here is keep them moving around and interactive, because they just stay on board better that way.

On the worst days, the room dissolves into chaos and the students look confused, but I can generally recover that by taking time out of the next class period to regroup. I’ll still take that over group napt ime. On the best days, the students leave with their energy intact and maybe just a little more “green fire” in their eyes.

Really Active Learning

Odyssey students to the turtle pond outside the Warnell and Ecology building. I raised a sleepy graduate student napping in the sun to give us a primer on turtle biology. For the large lecture class, I am still limited by sheer numbers, but I always mix up powerpoint presentations with small group presentations, class debates, even a eco scavenger hunt. Sometimes just moving around and talking about a topic with a small group helps brings back energy to the room. I use film clips and YouTube videos integrated into the lecture to diversify the message and regain their attention. I let them score me in real time; I got many useful suggestions when I requested verbal and written feedback on certain activities. They seemed to appreciate that I valued their opinion on my teaching effectiveness while it still mattered to them. Getting reviewed at the end of the semester is pointless to the students you just taught.

Warnell teaches many effective field classes, where students learn by hiking through the environment and holding diversity in their hands. One very good example is the Georgia Fishes Field Class that I have co-taught during Maymester for 3 years. We hike and camp, swim and float through the fishes’ environment, catching and releasing fish from mountain streams to the coastal ocean. Students learn the fish species quickly when they associate it with the environment by visual, sensory, and contextual cues. I tried to teach my new Fall Semester Aquatic Biology class the same way, but was sometimes hampered by class size (30) and scheduling conflicts. I did manage to bring the students to various aquatic sites by combining their field trips with my research effort and the help of a lot of patient graduate students. Students seem more compelled by being involved in unfolding science, and it gave additional graduate students an opportunity to teach.
that communities of the like-minded plague our world. Social and cultural circles are invisible, yet strong, and powerful, and they lead us to draw stereotypes of the “other” and to judge the other in perilous ways. Such circles follow us, shape our experiences, and filter our perceptions. Her solution is storytelling. She proposes that fiction gives us a way to punch holes through our thick walls of the “other,” to leave one’s cozy home and experience something that is different, then to thrive.

She is on to a critical point: How can I as a teacher widen imaginations? How can I support students to recognize and understand different ideologies or transcend impossibly strong social forces in order to welcome and incorporate new knowledge into their identity? My solution, and my classroom tip for this edition of Chalk Talk, is to teach with circles in mind. Below I describe three ways that I do this, with an emphasis on incorporating research into the classroom experience. I hope these philosophies and strategies are helpful in your classroom as well.

First, I strive to recognize and respect the circles that follow students into the classroom. I anticipate them, and I listen for their sound. Yes, circles make sounds, and you can hear them when students share their diverse experiences with you verbally before, during, and after class. Some students will write you about their experiences via mail, and, sometimes, you might not actually hear the story but only see something intangible in their expression – suggesting that a situation unrelated to class is affecting their world and allow their social context to expand. What follows them is storytelling. She proposes that fiction gives us a way to punch holes through our thick walls of the “other,” to leave one’s cozy home and experience something that is different, then to thrive.

But permeating circles only gets me halfway there; I want students to incorporate ideas from others into their world and allow their social context to expand. What follows them to their next course or life experience should be broader, richer, and more vibrant, not just a punctured version of their old self. This is why a research question, a vignette to be manipulated, and appropriate survey questions that capture key variables. Students get frustrated with each other as they work out potential casual diagrams. They disagree in their small groups, they argue when the full class reassembles, and they complain to me privately about some people working harder than others. They don’t always get along and strong debates lasting multiple class periods ensue. To me, this is the sound of circles bumping against each other and being permeated. Third, I make circles malleable by employing a class research project. We create an experimental vignette to test a hypothesis of students’ collective choosing. This involves students working together to hash out a research question, a vignette to be manipulated, and appropriate survey questions that capture key variables. Students get frustrated with each other as they work out potential casual diagrams. They disagree in their small groups, they argue when the full class reassembles, and they complain to me privately about some people working harder than others. They don’t always get along and strong debates lasting multiple class periods ensue. To me, this is the sound of circles bumping against each other and being permeated.

Last week I watched my 3-year-old son kick a ball across North Campus. He played, pondered acne, threw pennies into the fountain, and happened upon the statue of Abraham Baldwin. Excitedly he ran the circular path around this statue. He giggled as he completed his path. He stopped briefly, smiled at me, and kept running, again in another circle, and again and again. Unaware of the significance embodied in the bronzed statue standing directly in the center of his universe of folly, it made for the perfect metaphor. Perhaps he too will attend UGA and have professors that allow him to grow tall from the circle that follows him. Just as Abraham Baldwin positioned above him, he too should take the important step forward to teach, to serve, and to inquire into the nature of things, well beyond the circle that he currently navigates.

Most semesters I even have to look up from the podium, somewhat panicked and curious as to whether students are awake, paying attention, or if I have lost them; however, I am consistently relieved when I do because students are always looking at the screen in the front of the room. They furrow their brows and stare intently at the findings. No one is texting under their desk and no one has their head down. To me, the enveloping silence is the sound of circles growing.

The importance of research in the classroom is something that is often underappreciated. Yet, it is essential to teaching and learning. Research allows students to engage with the material in a deeper and more meaningful way. It also provides an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-world situations. By incorporating research into the classroom experience, I hope to help students develop critical thinking skills and become more effective communicators.

Natasha Ganem is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology and began teaching at the University in 2011. Natasha received her Ph.D. in Sociology from Emory University in 2006. Her specialty areas include research methods, juvenile delinquency, and social psychology.

In a 2010 TED talk, Elif Shafak, speaks to the power of circles. “If you want to destroy something in this life...” she maintains, “all you need to do is to surround it with thick walls. It will dry up inside.” Shafak argues that communities of the like-minded plague our world. Social and cultural circles are invisible, yet strong, and powerful, and they lead us to draw stereotypes of the “other” and to judge the other in perilous ways. Such circles
Teaching Diversity at UGA

Over the past year and a half I have come to realize just how privileged I am, as a member of the Comparative Literature faculty, to be able to teach material that enhances our students’ understanding of cultural diversity. Many of my fellow assistant professors and Teaching Academy mentors who teach in the sciences, say, do not have the same opportunity. Colleagues with whom I have talked about the subject have expressed interest in knowing more about my experiences. Before I share a couple of these experiences with you, let me make some general observations.

“I always understood that six million people were killed, and that racists made integrating a challenge, but it is easy to learn that and move on. These books force you to pause and think: try to actually understand what it was to be them, tortured and ridiculed for no reason other than race.”

The quote comes from an essay written by a student from my most recent Comparative Ethnic American Literature class, CMLT 2500. CMLT 2500 satisfies both the University of Georgia’s “Cultural Diversity” and Franklin College’s “Multicultural” requirements for UGA undergraduates. As a result, it attracts students from all across campus, with a wide array of interests and talents. Class sessions are diverse in every way, and that is a major reason why I love to teach the course.

We can infer that while the author above is clearly intelligent, her writing skills need improvement—among other things, she misses a colon in her second sentence. It is also clear, however, that she has benefitted from CMLT 2500 in the way that the University of Georgia intends. Through exposure to experiences of others very different from herself, she has been able “to pause and think” about an ethnically diverse country, and to give students a thorough grounding in “multicultural” education. This appears not to be the case in Georgia, though I have seen encouraging signs that things may be changing. My teenage son attends a Clarke County public high school and has experienced the diverse reading he has been assigned to over the past three semesters. He has not seen much evidence of such a diverse cultural grounding in most of my undergraduate students, however.

Where Georgia and California differ lies in the secondary school curriculum. California mandates its high schools to give students a thorough grounding in “multicultural” education. This appears not to be the case in Georgia, though I have seen encouraging signs that things may be changing. My teenage son attends a Clarke County public high school and has experienced the diverse reading he has been assigned to over the past three semesters. He has not seen much evidence of such a diverse cultural grounding in most of my undergraduate students, however.

Students at the three California schools where I taught previously—the University of Southern California, San Francisco State University, and the University of California, Davis—were far more likely than their counterparts in Georgia to have heard of an author like Harriet Jacobs. Indeed, quite a few of the California students already would have read Jacobs’ 1861 memoir, Incidents in the Life of a Girl. whereas Georgia students remain unaware of either the author or her work. Again, please forgive me if this statement reads as a huge generalization, but such has been my experience so far.

Many of our students, then, arrive on campus with little or no knowledge of the contributions made by African-Americans. Thanks to UGA’s commitment to diversity, they are given such experiences in mandated classes such as CMLT 2500. While undoubtedly some students are reluctant participants who have been “forced” to fulfill the diversity requirement, by the end of these classes, there is hardly a student who is not affected positively by reading about the lives and thoughts of people from different ethnicities, social classes, or sexual persuasions. These classes foster both a better understanding of one another and a greater appreciation of the country we live in.

Having been born and raised outside of the United States, I feel that I bring a different perspective to the classroom. Rather than simply viewing the United States as a “melting pot” with an education system designed to yield some sort of monocultural end-product, I see my adopted country as a unique place that thrives on internal differences, at least when our educational system promotes understanding and empathy. I am proud to say that UGA is leading the way here, even though there is still much work to be done.

Racism is not just an American curse, but a global one. So, leaving our political differences aside, we can point with pride here in the United States to the election and reelection of our first African-American President. No country in Europe, for example, can claim the same diverse leadership, past or present. Barack Obama’s presidency does not mean that we live in a post-racial society: far from it. But it does show how far we have come in a short time, and I would like to think that we, as educators, have helped speed the process along through such courses as Comparative Ethnic American Studies.

One of my biggest responsibilities in CMLT 2500 is to create a safe environment for all of my students, regardless of race, gender, or sexual persuasion. Much of reading material I assign requires us all to be sensitive to the feelings of others. At the same time, there is an obligation to confront head-on, in class, some of the worst of our societal and personal demons. I am delighted to report that, through trial and error, I have been able to create such an environment. Two of my most memorable teaching moments at UGA occurred during this course. In my first semester, I assigned the choreopoem For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, by Ntozake Shange. The work struck red anger in me from the very first word. I have mostly seen in San Francisco State University, and the University because of its graphic depiction of domestic violence. When Shange’s writing was released in the 1970s, some saw it as an attack on black men. But today’s generation of students seems to understand that domestic violence is a scourge that knows neither class nor racial boundaries.

One student declared her amazement at our discussion. Back when she attended an almost totally African-American Atlanta high school, she said, she could never have envisioned participating in such an informed conversation with people of other ethnicities. It was a poignant moment for all, including those students who had attended almost all-white high schools.

The other memorable moment followed class discussions on Borderlands by Gloria Anzaldúa and M Butterfly by David Henry Hwang, two works that explore issues of race, gender, and sexuality. During office hours, a student confided in me that his mother had disowned him recently because he had confessed to her that he was gay. I felt privileged to be able to provide him with a safe environment in which to talk. He, in turn, felt relieved to be able to relate this painful experience. These incidents brought home to me, in a visceral way, the importance of choosing not only excellent texts that reflect America’s great cultural diversity, but also texts that will generate potentially transformative discourse.

However, I have much to learn still, so I will leave you with two questions, if I may. First, how do you create a safe environment in your classroom? Second, how do you think we can help UGA’s Office of Cultural Diversity in its mission “to ensure a University of Georgia where people of many backgrounds and perspectives join together to actively advance knowledge”? Your ideas and suggestions would be much appreciated. E-mail me at pon@uga.edu. – Thank you!
The Latin expression in loco parentis means “in place of a parent,” and was historically used to describe and govern the role of professors when young men and women were away at university. Although the domain of this responsibility has changed over the years with respect to university professors and instructors, I feel that there is still a certain, very special role that we educators fill in the lives of the young men and women who are our students. It is not a responsibility that many may welcome or embrace, but it is a role that we play in a variety of ways from time to time.

Being a professor is a curious occupation—sometimes even the understanding support of friends, significant others, and loved ones cannot replace the support of peers.

When I became an inaugural Teaching Academy Fellow for the 2012–13 year, I already had over ten years of university-level foreign-language teaching experience. While I was unsure how much I still had to learn about teaching, I was very enthusiastic at the prospect of having teaching mentors for the first time in my career. Our group (Go Green!) met roughly once a month to talk about any issues of concern that we had. At the start, it turned out that we did not have much to talk about with respect to teaching. In fact, many of our initial meetings seemed much like psychotherapy to me: we talked about what was going on in our lives, in our research, and in our departments. Our mentors were extremely good listeners and provided us with thoughtful, understanding feedback.

And then little by little, minor crises started to unfold. In my case, the first crises took the form of tearful students who were having frustrations with the topic material in my courses. I had never dealt with students crying before, and certainly not my own students. Although I was unsure what to do in this situation, I did what my instincts told me to: I was as supportive as I could be and asked them to tell me more about what they were having problems with. Naturally, I shared these tearful experiences with my Teaching Academy mentorship group. They shared similar experiences, as well as the strategies that they had used to somehow remedy the situation. Despite the fact that it was too late for these experiences to come to bear on how I had handled my own situations, I found it reassuring to know that others had also dealt with similar experiences—and simply knowing that was a great comfort. Being a professor is a curious occupation—sometimes even the understanding support of friends, significant others, and loved ones cannot replace the support of peers.

While I was unsure how much I still had to learn about teaching, I was very enthusiastic at the prospect of having teaching mentors for the first time in my career.

Sooner or later, professors, instructors, and teaching assistants become rather well-acustomed to dealing with distressed students who are not earning the grade that they are accustomed to receiving. However, there are cases of students dealing with crises of a greater magnitude, and this is to say nothing of students bravely struggling with learning disabilities. One day, a student came to my office hours in the early afternoon. Although in retrospect his appearance and air should have given me pause, I welcomed him into my office because he was one of my students. He then shared his story with me, one that he was bravely tackling in a way that left me speechless.

He was assisting someone dear to him into my office because he was one of my students. He then shared his story with me, one that he was bravely tackling in a way that left me speechless. He was assisting someone dear to him to deal with the trauma of serving as a witness in an ongoing, high-profile legal proceeding, and this individual was due to testify that day. For better or worse, I was unfamiliar with the case. This was not a visit to provide an excuse, but rather an explanation for recent absences. His visit was brief, and did not request sympathy; rather, he was seeking understanding. I feel that I responded in a natural, human manner—expressing my condolences and support, and asking what I could do to accommodate him. I cannot imagine having had to deal with such pressures during my undergraduate career. Clearly, he was under no obligation to share such details of his life, and yet he did. His visit was brief, and he apologized for having come unannounced to office hours despite the fact that they were my official office hours. This experience moved me, yet left me in a cloud of doubt as to what to do, if anything.

At my next group meeting, I shared this story with my Teaching Academy mentors and colleagues as I had done on other occasions, and their support helped me to deal with it. There was nothing further that I could have done for this student without interfering. I feel that in this case, simply listening to the student was of great help. There is certainly no panacea for dealing with student crises, and it has not been my intention to suggest that there is. Each has its own intricacies, and often it is unclear to what extent the professor should act in loco parentis. In this particular case, I feel that my human instincts served me well. In the end, I know that I have gained a support network that goes well beyond the Teaching Fellows Program—and knowing that I have that at my disposal is invaluable. It makes me a better, more confident professor, and I am extremely thankful that the Teaching Academy Fellows has provided me with that.
Our teaching and classroom experiences. After discussing with mentors and fellows, we exchanged stories about you in quickly have a sense of which methods and recommendations might seem overwhelming in teaching academy happened to come about quite natural - teacher that is uniquely you. One of the best aspects of the process of finding one’s own style is also the process that shapes that style. We are learning as much about ourselves as teachers as we are learning to teach. Plan, prepare, participate, and above all, try not to let your own sense of “newness” to the field cloud your thoughts about success. Every effective teacher had to start somewhere. I had contemplated various angles on how to write an article that does not purport to be an advice column on success. Every effective teacher had to start somewhere. The way my courses were set up left me with few options for exchange outside of the directed discussions in which I was the one asking the questions and receiving brief student responses. I wanted to find a way to interact with the students as individuals rather than as a student audience in the classroom. Why? Because I had asked myself a few key questions, questions that caused me to think about myself as an individual, a communicator, and a teacher.

I asked, “In which situations do I communicate with the most ease? What do I need to bring some of those dynamics into the classroom situation? Who am I as a teacher? What type of teacher am I? What are my strengths – what can I build on?”

What I learned from answering those questions for myself led me to a course of action. Let the answers be your guide, for the same solution does not necessarily work best for everyone. We each have strengths that we should utilize as best we can. Give yourself the best chance to succeed. I realized that I feel most at ease in communication when I can engage students in smaller groups or answer a series of specific questions one-to-one. The latter scenario allows me to identify the basic misconception or assumption and locate the root of misunderstanding in a chain of faulty logic.

The way my courses were set up left me with few options for exchange outside of the directed discussions in which I was the one asking the questions and receiving brief student responses. I wanted to find a way to interact with the students as individuals rather than as a student audience in the classroom. Why? Because I had asked myself a few key questions, questions that caused me to think about myself as an individual, a communicator, and a teacher.

1. Chronicle for Higher Education

Presentation groups allow me to relate to the students more as individuals and in effect, personalized the teacher-student dynamic for me, rather than relating to the students as a class unit from my position at the podium. I now feel that I am able to bring more of my own style and personality into the teaching-learning exchange.

Learning to shift location and share my role with the students turned into a much more collective learning experience than I ever imagined. In one way, I also gained a new perspective. For example, I learned in a somewhat humorous exchange that what may seem obvious to one student is not necessarily obvious to another. This realization came about during a Q & A period. The question posed was a question I would not have asked, mainly because it was partly rooted in a misunderstanding. The best thing that came out of this experience was a lengthy discussion that involved more students than usual, and more significantly, the presenters were not alone in their misconception. As it turned out, that misunderstanding enabled me to address a point that might otherwise have gone undetected until test time. The discussion allowed me to guide the students from where they were (at the moment) and the informal dynamic allowed me to be more myself in the exchange. In that situation, I was able to identify the root of the misunderstandings and guide the presenters to refocus the discussion in a way that served all the students.

The process I have shared is just one way among many. It has helped me find my own teaching style (still evolving). I wish you all the best on your own journey.
I thought I knew what I was doing…. In fact, I think "all" new professors think they know what they are doing. But specifically in my case, I had a fairly successful career as a wildlife veterinarian that included extensive teaching to veterinary students and veterinarians in a variety of settings before I "went back to school" to get my doctorate in Ecology, and redirect my career in an academic direction. I received accolades regularly for being an expert on birds, but more specifically in my case, I had come to doubt my skill set, my ability to teach, and my insecurities of getting into the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources. I thought I knew what I was doing…. In fact, I thought I knew what I was doing! Then came the reality of being a graduate student… but as I soon found out, the payoff would be worth the risk.

In the Spring of 2011 we co-taught Field Ornithology, a course for undergraduates who major in the wildlife fisheries. Right away, we set up some simple ground rules, which I consider to be the foundation for our success: we attended all of each other’s lectures; we contributed equally to all of the decisions regarding the organization of the course (including exam preparation); and we kept in constant contact. This may sound intuitive, but for those of us who had “co-taught” courses in the past, (and considered them a great way to do 50% of the work), it was a huge commitment. I, and anyone who chooses to do it this way, had to understand that I would get no more credit or consideration for the additional work.

Here are some of the lessons I learned, most of which are “intangibles” which I believe you cannot read in a book or learn in a teaching course. A lot of what I learned has to do with Bob’s speed in life. I move like a small hurricane – Bob moves like a gentle ocean breeze. For example, there are a million rules about how to communicate information to students, through a syllabus, via email, through the online classroom, etc. Bob’s unspoken rule works best: Be there and be available. This does not mean that you should have extensive office hours or make your cell phone number available. In fact, what I noticed right away is that Bob is always in the classroom early, in case questions arose; and at the end of class, because Bob doesn’t run out the door, there was always a long line of students waiting to ask questions. Most questions are more easily answered in person so these face-to-face encounters worked well, but most importantly, they allow getting to know students by their names and start a rapport with them, which is particularly important once we started taking students out into the field. If a student dropped by, there wasn’t a lot of “please make an appointment,” or “I really don’t have time right now.” If he is in, he is available.

As professors, we lead busy lives with antagonistic demands. We all have times when we have had to let something “slide” because we couldn’t possibly handle one more item on our agenda and quickly we learn to be as efficient as possible so as to not duplicate a lot work. After teaching a class for more than ten years, you’d think that someone would be able to use old material and certainly use “old exams” or other strategies to keep from having to put in as much effort each and every season. Yet Bob returns all the graded exams to the students, which he believes is the best policy, but which requires rewriting exams. He approaches each semester in a fresh new way. This quickly rubbed off on me. If I had co-taught with someone who had simply said, “Well, I did it like this last time, so let’s just repeat that,” I would be very concerned about how much enthusiasm would have been dampened from the start. Not only did he encourage me to change things and come up with new ideas, but he himself would bring new ideas to the table. He didn’t rely on old material. For example, he opens up class with a “bird riddle of the day,” which he and his graduate students had made up and invited the students to solve—he supplies the answer at the end of class. It is a simple but effective way to wake up the students and project some fun enthusiasm. He also spends what I thought to be an inordinate amount of time on reading and re-reading the exams to make sure that all details were correct and his grading fair. He is really concerned that all of the questions are well written.

Bob seems to have a quiet but firm respect for students. He enjoys spending time with students but not in the way that those who are seeking the “cool professor” award do. In fact, he doesn’t engage in a lot of irrelevant conversation. Even on field trips and long drives, most of his talk is about birds, birds, and more birds. This
said two things to me: he truly loves birding and birds, a passion we share. But there was something less tangible but clear: he takes his role as a mentor and role model very seriously. He uses every minute to get the students “fired up” about ornithology. The students do not see him as a peer and because he never engages in the “us vs. them” mentality, and doles out copious amounts of respect, he immediately commands respect. He seems to expect the best from students and they deliver. In fact, most students trip over themselves to impress Bob during field trips—what better motivator for a student to learn 200 species of birds or their songs! That doesn’t mean every student gets an “A,” but students seem eager to try to earn one! It also meant that when a student runs into a problem, Bob gives them the benefit of the doubt.

I can’t say that Bob uses a lot of fancy new teaching methods or technology. In fact, he still writes a lot on the board and relies very little on PowerPoint. He does ask a lot of questions, and he allows ample time for students to answer, a little trick that truly makes a difference because just a few extra seconds allows students to think and get over their fear to speak up. He possesses the rare ability to command the attention of 40 students without many figures or photos. His very presence, dry humor, and quiet mannerisms, mean that when he speaks, folks listen. But he speaks less and much slower than your average professor and certainly less than I. Again, Bob’s speed works in his favor. He is a slow lecturer, but because of that, the points are always clear, and the atmosphere in the classroom is calm and relaxed.

To summarize, I would characterize Bob’s energy and teaching techniques as follows. He genuinely cares, he’s fanatically enthusiastic about what he teaches, but in a quiet way, and he has a deep respect for students. Everything he does stems from these pillars of his teaching philosophy. As a result, he rarely deals with cheating, late assignments, or other disconcerting issues. While working with Bob, I came to realize that you can adopt many teaching styles or techniques, but what needs revisiting is likely greater than that. It’s hard and it sounds silly, but to be an excellent teacher you have to fall in love with students and the topic—every semester.

When I started teaching my own course in the Fall, I took a good long look at how to keep things fresh. I vowed to be more empathetic with the students, to value their experience and to allow a lot more time for them to be heard. So far, it’s really paid off.