

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING

TRANSCENDING ASSESSMENT

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From the Editor

What were we thinking?

It's been a whole year since we decided that the theme for the 2013 issue of *The Scholarship of Teaching* would be "Transcending Assessment: Accountability and Teaching Beyond Bureaucracy."

Last year, it seemed to me, the campus was burned out on assessment – as one of our contributors, graduate student Jen Ross, puts it, assessment is "greeted ...with about as much enthusiasm as 'taxes' or 'colonoscopy.'"

Well, I actually do know what I was thinking. I personally love the intellectual challenges of assessing student learning. My youthful first career in journalism schooled me in the need for evidence; my second career as a social worker ignited my ardor for pragmatic assessment of the human condition, and my life as a poet fueled my love of "telling" details. But as director of the TCLT entering my third year on the job, I had lost some of my blithe confidence and couldn't help noticing a couple of insidious cracks in my "true believer" exuberance.

In occasionally spirited and intense Friday afternoon sessions, new faculty in 2011-2012 questioned the premises and institutional motivation behind calls for learning outcomes. I understood their critiques and found their energetic resistance a harbinger of hope, but it still bothered me. Further, in my work with faculty in the Catalyst Course Design program and in scrutinizing grant and fellowship applications in the TCLT, it wearied and worried me to see how much people struggled to incorporate assessment elements into their proposals and course designs.

It complicates things for everyone – but perhaps most of all for the teacher -- when it seems the institution needs proof of success for political or fiscal reasons. Nonetheless, let's be realistic: institutional executives are doing their job when they press for evidence that we are good at what we do and that our students are learning: we are no longer in a world, if we ever were, where conditioned respect allows a reverent public to assume we are kings and queens of higher learning.

But we have a ways to go to create "authentic assessment" that accommodates the often disparate and cantakerous counter-pressures of the real world university we communally and passionately inhabit.

As a spokesperson and advocate for faculty, and simply as a person trying to make a go of it in the classroom, I have always wanted us to cleave to our own understanding: most of us love our disciplines and many of us love our students – or at least, the parts of our students' minds and hearts that want to grow and know. We need to love our own evidence and not cringe from opportunities to explain it to others. In my Protestant youth I was harangued by the idea that good works are not enough. But I am an apostate who believes the opposite: faith

alone does not get us to "heaven" either. In the real world, messy, complicated and so often leaning toward entropy and chaos, it is in fact good works that offer salvation.

And as I consider the eight varied and lively pieces offered here in our newest edition, one thing is clear: the tension between institutional needs, teachers' faith in their work, and the students' experience in our courses is real, ongoing and unresolved. Yet opportunities for the "transcendence" I had hoped to unearth remain vital and at our fingertips.

The provocative logo for the TCLT in recent years, as you know, is an image designed by Janet Lorch: a green sprout rising from a flame. I commissioned this image and I have loved it. Yet, I also worried about it. Could it be seen as a kind of naïve celebration or self-abnegating allusion to the hundreds of fires that raged over Flint in 2010 and beyond? Did I have the right to appropriate this town's travails for a metaphor that I love?

I decided that I did. I needed this metaphor. Struggle and hard work often generate heat. Sometimes we need to burn to survive. The fire isn't the end of the story; it's what comes after that matters.

What, then, of transcendence? The transcendence I hoped for is right on these pages: the understanding that, as D.J. Trela asserts in our concluding piece, "we are about the enlightenment of the human spirit, the opening of the human mind."

So there are a couple of learning outcomes for you. When I let myself think in these terms about the work we do every day -- the work I am about to retire from – the breathtaking splendor of it salves my cynicism and doubt. I am glad to have been a part of this work for a quarter century. I am grateful for the work of the many colleagues who transcend the pettiness and triviality and drudgery by faithfully wrestling every day to "enlighten the human spirit, and open the human mind." It is good work we do. Thank you to the contributors to the discussion emerging in these pages, and thanks to all of you.



Jan Worth-Nelson, Director
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Playful Possibilities for Assessment: Fluffy Ducks and The Queen's Gambit

Words of Introduction

Is it possible for anyone to regard assessment as “fun”? Is it possible that we have hamstrung ourselves into boredom and resistance to assessing student learning by forgetting our love of play? How might the delightful aspects of games transform our approaches to assessment? Here, SEHS Lecturer Remi Holden (winner of the inaugural Bruce and Lillian Wright Online Teaching Award) explores these questions as he describes how “playful teaching and learning” has become central to the work of the Educational Technology Master of Arts Program.

By Jeremiah (Remi) Holden, Lecturer
Department of Education

How have a box of fluffy ducks and the queen's gambit helped me assess learning? My reflections are a mashup – literally and metaphorically – and so I ask your grace and flexibility while introducing this story's players, programs, and predicaments.

The University of Michigan-Flint recently reorganized its *Educational Technology Master of Arts* program. I graduated from this department with my master's degree in 2008. Since then I have served as a teacher, game designer and course developer, and also as a resident cheerleader for graduate courses taught on campus, in Geneva, Switzerland, and online.

As I reflect upon my history with the program and anticipate future initiatives, it is my understanding that our program – buoyed by its many partners and imaginative faculty – aims to accomplish three goals. First, we intend to transform how teaching and learning intersect with technology so as to span contexts and ways of knowing. Second, we seek to design and then leverage networked media to make, in the vernacular of pro-social tech-tinkerers, “cool stuff to change the world.” And third, we hope to sustain professional communities of educators – whether classroom teachers, administrators, or entrepreneurial designers – committed to the creation and dissemination of immersive learning experiences that foster knowledgeable and compassionate global citizens.

Are our goals ambitious? Certainly. And, like design-based researchers who influence our work, we're “building the plane while flying it.”¹ Yet we've been doing so for quite a few years now, and in that time we've learned a thing or two about program design, administration, and outreach. We've also gained insight into effective pedagogies for teaching teachers about technology as both media product and mediating process. And we continue to appreciate the importance of honoring our students' experiences and questions – for, more often than not,

they too are educators, whose desires and curiosities remind us that unanticipated outcomes can be as meaningful as prescriptive objectives.

In a dynamic field like educational technology, and at a time when teacher education is simultaneously under threat and open to transformation, student learning is as critical a focus as it is an enduring mystery. How do we attend to student learning when open-ended processes define our pedagogy and field? In what ways have we begun to assess across scales and contexts; that is, from our students' learning and our teaching to the program's long-term impact, and in settings throughout Michigan, across the nation, and around the globe? In developing, prototyping, and refining assessment mechanisms and mindsets – from tools and processes to new dispositions – we have a strong and collective sense that play, and more specifically playful teaching and learning, is central to our work as educators. Inspired by Maria Montessori, who noted that “play is the child's work,”² we believe educators, across contexts and disciplines, can benefit from and help to expand the possibilities of playful teaching and learning.

Before I define playful teaching and learning and consider what play as a means for assessment reveals as evidence of student learning in our graduate education context, a few introductions are necessary.

The Players and the Program

Who are some of the players in this story? My colleagues and I are process-oriented teacher educators. We are more interested in verbs (what we do) than nouns (formal titles). For example, while “lecturer” is my institutional designation, my instructional practices are not illustrative of the traditional didacticism associated with that term. My colleagues and I facilitate learning through iteration, enact cycles of design and experimentation, embrace failure, and commit to critical and

A Few Predicaments

communal reflection. And our practices are not innate. We actively cultivate relations among individuals, institutions, and inquiry, like UM-Flint's *Technology in Education: Global Program* (the now defunct pre-cursor to our new program) and the *Interactive Communications and Simulations* group on our Ann Arbor campus. We also create communities that are both scholarly (we administer THEN, a peer-reviewed journal about technology, humanities, education, and narrative, thenjournal.org) and entrepreneurial (we recently initiated the *Institute for Innovation in Education*).

The history and evolution of our graduate programming acutely reflects our dispositions as teacher educators – and our ongoing experimentation with assessment. From 2007 to 2012, the department's *Global Program* welcomed three successive cohorts of educators from around the world. Students in the 2011-'12 cohort, for instance, hailed from Egypt, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Germany, and a handful of American states. Throughout 16-month cycles including two three-week summer residencies in Geneva, we did more than enjoy the Swiss chocolate and mountain air. We intentionally removed faculty and students from the familiarity and fatigue of daily routines. In doing so, we created the conditions for divergent thinking about schooling and learning, collaboration across disciplinary and inquiry traditions, and the adoption of "anything is possible" design – whether we were tinkering with website code, building mobile apps, or writing organizational mission statements and grants.

Located blocks from the United Nations, and with student learning informed by emergent partnerships and international initiatives, the diversity of our successes and outcomes were matched in measure by compelling assessment predicaments. Consider a few examples. Educators worked with the world's leading fair labor watchdog to design and implement an online economic justice simulation for high school students. Websites and curricular resources about human rights in China, community gardening in Michigan, environmental conservation in Mexico, and global citizenship in the Congo were presented to – and then critiqued by – an official from the UN's International Labor Organization. An elementary school science teacher partnered with an early college social studies instructor to develop a "gameful" approach to learning with digital and analog tools. Once in Geneva, they shared results from practitioner inquiry with visiting educators from South Africa and Mexico. A team built solar photovoltaic systems, developed a curriculum to address barriers to rural electrification, and handed the hardware and digital resources to a South African mobile learning organization.

Across this mélange of activity and outcome, what and how do we assess?

Both our bygone *Global Program* and the revamped *Educational Technology Master of Arts*, like all programs within UM-Flint's Education Department, were developed to align both formative and summative assessment with teachers' knowledge proficiencies, their development of pedagogical practices and skills, and cultivation of professional dispositions. For example, our students' capstone portfolios are assessed in relation to both state and national teacher education standards, like those developed by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). We want our students becoming teachers who are ever curious about – and increasingly capable of – designing and developing digital-age learning experiences and assessments for their own K-12 students. And we plan and facilitate our courses to model and foster deep, interdisciplinary, and flexible ways of knowing. Knowledge, skills, and dispositions are of critical importance.

Yet as evidenced by the previous examples, our students – weaving together varied capacities as educational innovators, technology designers, and organization leaders – generate products and engender ways of being that, more often than not, are difficult to capture via the requirements of any standardized rubric. Perhaps it is more accurate to observe that what our students exhibit, indeed who they become, exists "beyond" the anticipated or a priori requirement. Working within and across international contexts, the contingencies of local needs and opportunities are difficult to anticipate. Designing new digital media to address emergent learning challenges requires a flexibility of plans and goals. Living and learning as "members of multiple lifeworlds...[our] Identities have multiple layers that are in complex relation to each other,"³ demanding assessments that are simultaneously culturally relevant, broadly applicable, and open to interpretation and representation.

In reviewing forms of assessment typical of our graduate programming – Master's theses, web-based portfolios, digital and mobile media, curricular resources, grant applications, presentations, scholarly manuscripts, to name but a few – I am aware that even a distinction between formative and summative fails to capture a tension my colleagues and I constantly manage. It's not that our bar for assessment has ever been set "too low." Rather, it's that the bar is set – that the standard is static, not dynamic.

Our students often surprise us by initiating processes and delivering products that reveal some other type of standard. Their learning reveals a bar previously unobserved, a standard honoring evidence of knowledge that is particular, practical, experiential, and even moral (something akin to what Plato termed *phronetic* knowledge⁴). To complicate matters, by the time new ways of doing, being, or knowing are articulated and

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incorporated into course pedagogy and program curricula, some students have surpassed even that benchmark.

Lest I give a false impression that we have created some magic incubator of endless innovation (which is neither a goal nor desired outcome), let me pause and review our track record. Not all our graduates write books, found organizations, develop new technologies, win international digital media competitions, travel the world implementing projects, or author research with faculty mentors. No, every student in our program has not done that. And yes, despite our best intentions, not every student will achieve these or similar outcomes in the future. Generative activity at the intersection of teacher education, technological innovation, and learning design is a messy process – but it is not a secret. With enough of our students' accomplishments unanticipated and inspiring, it behooves us to think of assessment differently.

This appraisal of perspective and predicament invites a turn towards play. Or, more specifically, playful approaches to teaching and learning. In many classrooms, as in many games, students are told what they must involuntarily do (e.g. “complete this math exercise”). Sometimes, though not always, students learn what they can voluntarily do (e.g. “I can do this or that”). Often, because of mentorship and experience, students recognize what they should or should not do (e.g. “when I do this, that likely happens”). And, in some important cases, students discover they are not told everything that they cannot do (e.g. “I have not been explicitly prevented from doing this or that”). Observing a continuum of prevention to permission to possibility recalls what scholars (and many parents) know well – play is characterized by positive affect, non-linearity, intrinsic motivation, process, and free choice.⁵

Building upon these insights, we advocate playful teaching and learning as a means to minimize fatigue associated with the required, invite the voluntary and imaginative, and delimit the forbidden in light of the possible. How might such a vision help forward alternative assessment processes and outcomes? Before addressing this question, it is necessary to sketch how and in what ways we teach and learn playfully.

Playful Teaching and Learning

While play might appear an atypical (even offensive) descriptor of graduate education, playfulness is an increasingly common characteristic within educational technology and related fields. In this sense, UM-Flint's *Master of Arts* program reflects trends in many leading programs committed to design thinking, rapid prototyping, fast failure, team-based projects, and the production and public dissemination of knowledge, content, and product.⁶

But Swiss chocolate notwithstanding (which, admittedly, is hard to forget), we are unique. So what is playful teaching and learning within the context of our programming? And, furthermore, how might our pedagogical commitments – those core

features of our work – depart the contingent and serve more broadly our colleagues in teacher education, other departments across campus, and additional disciplines and settings? I will briefly describe how we embrace four features of playful teaching and learning, and then share in detail one example directly related to assessment methods and outcomes.

First, play requires the acceptance of constraints. We do not encourage our graduate students to just “go outside and play” sans structure. If play is to be explicitly pedagogical, it must be constrained in relation to environments, purposes, and activities. “But hold on!” you must be asserting. “Aren't constraints the ‘required’ and ‘involuntary’ you previously sought to minimize?” My response to this rebuttal is rather unsurprising: “Not entirely.”

We gravitate towards Bernard Suits' definition of game play as “that curious state of affairs wherein one adopts rules which require one to employ worse rather than better means for reaching an end.”⁷ For Suits, an individual participating in this “curious state of affairs” has adopted a “lusory attitude.” Consider golf. Why use a stick to hit a ball hundreds of yards, aiming for a small hole hidden behind a bunker of sand? Wouldn't it be far easier to pick up the ball, drive down the fairway in a cart, and drop the ball in the hole? Well, yes, it would be easier. But, then we would be playing drive-and-drop-ball-in-hole, and not golf. Voluntarily accepting obstacles by adopting a lusory or playful attitude affords the opportunity to play. Abstracting this concept, it becomes possible to appreciate how constraints provide meaning; well-crafted and deftly managed constraints create the conditions for play – and, we believe, learning. As noted, we do not wish to burden our students with tedious requirement. Rather, we hope to reveal – and to play with – sets of constraints that provide meaning.

Second, we want our students playing with things. Of course, “thing” is as quotidian as “technology” is obtuse (and this can be a problem in our program and field, but I digress). I prefer the term “tool.” Tools do include physical objects, like mobile devices with their many apps. But tools also include interpersonal interaction, conceptual knowledge, and disciplinary tradition. The learning scientist Roy Pea provides useful language for understanding “ubiquitous mediating structures that both organize and constrain activity [and] include not only designed objects... but people in social relations, as well as features and landmarks in the physical environment.”⁸ Not only do we want our students playing with iPads, we want them playing with assumptions about how such a tool changes schooling, conversation, and inquiry. In what ways are the locations and practices of a high school mathematics class transformed when mobile devices collect and analyze data about food insecurity across classroom, neighborhood, and online contexts? Playful teaching and learning recognizes that tool constraints – whether of an iPad, mathematics content knowledge, or social milieu

– afford innovation.

Third, play assumes failure. Again, let me preempt an anticipated rebuttal – “You advocate playful learning, open-ended and process-oriented discovery, and yet you fail your students?” Of course not. Failure, in our context, does not equate with outcome (i.e. a letter grade). Rather, we design course activities encouraging experimentation, failure, reflection, and insight for the next attempt. Such low-stakes and iterative processes are typical of video game play, something digital media scholars have written about extensively. Indeed, in many playful experiences, whether video games or our graduate courses, failure does not prevent learning. On the contrary, it augments cognitive processing, emotional investment, and social cohesion (volumes of empirical evidence exist supporting these dynamics).⁹ Failure matters – it matters a lot. What we hope to suggest is that failure need not be experienced as exclusively negative, something to be avoided at all costs, shameful, and necessary to conceal from others. Rather, it is through iterations of engagement, productive struggle, and reflection that failure becomes anticipated, accepted, and normalized as an essential element of learning.

Finally, playful teaching and learning cultivates community. Solitaire aside, the type of playfulness my colleagues and I foster is neither isolating nor individual. Like group work in a classroom, consider another example of group-oriented play – soccer. Note prior characteristics: voluntarily accepting constraints about how hands and feet touch the ball; that ball, characteristics of the field’s physical environment, offensive and defensive strategies as tools; failure of the misplaced pass, opponent’s goal, the losing side (and, for the loser, incentive for redemption next game). Having established some conditions for play, consider how soccer also requires the cohesiveness of a team. The players who field a team rely upon specific positions and responsibilities to advance the ball. A well-executed pass highlights the importance of cultivating, maintaining, and strengthening a community of players. As a fourth characteristic of playful teaching and learning, we design experiences that rely upon the creation and successful leadership of teams, whereby social relationships are managed in pursuit of shared goals.

Failure matters – it matters a lot. What we hope to suggest is that failure need not be experienced as exclusively negative, something to be avoided at all costs, shameful, and necessary to conceal from others. Rather, it is through iterations of engagement, productive struggle, and reflection that failure becomes anticipated, accepted, and normalized as an essential element of learning.

Playful teaching and learning requires voluntarily accepting constraints via a “lusory attitude,” using tools like devices and disciplinary knowledge, embracing failure in relation to iteration and reflection, and developing and strengthening social relationships. These four characteristics are neither exclusive to any particular form of play, nor are they the intellectual property of our program. However, as complementary characteristics they do define how and in what ways we approach our teaching and learning.

So what of assessment? What does playful teaching and learning reveal? And can such an approach prove anything? To address these questions I require that box of fluffy ducks and the queen’s gambit.

POST Cards is one example of our playful approach to teaching and learning. POST (Project Oriented Semantic Trading) Cards is a game-based method for project development and technology design. Sponsored by Microsoft Research and developed in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, this card game was created through a months-long collaborative endeavor between the students and faculty of our graduate program. The purpose of POST Cards is rather simple: initiate a game-based structure for teamwork, inspire creative conversation by trading cards, promote project visioning via task completion, and make knowledge public by sharing representations and justifications.

The intricacies of trading, points, and scoring, while critical for game play, are less relevant to this discussion about teaching, learning, and assessment. I’ll focus our attention on that box of fluffy ducks, and wormholes, a treasure map, glorious junk, flow, alphabets, smoke and mirrors, rules made to be broken, and 115 other thematic cards and quotes. Every player receives a random selection of such Theme cards, which are then traded multiple times across multiple teams. As a team’s collection of theme cards changes, it is matched by a smaller set of Task cards. Tasks, which can also be traded, instruct a team to do something, like draw a comic, create a presentation, interview an expert, storyboard, mock up a website, or evaluate an idea. Teams voluntarily choose to complete some combination of 30 tasks, based upon which Task cards they possess, and in order to advance their project development. During one game in Geneva, a project group paired “mucking about” with over two dozen other Theme cards, and organized this collection into a concept map that identified “gameful” design elements, ideal learning characteristics, and future project goals. Whether a game lasts hours or days, every team collaborates in a generative, pro-social way to publicly share outcomes relevant to learning.

As noted, such play is non-linear and messy, and outcomes are difficult to anticipate. Will a team’s final product describe a vision for the future, or might they create a digital media collage? Will they amass and mash up piles of Theme cards, or

select only a few to inspire their Tasks? These are interesting questions to consider, but in many respects they don't matter. Or, more generously, they are less revealing than other dynamics and curiosities that emerge from POST Cards play. Yet let me be clear – I am not arguing in favor of process rather than product, or that we privilege the doing of play over the result, or that formative is a more apt approach to assessment than summative. Rather, as a method illustrative of our commitment to playful teaching and learning, we've come to appreciate how POST Cards creates conditions for both and more; that is, for both meaningful processes and products, and also much more.

So what else is POST Cards? First, POST Cards is public ritual. We routinely play versions of this game at academic conferences and program gatherings. It introduces project partners, guests, and new graduate students to the cultural norms of our work by being playful, not merely telling about it. In this capacity, the game functions as a public mechanism inviting others to join our scholarly community. Second, POST Cards is inquiry. Here's a recent example. One of our faculty and a former student, modified the game to spark a reflective dialogue about graduate study for a recent research article. A digital media representation of their conversation – essentially a text-based play product – was included as one of three cases illustrating scholarly inquiry at the intersection of game-based learning, identity development, and design thinking. Third, POST Cards is template. The game has real world relevance and impact. It has been adopted and adapted across contexts as our graduates and colleagues tinker with both its design and applicability. For instance, one of our graduates, a fourth grade social studies teacher, has used the game to teach her students about the branches and functions of government. She has also posted modified samples of POST Cards online, encouraging other educators to become game designers.

Yes, we play games with our graduate students. Yet describing POST Cards as merely a game jettisons nuance and short-changes an opportunity to examine how a playful approach to teaching and learning advances project development and technology design, and creates the conditions – in both immediate and longer-term contexts – for ritual, inquiry, and design.

Assess(ment)

Having described how UM-Flint's Educational Technology *Master of Arts* program adopts a playful approach to teaching and learning, my concluding play – and reflection on assessment – concerns language. Too often have I listened to educators speak about assessment as a thing, a test or set of procedures, as a noun. My reflections here, however, indicate that my colleagues and I work to enact teaching and learning whereby conditions are created to assess. POST Cards, as one example among many, illustrates how playfulness engenders an environment, fluid social relations, and tool design and use. This playfulness is active, a framing of "assess" as verb, a means of

doing the work of assessment differently. To assess playfully becomes a way through which our graduate students show us what they know and seek to learn, how and in what ways they solve emergent problems, work together in teams, imagine project possibilities, and plan future educational visions. Such a playful approach to teaching and learning is predicated upon the doing of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Experiences like POST Cards reveal as they remind. We see the cultivation of communities, interdisciplinary inquiry, and new understandings of knowledge – and by making the act of assessment playful, we are prompted to (re)experience assessment as meaningful.

¹ See diSessa, A. A., & Cobb, P. (2004). Ontological innovation and the role of theory in design experiments. *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 13(1), 77-103.

² See Montessori, M. (1964). *The Montessori method*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.

³ See New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 60-92. p. 71

⁴ For a description of phonetic knowledge in teacher education see Loughran, J., & Berry, A. (2005). Modelling by teacher educators. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 193–203.

⁵ See Johnson, J.E., Christie, J.F., & Wardle, F. (2005). *Play, development, and early education*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

⁶ As one example, in 2012 the White House created an academic consortium of leaders at academic institutions with programs related to "games for impact." Many of these programs exhibit the noted characteristics as aspects of their teaching, learning, and research.

⁷ See Suits, B. (1978/2005). *The Grasshopper: Games, life and utopia*. Ontario: Broadview Press. (p. 52)

⁸ See Pea, R. D. (1993). Practices of distributed intelligence and designs for education. In G. Solomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp.47-87). New York: Cambridge University Press. p. 48

⁹ See, for example, Squire, K. (2011). *Video games and learning: Teaching and participatory culture in the digital age*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Assessment?!

A Part of My Soul Just Died

Words of Introduction

Any self-respecting assessment of assessment has to include a student's voice. Here, UM–Flint graduate student Jennifer Ross, the Graduate Student Research Assistant for the TCLT, delivers a pithy and candid look at assessment from her student catbird seat, and proceeds to teach herself – and the fortunate reader – some basics from the literature of assessment. In conclusion, she asserts, “Hissed under breath, spat out like a curse, assessment certainly won’t be winning any popularity contest any time soon. Yet, at its core, assessment is a necessary and useful part of education.”

by Jennifer Ross, Graduate Student Research Assistant
Thompson Center for Learning & Teaching

Test. It's generally viewed as a four-letter word among the student population, and, as a student myself, sometimes I can't entirely disagree. We've all been there, had those monster tests that sap the life right out of us, leave us in a traumatized haze from which we suddenly awake to find ourselves contemplating which flavor(s) of Ben and Jerry's to buy. But, for the most part, I would have to identify myself as an anomaly, because, you see, most of the time I enjoy tests. To be completely honest, I find them relaxing. Multiple choice, short answer, matching, essay – it doesn't matter. I like them all. And what's not to like? A respite from studying? No homework that night? Shoot, I'll take tests every day.

I've discovered that I like the puzzle. The challenge. The thrill of just me and my brain and the page. Do I know what I'm supposed to or don't I? Can I figure it out or can't I? I like them because I can find out for myself where I'm at in the class, determine for myself how much I have learned. That's why I'm here after all, and no one can tell me how much I am learning or how to revise my learning strategies but me. So I need the tests – the assessment – if for nothing else but my own benefit...and the fun.

From what I've seen during my year as a graduate student research assistant in the Thompson Center for Learning and Teaching, the word “assessment” is greeted among faculty and administrators with much the same level of enthusiasm as students hearing the word “test.” That is to say, with about as much as enthusiasm as “taxes” or “colonoscopy.” Yet, is it “assessment” in and of itself that poses the issue and makes everyone groan? If we distill “assessment” down to its essence we see that, as an idea, it's really quite simple: we assess things to see if they work. However, as with many seemingly simple topics and questions (What caused the Big Bang? Do our lives have a purpose? What is love?), we find that the elegantly packaged little boxes in which these questions come wrapped are actually spring-loaded time bombs stuffed to the gills with streamers,

confetti, and little noisemakers that explode out of their confines causing no small amount of mayhem and madness. At this point in higher education history, that box has sprung open, sending our usually well-ordered classroom into disarray. The only thing we can do (short of throwing up our hands and walking away, of course) is pick a spot and start sorting through the mess.

Let's begin, then, at . . . well, at the beginning. What is assessment? I alluded to this question previously, but now it's time to bring in a good quote. According to the University of Oregon's Teaching Effectiveness Program, assessment is

the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences (qtd. in Fleming).

Simply put, assessment is an assortment of methods used to determine what students “know, understand, and can do.” In this light, it's easy to see that educators assess all the time. According to Melanie Fleming, a lecturer in the Academic Development Unit at the University of New England, assessment tasks include pretty much everything we've ever assigned students to do: annotated bibliographies, blog or discussion post entries, case studies, debates, demonstrations, essays, exams, laboratories or practicums, presentations, research papers, etc., etc., ad nauseum. At a basic level, the function of these tasks is to ascertain whether or not a student is progressing satisfactorily through what have been determined to be the essential checkpoints of a given subject and proficiency level. Early on, these objectives may seek to verify if a student can write a coherent sentence, exhibit proficiency in using computer software, or correctly balance a chemical equation. Later on, we require students to be able to present their research in sustained and cohesive arguments, apply Schrödinger's equation

to a three-dimensional problem in quantum mechanics, or demonstrate an ability to use arbitrage, hedging, and speculation in a corporate setting. If a student can demonstrate his or her abilities over the course of the semester, we pass them through the class and declare that they have learned.

But have they learned? And, more importantly perhaps, to what degree have they mastered their learning?

With these questions, complications begin to arise. If the purpose of assessment is to make learning visible, the question, as posed by Beth Dietz-Uhler and Cathy Bishop-Clark from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, then becomes, visible to whom? During their presentation at the 5th Annual Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Academy Conference held this May in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Dietz-Uhler and Bishop-Clark argued that student learning needs to be made visible to elements both within and outside of higher education, including instructors, students, the specific department or discipline, employers, legislators, and the wider community. In making learning visible, the university makes itself transparent and accountable.

Consequently, I contend that it is not assessment itself that causes an issue; rather, it is the emphasis on accountability that scares us in higher education. For, in order to answer to departmental, university, and community calls for accountability, we must be able to quantify learning. However, in order to calculate how much learning has been accomplished, we must first make visible the very thing we are trying to measure. We must first make learning transparent. But how does one make transparent something that is intangible, unseeable, and, quite realistically, unmeasureable?

I say “unmeasureable” not to be a stick-in-the-mud, but to segue to what I think is a crucial distinction: a differentiation between “learning” and “learning effects” (Bruff). Determining whether or not learning has occurred is problematic at best. During the Grand Rapids SoTL Academy Conference, Derek Bruff, a Vanderbilt University mathematics professor and the director of their Center for Teaching, presented “We Can’t X-Ray Their Brains,” in which he equates learning to dark matter, a type of matter which does not react with the electromagnetic spectrum: we can’t see it. We can’t see dark matter, but we know it’s there because we can see its effects – much like learning, in fact, which Bruff described as “the dark matter of education.” According to Bruff, while we can see the effects of learning, we cannot see the process of learning itself. Based on Bruff’s contention, I argue, then, that we have no way to assess actual learning and can assess only its effects. From those findings, we can merely infer that learning has been

accomplished.

In making our inferences, we must remember that correlation does not necessarily imply causation. Just because a student’s test scores improve or a paper exhibits fewer grammatical errors does not mean any actual learning has been accomplished – or, at the very least, not accomplished in the way in which we had hoped. For instance, a student may improve over the course of several exams simply because s/he has determined the testing strategy which produces the best results for those particular exams, not because s/he has studied well, retained the information, or drawn powerful connections. As another example, while a student may exhibit what seems to be increasing grammatical aptitude over a series of papers, it may be that s/he is more familiar with the subsequent paper’s topic and is therefore more likely to produce better-quality writing (Langer). Conversely, a poor performance on a test or in a paper may not reflect a lack of learning. On the contrary, the student may be grappling with new ideas and materials as much as or more than peers demonstrating satisfactory progress in the

same or similar assessment tasks. At the time of an exam or final paper, a student’s ideas may be only half-formed as s/he works to assimilate new information or as s/he delves into much deeper and more complex areas of inquiry.

Many of us, whether students, instructors or administrators, know that true learning often occurs beyond the classroom, long after

the student has passed through our doors. We know this, yet sometimes we lose sight of it, perhaps even sacrifice measures to promote true learning in order to satiate the bureaucratic pressures of recruitment, retention, accreditation, and reputation. In *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education*, Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta define a second type of higher education assessment, that which is “the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving learning and development” (qtd. in Fleming). We’ve come now to the realm of what I am going to call meta-assessment, a process in which we assess our own assessment techniques. Necessary? Yes, absolutely. But how often does this meta-assessment focus on improvement in the form of reflecting on, understanding, and implementing new theories of learning based on emerging biological, psychological, and sociological research, as opposed to this meta-assessment focuses on improvement in the form of boosting test scores, recruitment and retention levels, or on grandstanding for employers, legislators, and community leaders, many of whom only seek percentages and pie charts to

Many of us, whether instructors or administrators, know that true learning often occurs beyond the classroom, long after the student has passed through our doors. We know this, yet sometimes we lose sight of it, perhaps even sacrifice measures to promote true learning in order to satiate the bureaucratic pressures of recruitment, retention, accreditation, and reputation.

justify tax dollars spent? If we, who are in the best position to understand how people learn, lose focus on the very thing we entered this profession for – to educate – we have no business being in it. In the thick of the assessment and meta-assessment debates, we must remember that we are accountable not only to policy makers both inside and outside of higher education, but to students as well. The question now is, how do we turn this “dark matter of education” into something not only viewable, not only quantifiable, but, ultimately, beneficial to both the bureaucratic and the student-centered sides of things?

In our pondering, we return to a question posed previously: if we cannot assess actual learning and can only see its (possible) effects, how, then, are we to determine if learning is actually occurring? Perhaps somewhat ironically, I would point to the list of assessment tasks compiled by Melanie Fleming. I would argue that we are doing the right things; we just need to find the right way of implementing them and individualizing them for each class, and, quite possibly, for each student so as to facilitate, as best we can, our students’ learning. During the SoTL conference, Bruff launched several suggestions based on the work of Randy Bass, the Associate Provost and Executive Director of the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship at Georgetown University (“Randall Bass”). Bruff argued that educators should identify student learning through what Bass describes as “thin slices” (qtd. in Bruff). To visualize, picture a sectioned orange. The orange is divided into its separate wedges, each complete with its own membrane. Yet, when put together, the pieces make a complete whole. Bass described student learning as much the same. Learning does not come as a packaged whole. It is not “write this paper and *viola!* you’ll know how to write,” nor is it “memorize the periodic table and you’ll know how atoms interact.” Instead, it is a long process of compiling bits of information in order to forge new and reinforce old neurological pathways.

Bruff, like Bass, contends that numerous “intermediate activities” occur along the way from novice to expert. We as educators have to identify those intermediate activities and elucidate for our students the what, how, and why. For example, in writing a term paper, a student must develop a research question, write rough drafts, revise each draft, and compile a final draft. Already these tasks are intermediate activities within and of themselves, but what Bass and Bruff describe goes much deeper than that. Think again of the sectioned orange. Each wedge equates to one of the tasks I’ve just described. Both Bruff and Bass argue that we need to slice each of those wedges into thinner sections, much as if we were preparing a sample for microscopic examination. To do so, we must identify the intermediate activities of an intermediate activity. In other words, we must take a more complex approach to our understanding of what an assignment entails – what does each step of the process involve, and where might our students

encounter difficulty? For instance, if we ask “what are the intermediate activities of how a student develops a research question?” we will find that students must choose a general topic that interests them, make sure it’s interesting enough to keep them motivated and complex enough to promote a substantial argument, compile a list of search terms, revise that list in order to acquire more specific and relevant results, read the resulting articles, vet out articles that don’t pertain to their topic, and synthesize the remaining information to determine a hypothesis or tentative thesis with which to structure the remainder of their experiment or research.

If anything, the above discussion of “thin slices” and “intermediate activities” reminds us that when assigning assessment tasks, we must remember that what is obvious to us, maybe even unconscious to us, is not always obvious to students new to the codes and customs of academia. Additionally, we need to understand that making the puzzle pieces visible to students is not the same as “giving them the answers.” Far from it. In *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*, Susan Ambrose and her colleagues report that “when students are provided with an organizational structure in which to fit new knowledge, they learn more effectively and efficiently than when they are left to deduce this conceptual structure for themselves” (qtd. in Bruff). In assisting students with the structure, we make it more likely that they will learn . . . and learn more deeply.

Even as these “thin slices” help students, they also make visible to us their learning processes. Much as a flipbook tells a story when we thumb its pages, these “thin slices” of student learning will provide insight as to how our students interact with course material. Bruff provided several ideas within the context of social media, describing how professors have created Twitter-based assignments in which students submit live observations as they view a film or read a novel, have used Flickr as a photo-sharing forum where students upload pictures documenting their learning and learning processes, or have incorporated blogging in the form of journaling, as a discussion board, or as a forum for annotated bibliography or short essay entries. According to Bruff, if an educator can integrate social media into the classroom without making the assignments feel like busy work, the assignments will provide the instructor with an up-to-date snapshot of how students individually react to and engage with the material.

As I apply to doctoral programs in English literature this summer, I have to wonder how I will approach the topic of assessment. Acting as a teaching assistant or conducting first year composition courses are not uncommon sources of funding for incoming fellows. With what sort of attitude will I tackle the assessment behemoth, and how will I broach the topic of assessment with my students?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I turn to another:

why? As a child, I always functioned better knowing not just that I should or should not do something, but why I should or should not do the thing in question. Why shouldn't I jump off the swing set? Oh, because I'll knock out my teeth like that kid over there. Why should I be nice to my annoying little brother? Because one day he'll be four inches taller than me and a lot stronger. As a student, I have discovered the same thing: if I know why I'm doing something, it makes the task a lot less tedious and a lot more purposeful.

Too often education is treated as a mysterious, cloak-and-dagger process when it should be presented as an open and honest exchange of ideas. As Bruff, Dietz-Uhler, and Bishop-Clark all argued during their presentations, giving students information that helps them to construct a framework isn't "giving them the answers." It's providing them with a chart on which they can plot their discoveries. You wouldn't say to a student, "Solve for the third side of this triangle" without first explaining Pythagorean's Theorem, or expect them to describe the characteristics of Renoir's work if they had never seen his paintings. Yet this is how we present learning to students. Write this paper. Study these notes. Take this test. Very rarely do they ever hear why. The real why. Not the "because I said so" or "because it will make you smarter" why. The this-is-what's-happening-to-your-brain-when-you-do-this why. The why that truly answers the questions "how will this assignment benefit me in my education," or "how will this assignment really 'make me smarter?'"

One of my favorite teachers in high school was my A.P. Calculus teacher. I did abysmally in his class, but he sticks in my memory because of his honesty. Even if he couldn't make differentiation and integration something fathomable to my humanities-minded brain, he told me the why and how of them. Even if I didn't "get" the math itself, I knew the purpose behind the heaps of problems he assigned every night and why derivatives and integrals even mattered. When I walked out of the class at the end of the year, I wanted to hug him, thank him for not treating me like a halfwit and for actually explaining things. Or, when he couldn't explain, for admitting "I don't know."

As previously mentioned, when talking about meta-assessment we place a great deal of emphasis on accountability and transparency. Why not apply that same sort of thinking to the classroom? Why not make learning something transparent and accessible? For some reason classroom-based transparency and accessibility often seem to take a backseat or get lost altogether. Do we run out of time in the crunch to "cover everything?" Surely we have thirty seconds or a minute to explain how an assignment will help both us and our students to determine their progress and points for improvement. Surely we could explain that the objectives are much deeper than simply learning MLA formatting or knowing the sliding filament

theory of muscle movement. José Bowen, author of *Teaching Naked* and Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts and a music professor at Southern Methodist University, summarizes L. Dee Fink in writing, "Integration is more important than volume of content" (99). While plowing through content is to some extent unavoidable, Bowen asserts that if we want students to learn more and change their thinking about the world, including the way they think about their education, then we need to teach in such a way that promotes deep integration and engagement. According to Bowen, "learning to think in new ways is hard, but students perform better when they understand both what and how they are supposed to be learning" (89). The first step in encouraging our students to interact with both their education and the wider world, therefore, is to explain the relevance of the information and assignments and to give our students a reason for invested interest in class material.

Classroom transparency may also be overshadowed by the belief that our students won't "get it" even if we do try to explain. In subscribing to this idea, we sorely underestimate our students' abilities and, I would argue, treat their intelligence with a flippancy that has no place in university-level courses. Ken Bain, author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, explains, "Our thoughts do not travel seamlessly from our brains to theirs [our students' brains]" (26). In order to assimilate new information we present during class or office hours, students must first reorder previously held mental paradigms, a task which can be extraordinarily difficult depending on the strength of their beliefs in what they heretofore knew to be true (Bain). For Bowen, the disjunction between students' brains and faculty brains is based largely on a matter of *context* ("The problem of teaching, therefore, is getting not the facts but the context from my brain to yours"; 87) and expectations ("High expectations can be motivating; if someone else believes we can do this, then perhaps we can"; 94). If we exude an attitude in which we assume students will be unable to "get" what we are trying to teach them, we set them up for failure. According to Bain, the best college teachers "had great faith in their students' ability to achieve" (72). Consequently, he argues, "Students will be buoyed by positive expectations that are genuine, challenging yet realistic, and that take their work seriously" (72). However, Bowen points out that these high expectations must be augmented by approachability and honest support. In other words, if we challenge our students, express our belief in their abilities, and offer them a safe and supportive environment in to experiment with new ideas, many of them will rise to the occasion, not only "getting" the material, but perhaps surprising us with how much they can achieve.

More than either of the two previous possibilities, I believe we overlook classroom transparency because we were and perhaps still are not encouraged to think in a way which puts an emphasis on explaining the "why" of learning. As children we

were constantly nagging our parents with the question “why?” Somewhere along the line we stopped doing that. Especially in school. In adopting the theory that students’ minds are mere sponges, waiting to soak up any and all information given to them, educators have discouraged the examination of why. After all, if student’s minds are sponges, there is nothing complex about learning and, therefore, there is no “why.” Under this premise there exists only “because” phrases as simple and unsatisfying as the ones mentioned a few paragraphs above. I would argue that outmoded way of thinking has greatly influenced our teaching methods if for no other reason than because that was the way we were taught ourselves. However, now that we know so much more about learning and the brain, there is no reason we should not be able to at least attempt an answer as to why, even if we aren’t neuroscientists or cognitive psychologists.

Hissed under breath, spat out like a curse, assessment certainly won’t be winning any popularity contests any time soon. Yet, at its core, assessment is a necessary and useful part of education. Through it we attempt to gauge our students’ learning, evaluate the products of their endeavors, and pinpoint areas for improvement. On a larger level, we make our teaching transparent and ourselves accountable for student learning. Why, then, do we not make learning itself transparent and accessible? Why do we not tell our students, to the best of our ability, the deeper purposes of an assignment, the reason for a test? Being honest with our students creates a much more open and inviting classroom atmosphere and shapes education into a collaborative endeavor from which both our students and ourselves can learn and benefit.

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Assessment as a High-Impact Practice and the Assessment of HIPs

Words of Introduction

Associate CAS Dean Roy Barnes has been on the hustings of assessment reform and calls for “HIPS” for more than a decade. Here he takes a step back to reflect on where we’ve been, how far we’ve come and where we’re heading. He asserts the institution has progressed not just into laying out bureaucratic protocols, but into a commitment toward a much deeper shared understanding of what represents evidence of student learning.

By Roy Barnes, Associate Dean
College of Arts and Sciences
Associate Professor, Sociology

As I reflect on the university’s growth in the area of student learning assessment and muse about our future possibilities, I experience both a sincere sense of gratitude towards the many faculty members who worked to establish an assessment system for which we can all be proud, and the hopes of greater accomplishments to come.

But such optimism was not always associated with the “A” word – assessment. As a result of their 1999 comprehensive visit, the evaluation team from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, mandated a focused visit in 2003 with the expressed purpose of evaluating the university’s work in assessing student learning. While a difficult pill to swallow, this action by the HLC was warranted, as the state of assessing student learning at the university in 1999 was, to be kind, undeveloped.

In the subsequent years leading up to the HLC focused visit, academic programs across the university, and especially those in the College of Arts and Sciences, worked diligently to meet the challenge of designing and implementing protocols for assessing student learning. Personally, for me such a focus on student learning as opposed to a list of required courses (i.e., the curriculum) was a true paradigm shift. Indeed, it seemed reasonable to assert that if students successfully completed a carefully constructed curriculum, they would have acquired the requisite knowledge, skills and intellectual habits of mind to be successful in their majors. However, it is clear after a decade of experience, and the benefits of hindsight, that successfully completing a course does not always represent the strongest evidence of student learning. I grappled with this myself in thinking about assessing the sociology program. Rather than being “knowledgeable” of sociological theory, research methods or statistical techniques, I was forced to be much more explicit in what I wanted to see my students learn. It is not that faculty members did not know what represented evidence of student learning. Rather, it was a matter of refining and articulating

those expectations in ways that could be measured. Therefore, the assessment of student learning poses a methodological problem that is worthy of our best creative and intellectual efforts. Many faculty members have embraced this challenge, resulting in numerous examples of what Grant Wiggins refers to as “authentic assessment”¹ as opposed to multiple choice tests that assume one correct answer.

The practice of clearly articulating expectations for our students’ learning is not only professionally rewarding, but also delivers tremendous benefits for our students. I have discovered that one of the in-process benefits of developing assessments that capture the complexities and nuances of student learning is that we are encouraged to be clearer in our own minds about what constitutes evidence of student learning. This in turn helps us provide our students with concrete examples and language by which to self-assess their work and more importantly, clear expectations regarding academic excellence. This process of articulating expectations is at the heart of my advocacy for the assessment of student learning. It is one thing to lament that “our students cannot write” and quite another to provide them with clear definitions and examples of what we mean by good writing and poor writing. Here is where I see the assessment of student learning – or more specifically, the clear articulation of learning outcomes – as itself a High-Impact Practice. In George Kuh’s foundational report on High-Impact Practices or HIPs², he linked HIPs with increased rates of student retention and student engagement. I believe that the assessment of student learning will also increase student engagement and retention through enhanced learning through clearly articulated expectations. From my many years in the classroom, I have come to recognize that students will perform

¹ Grant Wiggins, “The case for authentic assessment,” *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 2 no. 2 (1990).

² George Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: what they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*, (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2008).

at high levels if we expect them to do so and provide them with the intellectual scaffolding which *will* enable them to succeed.

So, if one accepts the affinity between the assessment of student learning and High-Impact Practices, I would suggest that the authentic assessment of HIPs is the next frontier through enhancing learning through clearer expectations. The University of Michigan-Flint has embraced many of the HIPs identified by Kuh. On the one hand, first year seminars/experiences and capstone courses are now fully integrated within our General Education Program; on the other, many other programs across campus provide opportunities for common intellectual experiences, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, service learning/community-based learning, and internships. While evidence is mounting that these educational experiences are associated with measureable improvements in student outcomes, the number one research recommendation of a review on HIPs and student outcomes was to “expand the focus of such research beyond grades and persistence to include *direct measures of student learning* outcomes.”³ (emphasis added) Again, the university is in a good position to meet this challenge as both our First Year Experience course and our Capstone courses are grounded in five specific learning outcomes. Furthermore, through the efforts of faculty members on campus, the voices of all of the members of the faculty have been synthesized into rubrics designed to assess competent writing, research methodology, critical thinking and the use of multiple perspectives – with more to come over the next few years.

All this said, it may be a challenge to develop clear articulations of expected student learning that we anticipate occurring in internships, service learning, and say, a common intellectual experience. As noted above, one way to start is to make explicit the alignment between these educational experiences and the learning outcomes associated with our General Education program. What general education learning outcomes are associated with internships and common intellectual experiences such as the university’s Common Read? Does a community-based learning experience contribute to a student’s investigation of the nature of citizenship? I contend such alignments should easily emerge. We should resist engaging in extreme intellectual yoga exercises that are required to stretch the HIPs to meet a specific General Education outcome. Not only does this sound painful, it also violates our guiding principle of articulating clear learning outcomes – outcomes that are clear to us as faculty and will subsequently be clear to our students.

For the more challenging cases of articulating the student learning outcomes expected from our HIPs, the campus will need to engage in the process of asking and answering the basic question we asked ourselves about student learning within the

³Jayne E. Brownell and Lynn E. Swaner, Five High Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Equity.

major some 15 years ago – what learning do we expect from our curriculum? Whether it is a set of carefully constructed courses or the participation in proven High-Impact Practices, what do we want our students to learn and how will we know if they have been successful in achieving this learning?

To answer these questions as they pertain to the numerous instances of HIPs across campus, the first step may be to conduct an inclusive survey of the faculty and programs to determine what HIPs are currently employed and where they are occurring. However, in order to advance the project of assessing student learning outcomes, it will also be important to ask (and answer) what do we want our students to learn from each High-Impact Practice and how do we envision assessing this learning? From the results of our inventory, the campus will have a clear sense of what HIPs are occurring, where they are being implemented, and most importantly to the theme of this essay, what learning we expect to emerge from this experience.

This will be an intellectually challenging process. However, the university community has already successfully engaged in a similar activity. I am confident that we can achieve comparable success as we did in the assessment of student learning within our General Education program. Not only will our efforts yield immediate dividends by clarifying expectations and improved student learning, our efforts also hold the long-term promise of making academic success inclusive. Indeed, promoting academic excellence for *all* of our students is a task worthy of all of our efforts.

The TCLT Resource Library has many of the materials referenced in this article and noted throughout this issue. They are available for loan to faculty. If you are interested in borrowing an item, please stop by the TCLT at 241 French Hall or contact us:

Email: tclt-email@umflint.edu
Phone: (810) 237-6508

Additional information about UM-Flint’s General Education Program is available online at www.umflint.edu/gened.

As Coordinator of the General Education Program, Roy Barnes also welcomes your questions, comments and suggestions. He can be reached at rcbarnes@umflint.edu.

Could Rubrics Have Any Use? A Case for Suspicion

Words of Introduction

In this lively critique of what he calls the “university assessment industry,” Philosophy Professor Aderemi Artis voices active skepticism about calls for “reform,” and zeroes in on one cherished shibboleth of assessment: the rubric. He analyzes a trio of objections to the use of rubrics in evaluating essays, trolling for justification for employing them, and in the end remains unconvinced of their value.

By Aderemi Artis, Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy

There are a host of good reasons to be suspicious of the college and university assessment industry and its seemingly ever-present calls for “reform”: at the very least, a reflective instructor who notices the phalanxes of newly minted bureaucrats collecting generous salaries and embarking on cushy junkets in the name of assessment will be hard-pressed not to wonder about the purity of the movement. Moreover, this tremendous outlay of precious resources accelerates as the professoriate continues to be downsized and proletarianized. That the very summits of assessment reform are dominated by a coterie of elites whose fitness for leadership in higher education is questionable at best is only more fuel for the fires of discontent. Insofar as the implementation of rubrics can and often does play a central role in the movement of assessment reform, for instance of late at UM–Flint, suspicions about assessment reform move easily to suspicions about the rationale of rubrics.

But even those not harboring such doubts about the usefulness of rubrics might sensibly have serious questions about how such devices are to play any kind of constructive role in higher education. Certainly, the definitions of leaders of the assessment movement are unlikely to be of much help in this regard: witness the short essay on the topic by Merilee Griffin to be found in *Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics* (pp. 9-10), a 2010 document produced by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Griffin begins with a series of negative claims: “A rubric is not a technical specification, like how to build a bridge. Nor is it a checklist for ailing student performances in need of therapy. It is certainly not a Gotcha Grid for wayward writers. It is not even, as Merriam Webster said, an authoritative rule, although it meant that at one time.” The next half page then goes into detail about the history of older, now apparently defunct uses of the term. Next comes an extended series of bite-sized paragraphs, each of which begins with a statement about rubrics. Here is a sampling of these first sentences: “A rubric is a series of choices...A rubric is one of the most carefully

written documents in history...The rubric is a product of many minds working collaboratively to create new knowledge... The rubric is not a universal statement of truth for the ages...” Finally, the short essay ends with the statement, “It is what we promise to teach.” I found it difficult to imagine whilst reading this piece exactly how the words within it were supposed to be clarificatory or helpful to actual faculty members in actual departments working to craft assessment rubrics or to use them. Indeed, if anything, this essay and others like it seem only to confirm the fears of those incredulous about the push to employ rubrics in all departments in higher education.

As a sort of case study, I will look at several objections to the use of rubrics in evaluating formal essays, and try to see if there is any possible sensible use of such devices. While I am deeply sympathetic with those who doubt the purposiveness of either rubrics or the assessment industry, my job as a professional academic philosopher means that I am duty-bound, as it were, to do my best to construct the best case for positions even if and when I am not personally an advocate of them.

The first and perhaps most obvious objection to rubrics is that they are redundant. Rubrics are often supposed to be a tool for evaluating student performance or communicating to students the assessor’s evaluation of them but since we already have a tried and true tool for those purposes (grades and their accompanying explanations), the only thing rubrics do is multiply the workload of already often overburdened instructors. There are, it seems to me, two immediate responses to this sort of objection. The first, and simplest, is that rubrics are more of a tool to be used within and among the professoriate, and not necessarily to be used as a mediating device between instructors and students. The second is that there is some important job that rubrics do in informing students about their performance that is not done already by grades. The problem with the second response is that, even if it could be worked out exactly what new information the student gets from rubrics that are not gotten from a thoroughly explicated graded piece of work, it is likely (according to my

own experience and that of numerous others) that handing a student both a thoroughly graded paper as well as a rubric often serves merely to confuse the student about what they are supposed to be aiming at, or how to improve their performance. Thus, in effect, they undermine their own purpose in this regard.

Suppose, then, we go with the first response, that rubrics are tools to be used among the professoriate: the question then arises, how are such tools to be used, and to what end? For essay writing assignments, it is rather unlikely that a rubric that can be agreed upon across disciplines, because the purpose of essays varies so widely from department to department, and from school to school. Indeed, even if we confine ourselves to the departmental level, there are obviously very different expectations from different courses in a given department. However, perhaps if we further confine ourselves to courses at the same level and in the same department, for instance the 100 level in philosophy, rubrics might have a place among instructors for establishing the common baseline up to which students are expected to rise in order to be properly prepared for the next level of courses in that department. While this suggestion does not sound entirely implausible, there remain some questions about its implementation.

First, what sort of features of student writing should a rubric center on? It seems this question might be answered by first determining what such a rubric should *not* center on. A rubric should not focus on holistic aspects of an essay, where those holistic aspects can generally only be recognized by an instructor possessed of a judgment honed by years of experience in reading and analyzing student writing. One example of a holistic aspect might be, for lack of a better word, *coherence*, where coherence refers to the way in which the various elements of an essay hang together. For example, an essay with solid

grammar, a modicum of style, and reasonable content may fail to cohere as well as an essay with middling grammar, good style, and average content. But there is, as a rule, no way to antecedently specify where a piece of writing will wind up in terms of its coherence and why it does so, and thus this is a poor candidate for a rubric (indeed, it is often quite difficult to specify even after the fact what it is in virtue of which an essay either coheres or fails to do so, and this is one challenge of the grading process). However, there is much less of a challenge providing more “technical” criteria for what a good essay cannot, in general, do without. For example, philosophy papers have a typical style and grammar (these two often blend into one another) whose basics are fairly easy to specify. These basics might then form the basis of a rubric used inside a department by instructors wishing to establish a baseline of the kind of papers that a student completing a 100-level course should reach in order to pursue higher level courses. This in turn would make it easier to teach higher level courses because the instructor could frame essay assignments on the assumption of the baseline established in the rubric.

There is, however, a second question: assuming we accept all of the foregoing, what if the instructors in a department cannot agree on the kind of rubric suggested above? Well, it seems to me that departments should try as often as possible to work on a consensus-style decision-making process, so in the event that all department members cannot agree on a rubric, then it should not be adopted.

I remain unconvinced of the usefulness of rubrics (or of contemporary assessment reform for that matter), but I have tried to lay out the best case for their employment: hopefully there is at least one out there who might benefit from my efforts.

Dr. Lois Matz Rosen Junior Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award

Dr. Lois Matz Rosen taught at UM-Flint for over 20 years as a professor of English. She was the founding director of the Thompson Center for Learning & Teaching (TCLT). Upon her retirement in 2003, she established the Lois Matz Rosen Junior Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award, which carries a stipend of \$1,000. Julie Broadbent, Assistant Professor of Psychology is the 2013 recipient.

Eligible faculty include tenure-track UM-Flint faculty in their third year of appointment up to but not including the academic year of their initial review for promotion and tenure. Highly qualified candidates must possess the following characteristics.

- Consistent level of excellence in teaching diverse groups of students
- Demonstrated commitment to teaching through course development activities, attendance at campus teaching workshops, participation in conferences on pedagogy, publications related to pedagogy, etc.
- Recognizable commitment to UM-Flint students both inside and outside of the classroom (through advising, mentoring, or research/performance activities).

The TCLT Advisory Board will issue a formal call for nominations in January 2014.

Educating Family Nurse Practitioner Students at the Early Child Development Center: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Words of Introduction

Can collaborations between academic and service units serve both and in addition generate timely research? In this assessment of a partnership between the Family Nurse Practitioner Program and the Early Child Development Center, Christina Aplin-Kalisz says yes. Though not without bumps, the process she describes is a success story, generating measurable benefits to several key constituencies.

By Christina Aplin-Kalisz, Lecturer
Department of Nursing

As many faculty know, it can be very challenging to fulfill all of the necessary components of our roles. Here at the University of Michigan-Flint, our nurse practitioner programs have grown significantly over the past four years to include a fully online Doctor of Nursing Practice as well as a fully online Accelerated Master's of Nursing. During this period of tremendous program growth and transition, it has indeed been challenging for our faculty to continue to balance teaching, learning, and service, all the while providing our students with the necessary high quality education that has been the foundation of our programs being rated third in online graduate nursing programs per the US News and World Report, 2012.

As part of my role, I am responsible for, among other courses, the pediatric component of the Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students education. Over the past six years, I have developed a close working relationship with the Early Child Development Center and the director, Della Becker-Cornell, here on the University of Michigan-Flint campus. When Della and I first began our working relationship and collaboration, she was in need of a health consultant to meet with her quarterly to help her to better meet the criteria that her accrediting agencies required. I have since met quarterly, as part of my role as a nursing faculty member and within the framework of service to the university, with the center staff and provided annual medication in-services as well as in-services on other topics ranging from nutrition to children with special health care needs.

In return, Della and the Center agreed to allow my FNP students to rotate through the Center yearly for each cohort and provide developmental training for infants, toddlers and children for our students. This training consists of a two to three hour session for two to three students at a time watching and participating in Denver Developmental Screenings as well as doing Ages and Stages for developmental screening. This

is a vital component of the education for our FNP students in their pediatric content area. The students routinely rate this experience as very helpful to them in their clinical rotations and say that it is enjoyable as well.

In addition, beginning this year, our collaboration has been furthered to include a research project entitled, "Parental and Caregiver Perceptions of Healthy Weight, Nutrition and Physical Activity in Children who attend a University Affiliated Early Child Development Center in an Urban Area". The impetus for this study is of course directly related to the pediatric obesity epidemic in the United States and predominantly found in our inner cities (CDC, 2012). It is known that approximately 40% the children of the ECDC are either overweight or obese (ECDC center data, 2012). This study will serve as the foundation for further studies to include focus groups with the parents and caregivers that will be based on the survey results from the first study to be conducted this summer. Based on the focus groups, an interventional study will then be conducted that is anticipated to be a further example of interdisciplinary collaboration with the School of Education and Human Services and specifically the Department of Early Childhood Education program and faculty. There have been informal preliminary discussions with a faculty member in the Department of Early Childhood Education regarding the feasibility of this study.

This first study has additionally provided the opportunity to involve a Graduate Student Research Assistant (GSRA) who also rotated through the ECDC for her developmental training over a year ago. We anticipate this line of research at the ECDC will provide a fertile environment for future GSRA's and DNP students to engage in their capstone research projects. In fact, two of our second cohort of DNP students will be indeed conducting their capstone research study at the ECDC and looking at healthy weight, nutrition and exercise for these

children. Their study will involve looking at the existing data from the current study that has been generated this summer, and developing interventions/educational material and sessions for the parents related to healthy nutrition, weight balance and activity utilizing evidenced based interventions.

These developmental experiences with the FNP students in the ECDC transcends routine classroom assessment techniques, and the collaboration with the ECDC has involved some assessment components. It is during the physical health assessment course for pediatrics that my students rotate into the ECDC for the developmental experiences. Each semester of this course, I give the students a formative midterm evaluation and routinely, the students rate this component of the course, the hands on developmental experiences, as the most beneficial of the entire course. Without the collaboration with the ECDC, these experiences would not be possible.

As with any other curriculum modifications, there have been some stumbling blocks along the way that have now been molded into stepping stones for future students within the course. For example, this hands on developmental experience has been moved from spring (around May) to August, just before the Fall semester begins, so that the actual assignments/assessments are due much closer to the actual experiences. The students report this facilitates their learning of this concept. The assessment components include the students writing up the developmental experience just as they would if they were the pediatric provider in an office providing a well-child exam including developmental assessment.

A future area for interdisciplinary collaboration between the Department of Nursing and the Early Childhood Development Center includes the FNP students providing, under the direction of the board certified and licensed FNP faculty, physicals for the children of the ECDC and possibly offering these physicals to the children of the university student body and the Flint area.

These are only a few examples of the opportunities available to faculty at the University of Michigan-Flint to involve students in interdisciplinary collaborative teaching, learning, service and research. It is exciting for faculty and students to have these educational, service, teaching, learning and research activities available to them.

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January 23-24, 2014

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In preparation for these events, the TCLT will be hosting a Book Talk Series. Faculty registered to participate in one of the sessions will be provided a complimentary copy of the book.

To register for one of the Book Talks, please contact Sandy Alberto at salberto@umflint.edu or phone (810) 237-6508.

Fall 2013 Book Talk Series

Thursday, Sept. 26, 2013
11:30 am - 12:45 pm, MI A-B, UCEN

Wednesday Nov. 6, 2013
11:30 am - 12:45 pm, Ontario Room, UCEN

A reading guide for the text also is available.
Please contact the TCLT to receive yours today.

Quad-POD (Professional Organizational Developers) is a consortium of leaders from the four institutions of higher education in Genesee County and includes Baker College, Kettering University, Mott Community College and the University of Michigan-Flint.

Why Collaborative Teaching?

An Assessment of Merits and Methods

Words of Introduction

Absorbed by an interest in collaborative teaching, four relatively new faculty formed a Marian Wright Teaching Circle and spent a year researching the literature, analyzing various models, and assessing pros and cons. Then they collaborated on writing this summary. All four came to the topic with a range of experiences, some good, some bad, but a gusto for the possibilities – especially for interdisciplinary collaborations. In assessing the challenges, they conclude, “Whether playing the role of the enlightened or the enlightener, instructors should be willing to...recognize that teaching is not just about guiding students. It is also about teaching each other as faculty.”

By Erica Britt, Assistant Professor, Department of English
Sarah Lippert, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Visual Arts
Kevin Tang, Assistant Professor, Department of Biology
Bénédicte Veillet, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy

Introduction

Over the course of the Winter 2013 semester, several of us worked together as a Marian Wright Teaching Circle to address the issue of collaboration in teaching, consulting scholarship on collaboration, and discussing its benefits and challenges. This topic sprung naturally from the fact that those who participated are all relatively new to UM-Flint, and for such new faculty collaboration often is more difficult to achieve than among established veterans, and requires a more concerted effort; further new ventures sometimes are slower to develop. Under the circumstances, collaboration is one of the most effective ways for such faculty to investigate student needs and possibilities for innovative teaching. In this article, which is meant more as an *amuse-bouche* on the issue rather than an exhaustive exposé, the participants of this teaching circle will outline some of the practical and theoretical issues that we considered. We aim to do so by touching on both the lofty and practical aspects of collaboration in teaching, many of which are bound to the current issue of the *Scholarship of Teaching's* theme of assessment. Many of the issues and examples discussed are age-old features of academic life and discourse; yet, this article seeks to challenge readers to think about the potential benefits of collaboration, whether in established or less-traditional modes.

To begin, we will ask the most obvious question about collaboration: what is its inherent value, if any?

Collaboration—Why Do It?

Why collaborate? At the most general level, faculty are motivated to collaborate for the same reason that they are inspired to adopt or try out any “non-traditional” pedagogical approach; it seems to us they do it because they believe that the alternative

approach will be beneficial, at the very least to students, and in best-case scenarios to students *and* faculty.

First, collaborative teaching has the potential to *broaden* student learning. The collaborative classroom is, by its very nature, more likely to be truly inclusive of different disciplinary perspectives. In more traditional classroom settings, students can, of course, be exposed to a variety of viewpoints, which may be expressed by fellow classmates or described in textbooks or articles, and then discussed in class. Collaborative teaching, however, allows for students to recognize, within the context of a single course, that different *instructors*, each deserving of equal respect, can in fact approach the world and knowledge from significantly dissimilar perspectives.

Similarly, collaborative teaching can deepen student learning. A team of teachers does not merely bring to the classroom more perspectives and knowledge than a single instructor ever could, but also these teachers interact in the classroom, thereby creating the inevitability that they might sometimes disagree in front of students, which fosters a certain level of cognitively-fertile ambiguity (Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, n.d.). Depending on the topic, and on the disciplinary backgrounds of the teaching partners, a collaborative classroom can help to emphasize for students an important fact: there are problems that admittedly have no clear-cut, one-sided, easy answer.

Furthermore, collaborative classrooms are more likely to expose students, again within the context of a single course, to multiple *pedagogical styles*, in turn making it easier to reach them with different learning modes. Teaching partners might, just like a single instructor could, decide to use a number of

pedagogical approaches throughout a semester; but, the very fact that the team teachers are themselves likely to approach instruction in a new way, as a result, may increase the success and variety of pedagogies within the classroom.

Finally, collaborative teaching can enhance *active* learning, “changing students from passive recipients of information given by an expert teacher to active agents in the construction of knowledge” (Goodsell et al., 1992). Traditional classrooms tend to give the sense that the instructor is the expert knower and the student the passive recipient of a set body of knowledge, which is constructed by experts. Collaborative classrooms, however, highlight the existence of various, equally respectable “expert” perspectives (and the disciplinary subjects that are still up for debate). They are thus more likely to give students the opportunity to think of themselves as active contributors to, and builders of, knowledge.

It is worth noting that collaborative teaching has the potential to also be beneficial for the collaborating teachers in the ways just mentioned. Working with other instructors offers the opportunity to *broaden* the learning of each participant; after all, each of the members of the teaching team will bring to the classroom a unique knowledge base, even if he/she comes from the same discipline. The collaboration that goes into designing a particular course and planning the individual lectures or discussions will emphasize, *to the members of the teaching team too*, the prevalence of ambiguities within, and between, fields.

And finally, each instructor is more likely to stay *actively engaged* with the collaborative class. Just as it is easy for students to settle into passive recipient roles in the classroom, so it is possible for faculty to settle into their “expert” knowledge-disseminator roles. Collaboration is more likely to turn teaching partners into active learners, as they, like their students, are exposed to the pedagogical styles of their colleagues.

Why collaborate, then? Teaching collaborations can, it seems, not only broaden and deepen student learning, but also provide an opportunity for teachers to do the same for their own learning, potentially turning everyone in the classroom into a pursuer or constructor of knowledge. On the practical side, the opportunity for peer evaluation at the end of the collaboration provides further assessment value to the venture.

Models of Collaborative Teaching

Having established that collaborative teaching is likely beneficial to both faculty and students, let us turn to the question of how to do it. While the term “team teaching” has been used in a number of ways to describe teacher collaborations in secondary education settings and in colleges and universities, we follow Wadkins, Wozniak, & Miller (2004) and use team teaching as an umbrella term for an instructional approach that involves two or more instructors in the design and/or implementation of a course. There are a number of ways of implementing *team teaching* that include the following: collaborative teaching,

parallel teaching, station teaching, tag-team teaching, and the coordination of guest speakers.

In the collaborative approach to team teaching, more than one instructor is present for each class session. With this type of instruction, also described as cooperative teaching (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989), interactive team-teaching (Helms, Alvis, & Willis, 2005) and co-teaching (Waters & Burcoff, 2007), both instructors may be responsible for the content of instruction. However, depending on the specialization and strengths of each instructor, the instruction team may be flexible about which instructor, if not both, takes the lead in delivering each day’s lesson (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989). For example, in the most interactive type of collaborative session (referring to interaction between faculty) both instructors remain at the front of the classroom and co-facilitate the delivery of the content for the day’s lesson (Kluth and Straut, 2003; Helms, Alvis, & Willis, 2005). In a more moderate variant, one instructor may lead the discussion while the other assists, or complements, the instruction, by attending to the immediate needs of the students (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Sileo, 2005). At the other end of the continuum, one instructor may take a more passive role and serve as a silent observer, offering his/her viewpoint on the materials only when asked by students (Helms, Alvis, & Willis, 2005). In this more passive model, the observing instructor may also meet with the leader after the class session to discuss how the materials were received by students, and to develop course assessments, such as quizzes and exams (Flanagan & Ralston, 1983). Critical to each of these variants of the collaborative approach is that both instructors are present at each class session, allowing the other to remain connected to how learning unfolds throughout the semester. This is also useful for non-quantitative assessment, such as TK20 and other measures, given that two observers judging whether learning objectives have been met has the potential to be better than one.

Two other models appear in the literature. The parallel and station models of team teaching also engage both instructors in each class session, yet maximize instructional resources and allow for a higher level of student-teacher interaction. For example, in parallel teaching, one class is split into two or more equal-sized groups of students. The instructors then divide up and teach each group the same lesson, or different lessons, depending on the course’s goals. These parallel sessions are beneficial in that they reduce the class size and offer more opportunities for student-teacher interactions, particularly when students are developing hands-on experiments and activities that need guided instruction. In the station approach, activities and content are provided at separate stations in the classroom, while groups of students move from station to station completing activities. In this method, both instructors are free to move around the classroom, listen to student conversations, provide feedback, and check with students who need additional clarifi-

cation (Kluth and Straut, 2003; Sileo 2005).

Unlike the previous three approaches, the tag-team and coordination models do not require the presence of all instructors for each session. For example, in the tag-team teaching approach, also described as rotational team-teaching (Helms, Alvis, & Willis, 2005), different instructors take the lead teaching specific sections of course content, and not all members of the “team” are present for each class meeting. In contrast, team teaching can also involve the coordination of multiple guest speakers. Here, one instructor arranges for multiple guest speakers to teach specific sections of the course that match their areas of specialization (Wadkins, Wozniak, & Miller, 2004).

In the end, no matter which format of team teaching one adopts, significant thought needs to go into the working dynamics of the teaching collaborators, as both positive and challenging experiences are inevitable, requiring that certain potential pitfalls of team teaching be negotiated.

Negotiating Different Teaching Styles

Uniting diverse teaching styles is a significant challenge in a team-teaching scenario, but it also represents an opportunity, as it exposes both students and instructors to a breadth of teaching methods that may allow all involved to learn more effectively (see above “Collaboration—Why Do It?”). A.F. Grasha (1994, 1996) describes five teaching styles: expert, formal authority, personal model, facilitator, and delegator. This system is by no means the only taxonomy of teaching styles, (e.g., Fischer and Fischer 1979; Pratt 2002), but the Grasha classification system is commonly used and is the one we will use for our discussion. In describing the philosophy and attitude that define each approach, Grasha (1996, p. 154) notes that each comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. The *expert* “[p]ossesses knowledge and expertise that students need”—the instructor’s vast reservoir of information and skills is a resource that students can utilize, but may at the same time be intimidating. The formal authority shares information through carefully-structured objectives, expectations, and rules, while maintaining clear communication and providing constructive feedback—the structure gives students clearly-established and unambiguous paths to successful learning, but may be too inflexible for all students and situations. The *personal model*, or demonstrator, “[teaches] by personal example”—the establishment of a model of thought and behavior allows students to directly observe and emulate a trained specialist, but also, explicitly or implicitly, enshrines a “best way,” which students may not feel that they can achieve. The *facilitator* focuses on the teacher-student interaction, acting as a guide for the student to develop greater independence, responsibility, and critical thinking—flexibility is the strength of this approach; however, the method is time intensive and may not be appropriate in all situations. The *delegator* works to “[develop] students’ capacity to function in an autonomous fashion”—this encourages students to act as

independent learners, yet not all students are equally prepared for and capable of operating with extended autonomy. Grasha (1996) is quick to warn that individuals should not be expected to fit neatly into one of these five categories; instead, any one teacher will display a mix of all five teaching styles to varying intensities.

Stylistic choice in teaching is less a deliberate selection and more of an outgrowth of the instructor’s personality and temperament; how we teach is a reflection of who we are (Eble 1980; Grasha 1996). As a result, instructors will bring a unique but complex spectrum of teaching styles to any collaborative endeavor. Difficulties in integrating teaching styles usually do not arise from conflicts on specific pedagogical methodologies, as instructors are typically open to new ways of presenting information. Rather, difficulties are more likely to arise from disparities in how to execute that pedagogy, specifically in terms of the degree of structure and organization in the teaching process (Silver and McGowan 1996). This aspect of teaching style differs by individual and varies along a spectrum, ranging from highly-structured to highly-spontaneous. It is clear from the five teaching styles listed above (Grasha 1996) that some are inherently more structured, whereas others are more spontaneous, and that those instructors who value structure will tend to gravitate toward specific teaching styles (e.g., formal authority), whereas those who value spontaneity will likely prefer certain other modes (e.g., delegator). Although there is no “correct” mix of organization versus spontaneity, team-teaching efforts are more likely to go smoothly when the instructors share similar views on the level of planning and coordination needed for a course (Silver and McGowan 1996). Even if two instructors are dissimilar in their styles, they can still be an effective teaching team, as long as there is consistent communication about their responsibilities and expectations, so as to reduce potential friction caused by conflicts that may arise during the course. It might be okay, as a hypothetical example, for instructors to work at opposing hours and paces, as long as each is aware of what to expect from the other, and when to expect to be able to communicate. For instance, one teacher might prefer to communicate via e-mail, and the other by telephone or texting; or, one is fine with being called at home at all hours, while the other’s sleeping infant would not appreciate a 2 a.m. call. In sum, the mundane nuances of working together, including professional and personal boundaries, sometimes need surprisingly concerted and conscientious effort to avoid or resolve potential conflicts.

Certainly, integrating two different teaching styles, no matter how similar they appear, poses practical problems. However, these hurdles are not insurmountable if each teacher is capable of an honest appraisal of his/her teaching tendencies, and is able to articulate his/her expectations for the conduct of a class with other members of the team. Successful instructors, regardless of teaching style, should be able to communicate and adapt, so

that potential differences can be addressed. This type of interaction not only deals with predictable problems, but also sets up a framework for handling the unforeseen.

War Stories and the Ethics of Assessment in Collaboration

When contemplating what would be the most useful information to include in this article for our peers, we certainly drew from a few experiences that were valuable, if not always enjoyable, and we felt that a few anecdotes about past learning moments were appropriate. As teachers, we have experienced scenarios with fellow instructors that warrant mention, because we recognize that both our challenges and successes inform positive change. The examples below speak to the 'real-life' obstacles that made us better collaborators; they address differences over grading continuity, and varying standards or working methods, for instance. These 'war stories' also point to the types of issues that some of us have encountered, ranging from the big ethical questions to more nuanced interpersonal concerns.

Whether at UM-Flint or elsewhere, each of us has experienced some form of collaborative teaching, and in differing formats. For instance, some of us have taught in courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels, where the course was designed and led by two instructors throughout the semester, and where leadership duties alternated, and grading was shared. Others have co-taught by taking on individual sections and grading for part of the semester, or alternatively by sharing leadership of the classroom at the same time. In some cases, we have navigated these collaborations out of obligation, and in others we have volunteered to do so.

Although it may seem obvious that one learns from experience in teaching, this is perhaps most true with the unexpected aspects of collaborative teaching. At the outset of such opportunities, it is often the case that one enters into such commitments, willingly or not, with rather pre-conceived notions about prospects for the collaboration's success. One might ask, "How am I going to tolerate this person for a whole semester?" Alternatively, one might naively think "I like this person—everything is going to be great." Either scenario is likely to be fraught with the unexpected.

The success of collaborative teaching arrangements often hinges on assessment, because no other issue can be so divisive between collaborators as how to plan, undertake, and complete assessment. If the faculty members come to their teaching experience from diverse disciplines, training, or ethical standpoints, they may experience impact even on the most traditional and basic forms of assessment, such as grading. For example, a worst-case scenario might involve a collaborator who is detail-oriented and fastidious about communicating expectations

in syllabi, whereas the other teaching partner prefers to avoid committing to course structure in the syllabus, and chooses to 'divine' grades at the end of the semester. For the latter, spreadsheets and calculators are alien tools; grades are to be assessed by assigning a letter at the end of the semester that reflects the overall performance of the student in the eyes of the instructor, or rather whatever he/she can remember of his/her abilities. In this scenario, how do the instructors navigate the vast differences that lie between their approaches? Even if this chasm could be bridged, how does one explain to students how they were assessed, and how such differing factors in their grades were manifested quantitatively?

An even more serious problem arises when the methods of assessment are inconsistent. In this second scenario, let us imagine an instructor who uses a rubric, and one that does not. It is hard enough for teachers to agree on a rubric for assessment in programs or curricula, but how is collaboration impacted when instructors differ on whether to use one in the first place? Rubrics in the most conventional sense are internal calibrators of fairness, and gauges for having met learning objectives. Through experience in grading and course design, instructors become

adept at developing evaluative tools, some of which are tied to intuition. Yet intuitive 'internal' rubrics run the risk of failing to expose inconsistencies in an instructor's method. In this second scenario, if one instructor relies solely on such an 'internal' and largely-intuitive rubric, the method behind a given grade cannot be substantiated or homogenized to promote consistency in grading between the two instructors, or from one student's work to the next. As such, it becomes much more difficult for the intuitive grader to explain his/her system to his/her teaching collaborator, and even more challenging for the pair to relay comprehensively any justifiable grade or assessment to their student. Further, if grading differs greatly between instructors, but both are teaching throughout the semester, sharing the podium, so to speak, is the answer for both to grade everything and factor the average, or should instructors be responsible for grading solely items that they disseminated? This conundrum, so well known to collaborators, demonstrates why assessment is inextricably tied to collaboration.

As a final example, consider a scenario in which the collaborative pair of instructors is further challenged by geographical differences in assessment. It is not uncommon for faculty in higher education to come from diverse international systems. Not only do methods of assessment vary across the United States, but they are considerably diverse between nations. A minor example exists in the grading system used between Canada and the US. Grades are significantly lower in the former country, where a passing grade is 50%, and an -A begins at 80%. To compensate for this, Canadian applicants to US institutions

The success of collaborative teaching arrangements often hinges on assessment, because no other issue can be so divisive between collaborators as how to plan, undertake, and complete assessment.

instructors differ on whether to use one in the first place? Rubrics in the most conventional sense are internal calibrators of fairness, and gauges for having met learning objectives. Through experience in grading and course design, instructors become

usually are given a 10% bump in their grades. This is a fairly well-known and fixable difference, but what happens if the *responsibility* for assessment also varies? Another time-honored tradition in assessment is the graduate defense, where advisors guide, but test, advisees through elaborate measures of accomplishment. Yet, despite the global popularity of theses, dissertations, and defense protocols in graduate programs, faculty are often unprepared for the collaborative dimension of serving on a master's or doctoral committee. As many a graduate student could probably attest, nothing is worse than when advisors fail to collaborate seamlessly in the assessment of a student's work. For instance, let us imagine a pair of international collaborators coming from incongruent expectations of each other's responsibilities in advisory instruction at the graduate level. In some systems, for example, graduate advisors are expected, if acting as the student's primary advisor, to tend not only to the advisee's conceptual arguments, but also to the style and format of graduate writing; this work is of course followed by such an advisor presiding over an oral defense. However, advisors in other systems abroad do not always actually participate in their student's defense, and may not even see themselves as responsible for getting involved with the mundane details of style and formatting. In the latter case, external reviewers officiate over the defense, obfuscating the typical advisory duties known to faculty in the North-American system.

As we have all experienced, one does not need to go to a different country to find out that instructors, advisors, and educators will often fail to agree on assessment practices. Despite these situations described, which as noted reflect real experiences of members in the teaching circle, it is perhaps because of these potential conflicts in collaboration that it offers such a vital opportunity. As has been already noted, how better to learn as an instructor than to be exposed to new ways of doing things? Whether playing the role of the enlightened or the enlightener, instructors should be willing to embrace such learning moments, and recognize that teaching is not just about guiding students it is also about teaching each other as faculty. Naturally, one may or may not want to repeat a negative collaborative experience, but fear about what may transpire should not undermine one's willingness to engage in collaborative ventures.

Conclusion

Like any choreographed event, collaboration necessitates sensitivity to a partner's direction and pace. In spite of the potential challenges, it is often likely to bring about a new sense of connectedness to fellow teachers. It is important to consider which form of collaboration will be most beneficial for both the instructor and students. The best collaborative experiences, as described here, will be those that embrace the true spirit of collaboration, which is to bring together a diversity of experiences, methodologies, and perspectives to the learning process. The purpose of this article, and of the teaching circle's objective, has been to work in a small way towards certain aspects of this insti-

tution's mission, including the notions of engaged learning and dedication to teaching. We hope that the institutional culture of UM-Flint will continue to build upon embracing collaborative teaching, while still supporting the highly-specialized knowledge that comes from scholars instructing their students.

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The Missing Piece: Intersection of General Education Outcomes and Undergraduate Student Research

Words of Introduction

Evolution of the UM–Flint’s General Education Program has one missing link, according to Political Science Assistant Professor Dana Dyson. That link, she contends, is attention to “the research track between the instructor and the student.” Here she offers a system for documenting clear and readily observable links between GE objectives and undergraduate student research options. Noticing and honoring these connections are important steps, she suggests, for many good reasons – among them changing University culture and aligning the tenure and promotion process more closely with stated institutional goals.

By Dana D. Dyson, Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science

Introduction

Public demand for written standards, measurable outcomes, and accountability has driven the standards movement far beyond secondary education and into higher education (Hernon et al., 2006)¹. The mandate is simple -- institutions of higher education are required to demonstrate effectiveness in teaching and to hold departments accountable for the material being taught within specific disciplines. Disciplines are encouraged to analyze student-learning outcomes and produce a feedback loop to improve the quality of teaching and student learning. Regional accrediting organizations are asking colleges and universities to embed assessment into their organizational culture. Yet, changing the culture requires that adequate incentives be provided to students, faculty and staff (Kuh, 2008; Palomba and Banta, 1999). This short essay examines my experience with the general education assessment process and highlights my discovery of what is missing. The research track between the instructor and the student does not seem to be fully incorporated into the General Education (GE) Program. As such, it is missing from the University’s culture and the tenure and promotion process.

Assessment Process in Political Science Department

In the fall of 2008, I started teaching at the university and immediately began to work with my colleagues on developing an assessment tool for POL120 [Introduction to American National Government and Politics], a GE course. It was a perfect fit for my research interest, which included identifying and measuring the relationship between available monetary

and non-monetary resources and K-12 student educational outcomes. Given that the federal No Child Left Behind policy drove the assessment and accountability movement, the interconnection between politics and educational policymaking made sense to me.

In general, political science lagged behind other disciplines in developing a systematic means of enhancing student learning and assessment within the undergraduate curriculum.² However, I learned that the Political Science Department at UM-Flint was an ‘early adopter’ of the campus-wide move toward program assessment. Over a 10-year period, assessment results had led to some changes in curriculum, and some faculty had adjusted how their courses were taught in response to the discussions that accompanied the assessment exercise. A plan was developed and put into place in the late 1990s and was significantly modified in 2000. An annual assessment with seven learning outcomes and an associated scoring rubric were developed, with portfolio student work as the primary documentary evidence. What was needed, however, was a systematic course-level evaluation of introductory-level courses, while maintaining the existing student portfolio as a key element in the existing assessment work of the department. The new university-wide Social Sciences designation for General Education added greater urgency, as well as energy, to this perceived need. The short run challenge for our department was to synchronize the existing program-specific learning outcomes with the newly adopted GE system. The designation had created a demand for more detailed measures for political science courses that serve the GE program. This was not seen as a new imposition, but as an enhancement of the existing goals of the political science program. After considerable discussion

² Deardoff, Michelle D., Kerstiin Hamann and John Ishiyama (2009) eds. *Assessment in Political Science*. American Political Science Association State of the Profession Series, Washington, D.C.

¹ Excerpts taken from conference paper by Dyson, D., W. Laverty, and D. Munroe, “Gen Ed on Our Minds: What Can Assessment of “Introduction to American Government” Tell Us about General Education Outcomes?” that was presented at the American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference, 2011.

and research, we settled, in principal, on a pre-post assessment instrument.

We were encouraged by the work done by Engstrom (2008), Champney, and Edelman (2010), who used pre- and post- testing in a quasi-experimental format across multiple sections of introductory government courses as the basis for assessing student learning. We elected to replicate this method in a number of ways to assess how student learning was shaped by changes in substantive content and instructional method. The structure of the assessment process generated significant faculty discussion as we identified several issues (e.g., instrument development, implementation phase, creating student incentives). Selecting an appropriate instrument with an acceptable set of assessment questions that would allow students to demonstrate familiarity with basic factual material often encountered in an introductory American politics class was a first step. Clearly, finding a single approach to assessment that would overcome different content and teaching approaches presented problems. In the end, faculty recognized that the pre- and post-assessments' central goal was to measure whether students' scores improved after having spent fourteen weeks in the introductory course.

Several other issues had to be resolved for the implementation phase of our departmental assessment. The first question that arose was how to administer the instrument to three classes. Should class time be used to administer the instrument? Individual faculty members were given discretion as to how long the pre- and post-assessment instruments would be available to their class. The second question dealt with whether we should establish a standard time frame across classes. Students in one class may have had 3-4 days, while students in another class may have had 5-7 days to take the assessment. Again, we left this to the discretion of the instructor. There were other issues that affected the implementation process; however, the extent to which these factors influenced student performance was unable to be determined.

Yet, another obstacle became evident: How do we incentivize students to participate in the assessment process? Faculty attempted to address this by providing incentives to students to encourage full participation. For example, in the first semester the assessment was deployed (fall 2009), one professor counted the assessment as two (2) participation assignments, which equates to approximately 1.5 points of a student's final grade on a 100-point scale; then, for taking the post-assessment, a five point bonus was offered for student's final exam score. The same incentive was offered in winter 2010; however, three students calculated that they only had to take the post-assessment to earn the extra credit: they scored between 5-10 on the 50-question assessment. Thus, the incentives were only partially successful, as in some cases, students found ways to take an assessment, perform poorly, and obtain the extra credit. Still, we continue

to parse out this issue and hope that students will take the assessment more seriously and perform well in the future.

Overall, we found that the preliminary examination of our efforts to implement the pre- and post- assessment of the introductory American Government course highlighted a number of problems at the course and program levels. They illustrate, however, the important positive outcomes that can result from an integration of the needs of department/course assessment while integrating the need for an assessment of GE. As mentioned above, faculty entered this particular assessment process as skeptics. No previous attempt had been made to measure changes in knowledge or learning. Thus, this project was initiated essentially as an informal "pilot study." Faculty had few, if any, expectations about what might be gleaned from the investment of their time and energy and there were no specific expectations regarding how students might perform or not perform. As we moved forward, however, we came to acknowledge that the pre-post method has its limitations as an experimental design, such as the fact that it does not capture the whole picture of student learning. In the end, we were successful in developing a GE assessment process and we will continue to reevaluate and enhance it

So, What is Missing?

My experience with working on the general education assessment made me aware of the fact that although there has been focus on developing and implementing GE outcomes for undergraduate coursework, little has been done on developing GE outcomes for undergraduate research (UR) projects to assess learning relative to the student's experience. More specifically, I found that what was missing in the assessment of undergraduate GE was a parallel type of formal mechanism for developing and assessing learning outcomes for the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP). The UROP is designed to support collaborative research experiences between the faculty and students in an effort "to foster a culture of research."³ Students gain hands-on research training to enhance their college experience and faculty get to mentor enthusiastic and highly motivated individuals.

Mentoring students is central to the University's mission and is critical to the growth of students and to the university. It is also central to my own growth as a scholar. Instructors who invest time and energy into mentoring students in the research endeavor often find that they not only develop future research and career opportunities for their students but also further their own research agendas. For me, mentoring students in the UROP is rewarding in a number of ways. First, it provides an opportunity to employ innovative teaching strategies that extend beyond the classroom. Individualized teaching allows me to engage students in a deliberative learning process that

³ Retrieved from University of Michigan-Flint, Office of Research website, Mission Statement 05/31/2013.

produces immediate measurable outcomes. For example, students are free to inquire about specific in-depth questions, which classroom time constraints cannot always accommodate. These questions often incite more questions and possible future research. Students share what they are doing with other students, which generates additional interest in the instructor's research. Even students who are not interested in engaging in research may become interested in taking a course with the instructor.

Another reward for me is that individualized learning supports pedagogical experimentation through a holistic approach to learning. In this respect, the student and instructor can explore the learning experience through a host of meaningful opportunities. For example, I have conducted and presented research with several of my research assistants. A few students worked with me on researching a school district that is engaged in developing exceptional and innovative methods for improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students in Suttons Bay, Michigan. In another project, five other students traveled with me throughout fourteen neighboring counties to measure the comprehensive legal services needs of low-income Americans through the Legal Services of Eastern Michigan. Moreover, I have collaborated with my research students on paper (and/or poster) presentations at Meeting of Minds (MOMs) Undergraduate Research Conferences, the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) in Missoula, Montana, the Michigan Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) in Lansing, Michigan, and the Race, Gender and Ethnicity Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Finally, the students developed skills in data collection, survey development, data analysis, telephone interviews, and face-to-face interviews to name a few. They completed the PEERRS certification, and several completed the Qualtrics (survey development software) training through the Office of Research. These skill sets are a tremendous boost in helping to give our students hands-on experience and in preparing them for graduate school: They become more marketable and competitive in both admissions to graduate school and job searches. According to Susan Albertine (2010), currently the Vice President, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), a marker for success in Liberal Arts Education is "Evidence that students can apply the essential learning outcomes to complex, unscripted problems and real world settings."⁴

Writing about these events reminds me of a story that one of my research assistants shared regarding her experiences. She stated that she applied for a position as the Director of Public Health. She was not sure of her odds given that she had just

graduated from the University. Much to her surprise, however, the organization hired her for the position. She learned that one of the prime reasons was because of her work as a researcher and her success with preparing for, submitting to, and presenting at conferences. Ultimately, she decided to pursue a medical degree instead of starting her career at that time; yet, her story sheds light on the spoils of participating in a student-faculty partnership and on the value of her newly acquired skills.

Proposed General Education Outcomes for Undergraduate Research

One of the primary goals of higher education is to teach students how to apply their new knowledge and understanding of how the world works in terms of problem solving (Kuh, 2008). This is especially true and necessary in our rapidly changing global environment considering the fluctuating shifts in our market economy. In such a climate, students need to acquire knowledge and develop skill sets, which are both sustainable and transferable. Increasingly, research experience is becoming one way higher education can prepare its graduates and is a viable option for students who are seeking more or greater opportunities to expand their know-how and future career prospects. The core purpose of a strong liberal arts education is to equip students with the tools that will allow them to realize such opportunities. The benefits of student research are well-documented (Bauer and Bennett, 2003; Chandra, U., Stoecklin, S. and Harmon, M., 1998; Russell, S.H., Hancock, M.P. and McCullough J., 2007). Institutions that develop and implement undergraduate research opportunities cultivate and promote a sense of self-esteem in their students. The student must develop critical questions about empirical observations, and then, attempt to make sense of them. By its very nature, research is designed such that the researcher develops, creates, produces, analyzes and synthesizes, in addition to applying theoretical assumptions to real world situations. The process empowers and stimulates intellectual agility.⁵ How, then, can the university assess this form of student learning? We need a supply of evidence of meaningful experiential learning outcomes. In other words, we need clearly stated goals and objectives for measuring learning outcomes in the undergraduate research experience.

My work in attempting to capture outcomes of student research began to suggest many connections with the goals of the General Education Program. A chart combining GE objectives and Undergraduate Student Research Outcomes emerged from these considerations (Table 1) Here is what has evolved so far, demonstrating, in fact, many relevant links and showing how undergraduate research might become part of the assessment process, both accentuating GE objectives and providing rich evidence of our students' learning. This is

⁴ Albertine, Susan. (2010). High Impact Practices and Integration with UM-Flint's General Education Curriculum. UM-Flint 4th Annual Assessment Summit, (p. 29). Flint, Michigan.

⁵ Association of American College and Universities. "Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College." National Panel Report (2002, 21-24). Retrieved from AAC&U May 31, 2013 at <http://www.greaterepectations.org/pdf/GEX.FINAL.pdf>.

TABLE 1
Link between General Education Objectives and Undergraduate Student Research Outcomes

Goals of General Education	Objectives of General Education	Outcomes of Student Researchers
Integration into the Learning Community of the University of Michigan-Flint	Reflect on one's own learning processes Demonstrate facility with research methods Demonstrate the ability to think critically Demonstrate the ability to think creatively	Discuss research, findings, and lessons learned Employ research methods to conduct research Develop literature review and research proposal Develop literature review and research proposal
Enhanced Communication Skills: Written, Verbal and Non-Verbal	Produce competent written work Participate in dialogue that involves respectful and careful listening Use visual or non-verbal tools to enhance and decode messages	Produce a conference paper or a poster presentation Present research at a local, regional or national conference Develop PowerPoint slides to present and showcase research
Enhanced Breadth and Interconnectedness of Knowledge	Demonstrate knowledge of culture and the arts, social structure and process, and the physical and natural world Demonstrate knowledge of economics, finance, and quantitative literacy; health and well-being; and science and technology Use multiple perspectives and methodologies to analyze real or hypothetical problems	Synthesize data to create new knowledge and understanding about how the world works Analyze data using qualitative/quantitative analysis methods Use varying theories and concepts in the analysis
Engaged Citizenship: Local to Global	Investigate the nature of citizenship Apply knowledge to complex issues such as social justice, globalization, economic growth and distribution, environmental sustainability, public health, etc., in increasingly broad spheres of influence	Discuss the impact of the research on citizens locally and globally Apply research findings to examine complex problems

Source: Compiled by the author.

potentially important supplement to instruments like the pre-post tool.

Challenges in the Development Phase

Many faculty members offer valid criticisms that resonate strongly with me about engaging undergraduate students in research. Faculty members invest an overwhelming amount of time and energy into their scholarship. It almost seems unreasonable to expect them to take on the added weight of engaging students in the process. While learning how to juggle teaching, research, service and student research projects, I have experienced several challenges. Perhaps, my greatest

challenge has been learning how to balance the auxiliary responsibilities associated with student-faculty partnerships (e.g., record keeping, absences, documentation, reviews, feedback, debriefing, scheduling). Engaging in undergraduate research is an enormous undertaking when one considers that the University and the subsequent support system are still in the development phases. Investing time and effort into securing resources, managing students, navigating the bureaucracy and handling external vendors is an intense and cumbersome process, which depletes the actual time that the faculty has to conduct research. Yet, transforming our general education

assessment process by developing educationally specific outcomes may make the process less arduous, help us to identify more supports, allow us to continue building, developing, and sustaining a research university culture while facilitating UR as catalyst of the tenure and promotion process and salary decisions (Agarwal, 2010).

Conclusion

It is my hope that this brief synopsis of my experience with general education assessment and undergraduate research will engender a rich discussion about the development of GE outcomes to measure student success in undergraduate research. I believe that this is doable. Assessment can have an immediate and a positive impact on programs, in addition to being sustained over considerable time, when it is empowering and proactive. We can turn negative viewpoints about assessment into positive outcomes by embracing the idea that empowerment is proactive. Assessment can provide evidence for substantiating requests for resources, driving efficient decision-making in terms of creating the means and methods for increasing student retention and graduation, in addition to supporting student learning and student satisfaction (Deardorff, et al., 2009). Students can benefit from the assessment process in that the feedback loop can provide them with the necessary information to enhance their role in the learning experience.

There are silver linings. Overall, as I assess my students' research work, it is clear that the process of assessing their learning mattered for both my students and me. I am continually encouraged by finding new sources of assessment evidence; for example, each semester I now offer a space for summary evaluations on our Blackboard site. My students offer many comments on our Blackboard site where my students comment about how much they have learned through their research activities – while also noting how hard it is! A time consuming and laborious process initially, over time the benefits of assessment seem to outweigh the costs. It helps to measure the experiences or knowledge that a student brings into the classroom and compare that to the experiences and knowledge that a student acquired after participating in learning activities. Participating in student assessment is rewarding for me because it helps me to observe systemically what my students are or are not conceptualizing about political science theories. Moreover, I am able to discuss the results in my tenure binder to demonstrate teaching effectiveness. Given that assessment worked for the course-work track, it may work equally as well in the student research track.

At the University, we have accomplished a lot toward transforming and transcending general education assessment and having the courage and fortitude to embrace the process. Without measurable outcomes, the effect of faculty engaging in student research in terms of the tenure promotion process is negligible. The link between general education objectives and

undergraduate student research outcomes mentioned above may serve as a usable template. Future questions may include; how could we assess and measure the valuable work that faculty does in working with our students on research projects? What outcomes do we desire? How can we help to expand, improve and sustain our research projects through UROP?

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Why?

Words of Introduction

After D.J. Trela announced last year that he was stepping down as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, we knew that we wanted him to speak at the April Celebration of Teaching. He ultimately agreed, and we were so moved by his remarks that we asked him to submit them to this issue of the Scholarship of Teaching. Here is his address, with some modifications. "However much we struggle, however often we get sidetracked, however much we curse the darkness, remember what we are about," he writes. "...we are about the enlightenment of the human spirit, the opening of the human mind." Thank you, D.J.

By D. J. Trela, Professor
Department of English
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, 1999-2013

"When a manager with a reputation for brilliance tackles a business with a reputation for poor fundamental economics, it is the reputation of the business that remains intact."

--Warren Buffet

This is a sturdy platform that Jan Worth-Nelson, our beloved Thompson Center Director, has constructed for me to speak from this afternoon. I thank her, and you for persisting after lunch--it is a beautiful day that we have had far too few of this Michigan spring, it is Friday, it is end of semester, and almost everyone can think of half a dozen things she might prefer to be doing at this moment. I am the only thing that stands between you and the weekend, or possibly even the summer break. Your presence here speaks to your commitment to the craft of teaching and to the mission of UM-Flint. Thank you, and please know that I have sacrificed a goat to the rhetorical gods in the hope that you will find my remarks worthy of your time.

Why "Why?"? Well, Jan told me I could talk about anything I wanted. She also said she would need a title. "Why?" seemed provocative without committing me to anything in particular. This complements how I tend to prepare formal remarks for occasions like this one. My habit in preparing more formal remarks like these is to mull a lot before I do any writing. Phrases start to emerge as I mull, my reading becomes a bit more focused as themes and ideas begin to populate my brain, and I start drawing a brain-blueprint from which to construct. As I think back over a writing life, I have always worked this way—it is rare for me to consciously build a detailed outline. Rather, I concentrate like the devil on formulating a meaningful thesis. Once I have done that, my writing tends to be better, because it is more purposeful and focused. Note that I did not say that the writing becomes easier. It still takes time, thought, effort.

While I would like very much to share with you some reflections on teaching in keeping with today's theme, recall that I am a Dean with no teaching responsibilities. So talking about teaching to you experts would be presumptuous. I can tell how,

as a Dean, I have tried to approach the support of teaching. I have done my best to listen to all of your ideas, and I have at times encouraged particular ideas and sought support for them. I have worked to provide and institutionalize support, because--let's face it--what we value is not what we say we value, but what we say we value and also fund. My support has been financial, moral and psychological. Otherwise, I have tried to stay out of your way. I've had my biases, but I've been frank with you about them: I've supported academic assessment, supported general education reform, supported a variety of new programs, including Energy and Sustainable Systems and Integrated Science, and also supported more rigorous and searching methods to assess the quality of teaching so that when it comes time for major reviews or promotion and tenure we are not locked into the tyranny and limited value of student evaluations of teaching. So please add to my biases the belief that the quality of teaching is best assessed by multiple carefully conceived assessments of it. One size does not capture all.

Since I have nothing to teach you about teaching, I will focus my thoughts on what has been a long, and as I finally have time to realize--a tiring--but hugely rewarding deanship. I want to talk about UM-Flint, its meaning and importance to me (and I hope also to you), and where I hope this institution will be headed in coming years and decades. As I share my thoughts with you, I ask you to keep something vitally important in mind: In universities, you faculty, and you staff, are the primary agents both for stability and continuity here, and also for positive change that ultimately comes to pass.

Now, I can understand and expect from many of you a cynical, disbelieving response to what I just said. After all, it's Deans or Chancellors or Provosts that have all the power! They can make changes, move budgets around, build things, whatever. But in the higher education world that I've known, and worked in for nearly a quarter-century, I've never seen a single act of will by a member of the administration result in sustainable, meaningful change that was not also supported by

the faculty. I'll give you a non-Flint example. Where I used to work, Roosevelt University in Chicago, once had a Dean (not me) who forced through the College a restructuring that moved us from Departments to Divisions. I actually ended up leading one of those Divisions. This decision was never an overly popular one though, the grumbling never stopped, and in about a decade, this change was reversed by a successor Dean. It didn't happen overnight. I'm sure it took discussion and agitation, but an unpopular and seemingly unworkable change that had been imposed was turned back. Faculty, unlike administrators, are far more likely to take the long view, but faculty are far less likely to realize the power that comes with longevity. But it's the long view that wins. If you take nothing away from my talk this afternoon, please take this to heart: you are the agents of permanent, positive, institutional change. Not me. Not the Provost. Not the Chancellor. Not even the Regents.

Here's a Flint example. It's 2004, many of you here today were here then, and we had an enrollment downturn coupled with a substantial reduction in state funding. We had layoffs, lost positions and there was no pay raise. Faculty called for many things, including an institutional strategic plan, which we did not then have. Chancellor Mestas had been on record as being unsupportive of strategic plans, but due to faculty agitation, he finally agreed to such a process. That first plan led to a number of changes in priority that affected administrative hiring, student recruitment, program development, the structure of our budget. Now, nearly ten years later, we have a successor strategic plan in place, strategic plans are common in the College and in our Schools, and in other programs and offices. It's hard for me to imagine this institution ever again proceeding without one. And faculty brought it about, even if Chancellors, Deans or Directors take credit for them.

What's my point? Why is this important? A primary lesson I have learned is the ability of an engaged faculty to shape institutional destiny. Of the Civil Rights act of 1965 Senator Everett Dirksen said, "There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come." In academia, there is nothing so powerful as a genuinely motivated faculty. The change that sticks comes about only with its broad concurrence. The flipside, of course, is that bad things can and do happen, and they can last, if you are not paying scrupulous attention. This is not just something I believe, but it is a recurring truth I have witnessed. As Dean, as I have realized what I have just described, I have worked to achieve faculty concurrence for all significant changes I felt would benefit us. No doubt there have been occasions when I could or should have consulted at greater length--we all make mistakes--but much as I may have wanted to in some circumstances, I've done my best to avoid acting arbitrarily or without consultation.

Before I speak about UM-Flint, I have to talk briefly about myself, since who I am and how I have evolved has a lot to do

both with why I am here, and also with why I have stayed in the same position for so long--why I have found it so congenial to stay. And remember, "The child is father of the man." If you would know me, ask where I came from. Advance apologies if anything I say is a repeat of earlier information to any of you. My late father used to say, "I never lie. I just tell stories." Here are some of mine.

I'm a working class kid, born and raised on the south side of Chicago. Some people are surprised by that since they say I come across as polished. I'll leave the question of polish to you, but whatever might be there is clearly a product of my formal and informal education, rather than an accident of birth. We lived in a brick bungalow in the densely populated neighborhood of West Englewood, knew nearly all our neighbors, shopped at the general store across the street, and on hot summer evenings hung out on our front porches where we drank iced tea until it got dark and the fireflies came out.

Although it was a big-city existence, it also was sheltered, even parochial. An urban existence is not a passport to sophistication, or even to a liberal education. At the time Chicago was a deeply segregated city. My own neighborhood would witness the phenomenon of White Flight in the late 1960's and early 1970's, at which point my parents moved us all to the suburbs. My people feared diversity. I went to parochial, in this case Lutheran, schools through high school. I had no outlets for knowledge or wisdom outside the schools I went to, the neighborhood I lived in, or the relatives I visited with. With two exceptions. The first was the independent reading that I did, and I did a great deal of it. None of it was terribly disciplined, but it tended toward the historical and the literary, at least once I got over my Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mystery phase. Second: My grandmother's second husband was a farmer in southeastern Wisconsin. We visited them there on summer weekends when I was a boy. At the time I thought everyone's grandparents lived on a farm. Grandma was a wonderful cook who had at one time operated a catering business in the Chicago area. Word of her talents got around, and she assisted a local husband and wife who had their place in the country where they spent weekends and summers. Ruth and Al Dreier were modest, humane folks who had done well in life, retired early, and become world travelers. Ruth also was a wonderful cook and enjoyed learning my grandmother's Danish specialties. This acquaintance led to a friendship between my family and the Dreiers that lasted until their deaths. I loved hearing their stories of travel to far-away places, was enraptured to find that Al had been a personal friend of the poet Carl Sandburg, and enjoyed walking their gardens with them, or just sitting and talking with Al in his cluttered, book-lined study. Their stories generated an ambition in me to mirror their experiences, travel like they did, become wise in the ways of the world as I felt they were. Life had given them a patina that as a teen-ager I wanted for myself.

The fact that today I like scotch, port, and gin and tonic over beer may partly be attributable to the Dreiers--these are the family friends, now passed on, who inspired me. Also, Randy Repic, from whom you heard earlier today, has given me a basic tutorial in the wonders of bourbon, just as I have tried to enlighten him about single malt. I attend opera and the symphony, like to act in Shakespeare plays, garden and cook, have never in my life watched a football game from start to finish, and am a diehard Chicago Cubs fan, believing every spring this could be the year that we win the world series that we haven't in more than a century. (This probably is the most irrational aspect of my existence.) I have been attracted to traveling and to cultures other than my own for decades in ways utterly unique in my family--again, I thank the Dreiers. My parents never really wanted to go anywhere more exotic than Las Vegas or that waiting room to heaven known as Florida, but I honor them for supporting my own ambitions, different as they were from their own. Even as a boy I wanted to go to Europe. After all, it was the continent three of my four grandparents had come from. I first traveled there when I was sixteen, and was told by an aunt I was the first Trela to go overseas in over 50 years. This virus for more "exotic" travel seems to have infected me alone of my family. I owe most of this to Ruth and Al. I am grateful never to have been vaccinated!

The term "working-class" that I used earlier deserves an asterisk and a footnote. (After all, I am a scholar, so what would life be without footnotes!) My parents graduated high school, married young, and my dad worked at odd jobs before learning to be a roofer, and deciding, along with my mother in 1952, to strike out on their own. Trela Roofing Company and its motto—"Have one 'On the House'"—was born. So while Dad worked with his hands by day, he served as a salesman in the evenings, and Mom kept the company books and answered the phone all day long. Their working class background and mine have been tempered with capitalist overtones. We had good years and bad years, and while no one in my family has gotten rich in the roofing business, an increasing handful of them have earned honest livings, bought houses, paid taxes and sent their kids to college, as a result of the collective efforts of what is now Trela Roofing and Remodeling. After 61 years my brothers and nephew manage the company, and at nearly 87, my mother still writes the checks. A few years back I gave up my own company stock to my nephew. I am proud of the success and longevity of this family business, now in its third generation.

While of my family I am the least involved in the company, roofing was constant summer (and at times winter) work for me. And it pervaded our family life. I've done tear-offs on 90+ degree days when the surface temperature of the roofs was probably closer to 110. I've also been on rooftops in December and January when my hands and fingers were so numb with cold that I've felt nothing when my roofer's hatchet hit a thumb

or finger rather than the nail it was intended for. (When your hands eventually warm up, believe me, you'll feel the pain!) Work through a Chicago winter, and the inside job of a Dean, with little to no heavy lifting, even on its worst days, becomes a sort of blessing!

We always ran the business out of our home. In the earlier days, we had only one phone number for business and personal calls. On a day-to-day basis, everyone in the family had to learn how to deal with customers who usually called, but sometimes rang the front doorbell. If my brothers wanted to talk to their girlfriends, they often had to head down to the payphone on the corner. Why? Well, a customer might call and want an estimate. The phone frequently rang during dinner, but in an era before answering machines were common, Dad would get up from the table and pick up the phone. Customers came first.

When the phone rang, we knew to say: "Trela Roofing!" It needed to be cheerful. The customer wanted an estimate? Then we asked, "May I please have your name and phone number?" and "Would you mind telling me how you heard about us?" Sometimes we had to diffuse the anger of a complaint--"I understand you are upset, so please tell me what would make this situation right in your eyes?" That sort of response, learned at an early age answering phones in a Chicago business, has helped me immensely as Dean. It helps move situations from complaint and irritation to possible problem-solving. It also puts the complainers a little off balance. Instead of defensiveness, they get unexpected cooperation.

To round out my roofing reminiscences, over a life of 54 years, I have learned and forgotten much, but there is one proud memory that will never leave me. I am six years old. It is early evening, after dinner, on an early summer evening. My mother has gone across the street to talk with a neighbor, my brothers are playing ball in the alley behind the house, Dad is on calls, so our bungalow is empty except for me. When the phone rang, and I hoped it would, I knew how to answer--"Trela Roofing!"--what information to take down, and how to write it in the call books we kept at both extensions in the house. I will never forget my mother's praise that evening. I had "written so neatly!" I had become a part of the company.

Why is this part of my background important? I learned a kind of responsibility and loyalty to an organization that was both family and business at an early age. I took pride in the product we provided. I also learned that customer satisfaction is what keeps a small business going. I learned that word of mouth can be more important than advertising. I also learned that sometimes when the customer truly isn't right, it might just make more sense to pretend he is.

Now, let me say a word here about that dreaded term, "customer satisfaction" in an academic context. I learned its importance while working in a family business, but I've also come to see how it does appropriately apply to the realm of higher edu-

caution. We do have an obligation to be efficient and thoughtful in how we both identify and serve our students' needs--whether through counseling services, a recreation center, high impact practices designed to improve retention, getting our grades in on time, scheduling courses at times convenient to students, etc. We are receiving fewer dollars than I think we should from the state, and more dollars from our students and their parents than many of them can afford. We have an obligation to use every last dollar as efficiently as we possibly can. However, just as customers could not tell my brothers or me how to install a roof properly, students don't have the right to tell a teacher or the University how or what to teach. Nor, of course, does their payment of tuition entitle them to a particular grade. Trela Roofing warrantied its roofs for fifteen years. We here at UM-Flint want to be able to warranty an education for our students that lasts them a lifetime. We know how to do this as well, or better, than any other institution of higher education in the state.

While I was not the first in my family to attend college, I was, like many of our students, and perhaps like some of you here, the first to graduate. Both my brothers stayed with the family business, but I always aspired to college. Why? Learning fascinated me. As did ideas, words. I was curious. I loved to learn things. I also tended to be small for my age, wasn't particularly athletic, so studying and earning good grades was a means by which I could distinguish myself, apply myself. I liked the feeling of cracking codes, unraveling mysteries. It made me feel that I had grown, and grown meaningfully. A college degree in history spurred me on to graduate work in English. An author I read in my first quarter in college ended up becoming my dissertation topic five years later. The discovery bound up in original research inspired me.

In my professional career, although I have adjuncted, and lectured and post-doc'd, I have worked primarily at two institutions over the past twenty-four years: Roosevelt University in Chicago and here at UM-Flint. I've been fortunate in both choices as the institutions have helped shape my own values--Roosevelt, as a faculty member and incipient administrator, and UM-Flint in refining for me the worth, value and necessity of public higher education to our society.

So why was Roosevelt such a generative experience for me? To answer that, you need to know something about it. Think for a moment about how colleges or universities come to be. If public, they are created by legislative act or Constitutional article, and, at least until recently were generously subsidized by annual appropriations. Private colleges or universities generally had endowed sources of support--whether John D. Rockefeller in the case of the University of Chicago, or numerous religious denominations in hundreds of campuses across the country. Roosevelt University is virtually unique in that it was founded not by a donor, and not by the state, but by faculty.

The story goes that Edward Sparling, the first President,

was serving as Dean of what evolved into the City Colleges of Chicago. He was asked in 1945 by the Board of Trustees to provide information on the campus' number of African-American, Jewish and female students. The way the question was posed suggested there were too many in each category already, and that the Board was interested in imposing quotas. Dean Sparling refused to answer the question, and resigned his job, as did a cohort of similarly outraged faculty. They all went out and did what I think would be virtually impossible today: they started their own university. Think about the guts it took to do that! Thus was born Roosevelt College. Admissions were based on merit, not race, gender or religion. Faculty had a strong role in institutional governance, and during my ten years there I served on most of those committees, including as a faculty member elected to the Board of Trustees that formally governed the University. Roosevelt taught me many things, including what a joyful thing a truly diverse classroom can be. But above all, it instilled in me a profound respect for faculty participation in governance. This Roosevelt experience is at the core of who I am as an academic, and as an administrator. I'm certain it's what allowed me to serve all of you for fourteen years as your Dean.

So why, if Roosevelt was so great, did I choose to come to UM-Flint? Many reasons. I saw affinities between both institutions' values. It was the University of Michigan. I didn't necessarily feel ready to be a Dean, but presumably the Provost and search committee thought that I was. In short, I was asked to come here. On a more personal level, I was ready for a change, I was also recently divorced, in the process of coming out, was dealing with my first on-again-off-again boyfriend, and at the end of my current administrative appointment at Roosevelt. I remember thinking at the time, "How much more stress would there really be by making one or two more major changes in my life circumstances? By taking another job, and making a major move?" Getting to yes for me was about being willing to take a risk, and giving myself permission to fail. I finally asked myself, "What is the worst thing that could happen?" The answer was that if I did fail as Dean, I would be "forced" to teach and conduct research, both of which I found deeply fulfilling. More than that. Both of which I loved. When I finally asked and answered the right questions, I realized that I couldn't lose. Now, fourteen years on, I can summarize UM-Flint, and Flint, in just a few sentences: I've never had a better job, I've never lived in a better place, and I've never had better colleagues or friends. Some of you, when I interviewed you for your positions here, may have heard me say the same thing.

Why has UM-Flint been so generative for me? Let me start with a quote that expresses some truths and values better than I can in my own words. I came across an editorial by John Churchill, the secretary of Phi Beta Kappa, an honors society that focuses on the advancement of the liberal arts. He wrote:

It is time to reassert plain facts. College is not only about

training for jobs. It is about citizenship. It is about shaping oneself in a community into a fully-realized adult person. It is about learning to cope constructively with questions of meaning and value. In a democracy, we need to take as many of us as possible, as far as possible, down that road.

UM-Flint has taught me not just the value of good citizenship, but our society's vital need for it. I have not learned this, by and large, from my fellow administrators. During my time here I have worked under or along side four Chancellors, five Provosts, six Health Professions Deans, four School of Management Deans, with a fifth due in a few months, and seven Education and Human Services Deans. It's hard to learn from folks who barely have time to unpack their pots and pans before they move on! I have learned my most important values from the many of you who model good citizenship to your students and colleagues in research projects, First Year Experience courses, service learning courses, supervision of internships, in Maize and Blue awardees and our entire Honors program, through revised curricula that incorporate engagement or undergraduate research into their programs. I have learned from Gary Pace and Nathan Oaklander, both of whom were dedicated and productive faculty for forty years. And I have learned from junior faculty whose career here has barely begun, but in whose efforts I see the growth, vitality, and visionary future of UM-Flint. My list could go on, but suffice it to say that when I take in the talents, vision and strength of our faculty and staff, what I see is profoundly good, positive, and, at its best, transformative. And what I see excites and energizes me. Because at the end of the day we are not just preparing chemists or nurses or business majors or political scientists. Of course we're doing that, but also we're preparing our students for a life of citizenship. Our graduates will be, and most probably already are, taxpayers. They are voters. They are citizens. They will elect the legislators and governors who shape higher education budgets. They will lead non-profit organizations, serve on school boards, become active in churches, synagogues and mosques. Some of them will enter politics and so more actively direct the destinies of this state. And, to repeat what I just said, all our students are citizens. I don't think we've fully realized the importance of the work we do to the future health and vitality of our community, state and nation. We need to do all we can to see that our students become the best-informed, best-educated, most intellectually curious citizens they possibly can be. And I do not care whether these students become Republicans, Democrats or something else, because if we have provided them with the critical thinking and analytical skills they need to negotiate the vagaries and travails of life, we can rest assured that they, as citizens, will be far more likely to make enlightened decisions about our society than not, regardless of what party they may vote for.

I came to UM-Flint with hope - hope that has been realized

far beyond my wildest expectations. For fourteen years I have stayed, and I plan on staying because, quite simply, we get it right far more than we get it wrong. Academics can be highly negative people, and the most popular spectator sports in a bureaucracy, often raised to Olympic proportions, are carping, assignment of blame and finger-pointing. I know as well as anyone that we have a lot of gold medal winners here at UM-Flint!

Let me close by reminding all of us of some important facts. I ask that you take them to heart and ponder them. Fact one: A repeat of what I just said: we are in better shape than we realize. Our fundamentals are sound and I see them growing stronger in coming years. Fact two: As a University we don't reflect on or celebrate our successes nearly often enough. That's why events like this one today are so important. My third fact is both a reminder and exhortation: However much we struggle, however often we get sidetracked, however much we curse the darkness, remember what we are about: Higher Education. Education for citizenship. This is one of the noblest enterprises it is possible for me, and for you, to imagine, or realize: we are about the enlightenment of the human spirit, the opening of the human mind. We are about lighting candles in dark spaces. Every student we can send forward with a UM-Flint education is a positive agent for change in our society. Because we are about educating for active participation in our democratic society. The good that you do lasts a lifetime. I plan on staying at UM-Flint because I see how you embrace and realize our mission statement of academic excellence, student centeredness, and engaged citizenship. I am excited and energized to be your partner in these endeavors.

Finally, when it comes to optimism I realize it's easy to seem naive. But I have faith, and confidence, and I can tell all of you why in one sentence.

Because I look out--and I see all of you.

Contributors' Notes

Christina Aplin-Kalisz has been a Lecturer III in the graduate nursing faculty at UM-Flint for the past eight years. She received her Bachelors of Science in Nursing as a Spartan in 1995, her Masters of Science in Nursing, Family Nurse Practitioner Program, from UM-Flint in 2001, and most recently a Doctorate in Nursing Practice in Educational Leadership from Case Western Reserve University. Her research areas of interest include adolescent health risk behaviors and pediatric obesity. She is currently conducting a study about healthy eating and exercise in preschoolers at the ECDC. She enjoys gardening, travel, her Yorkies and exercise.

Aderemi Artis is an assistant professor of Philosophy at UM-Flint, who teaches the history of philosophy from antiquity to the present, the philosophy of art and the philosophy of science, and, on occasion, First Year Experience. Dr. Artis' primary area of research is Early Modern European Ideas. Outside of work he enjoys golf, pottery, video games, fermented beverages, electronic cigarettes, and moving relatively heavy pieces of iron.

Roy Barnes currently serves as the Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Coordinator of General Education at the University of Michigan-Flint. He has been a member of the Academic Assessment Committee since 2002 with a break between 2010 and 2011. In addition to being deeply interested in the assessment of student learning within our General Education program, Professor Barnes' research interests are in the areas of interlocking corporate directors, social network analyses and political sociology. He spends some of his off hours assessing wine; his current favorite is pinot noir.

Erica Britt is an assistant professor of sociolinguistics in the Department of English. Her work focuses on African American English, style shifting, and identity performance in public speech. She is also developing the Vehicle City Voices project which surveys linguistic variation and collects oral histories about life in Flint, Michigan.

Dana Dyson is an assistant professor in Political Science / Public Administration. Her research interests integrate three areas: public policy, public administration, and American politics, along with a cognate concentration in educational policymaking. She is interested in understanding the factors that influence and improve student academic performance. Her favorite pastime is eating a bowl of something delectable and reading an intriguing book. She has four adult children (Monica, Marsha, Ashley, and Robert Jr.) and a hilarious one-year old granddaughter, Sophia. However, Maximilian (Max), an eight-month old German Shepherd who wipes his feet when he enters the home, plays baseball and talks constantly, consumes her world - the world according to Mr. Max.

Jeremiah (Remi) Holden is a designer – of learning spaces, games, pedagogies spanning multiple contexts, and digital media. Though Remi does create graduate courses and webspaces, he prefers designing as a process, as a means for leveraging relationships among curiosity and ignorance, failure and improvisation. A Ph.D. candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Remi researches the spatial “unsettling” of mathematics teacher education and also facilitates online teacher professional development. As a teacher educator with the University of Michigan-Flint, he is a lecturer with the Educational Technology Master of Arts program and helps to lead the Institute for Innovation in Education.

Sarah Lippert is an Assistant Professor of art history in the Department of Communication and Visual Arts. She specializes in French and British art of the nineteenth century, as well as art of the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Dr. Lippert has been working with students in higher education since 1999, teaching a broad range of art-historical subjects, covering antiquity to the present day. As such, she routinely enjoys opportunities to convince students that a urinal signed by Marcel Duchamp can be art, but that aliens did not build the Great Pyramids of Giza, a wizard named Merlin did not create Stone Henge, and Mary Magdalene is not featured in Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*.

Jennifer Ross is completing her final year as a graduate student in the Master of Arts - English Language and Literature program and as an undergraduate studying dance. After graduating in May, 2014, she plans to enter a doctoral program with the ultimate goal of becoming a university professor. Her interests include reading, writing, dancing, and listening to music.

Kevin Tang is an assistant professor of biology. He studies the evolutionary relationship of fishes. He has been teaching students in higher education since 1996, arriving at UM-Flint in 2011 with degrees from Cornell and the University of Kansas and post-docs at the American Museum of Natural History, Loyola University in Chicago, and St. Louis University. He has taught a variety of classes, ranging from introductory freshman courses to cell biology and genetics to graduate courses in fish biology.

D.J. Trela is the former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, having served 14 years – the longest tenure of any CAS dean in the history of UM-Flint. As detailed in his essay included here, he grew up in a blue-collar family in Chicago and from an early age was part of the family roofing business. His doctoral dissertation, earned from the University of Edinburgh, was on Scottish satirist, essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle. D.J. is an accomplished country dancer, looks distinguished in a kilt, and has hosted several fabulous and hilarious celebrations honoring the naughty Scot Robert Burns.

Bénédictte Veillet is an assistant professor in the philosophy department. She is interested in questions about the nature of consciousness, its relation to the brain, and the character of our first-person access to our conscious mental life. She is a member of the Center for Cognition and Neuroethics, which fosters research collaboration between UM-Flint and the Insight Institute of Neurosurgery and Neuroscience (IINN).

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