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*Good teachers dwell in the mystery of good teaching until it dwells in them. As they explore it alone and with others, the insight and energy of mystery begins to inform and animate their work. – Parker Palmer*

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### **The Mystery of Good Teaching**

Good teaching emerges from professional integrity; therefore, I endeavor to make honesty, reliability, adherence to ethical principles and demonstration of the cultural values of our institution a part of my daily duties as an educator. I delineate my areas of educational responsibility in terms of these values and thereby choose to measure the success of my efforts by my ability to help students function effectively in our knowledge-driven, global economy. Along with meeting (if not exceeding) the learning outcomes of the courses I teach, I am interested in preparing students to:

- Foster critical thinking skills
- Cultivate problem-solving strategies
- Exercise collaboration
- Use diverse technologies
- Participate in their professional discourse community
- Develop life-long learning habits.

My responsibilities as an educator also extend to my colleagues. Strong mentoring relationships with new hires that emphasize teaching methods, research, and service to University and community help to reinforce the concept of their own roles as reflective practitioners. Positive contributions and participation to departmental and academic team decisions, projects, and events are goals I set for myself each semester; moreover, I try to consistently encourage the involvement of others in activities designed to make our students' learning experiences and our overall community of learning better.

### **Engaging in the Mystery**

Teaching is a social act. Education in general is field in which communicative spaces are created because the process of learning requires interaction with others. In the classes I teach, several methods which embrace these tenets of social constructivism, zone of cognitive development, and knowledge-building theory are employed:

#### *Writing as a process*

Students craft a variety of papers using a standard writing process that involves multiple

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drafts. The multiple revisions that are made throughout the process are evidence of their growth as writers. A major component of this process is peer critique. Throughout the semester students share the drafts of their writings with each other. These sharing sessions are aimed at getting reactions to their writing from readers other than myself (their instructor) in hopes of helping them develop a more critical approach to their writing (by reading the writing of others), and cultivating a stronger awareness of audience as they write (as their work is read by others).

#### *Active learning*

Although weekly lectures are always a part of my courses, the majority of class time is focused on activities that require students' active involvement. These active, cooperative and collaborative activities may include partner projects, small group work, whole group discussions, guest speakers, and field trips; each activity is designed to support the culmination of students' demonstration of strategies for reading, writing, and researching within the major project for each course.

#### *Service learning*

Davenport University has always stressed the importance of service to community as a key facet of academic and professional development. Learning through service can be a catalyst for students to establish themselves as contributing members of the communities. It can also help them learn the importance of networking within their professions. Through the service learning projects within my courses, students demonstrate the ability to successfully interact with a nonprofit or community-based organization to generate a quality professional document. Students also showcase their projects and learn important networking skills at an end-of-semester reception showcasing their efforts and appreciation for their community partners.

#### *Collaborative technologies*

Since a great deal of professional communication takes place in cyberspace or workplace intranets, relevant technologies are a major aspect of each course I teach. Along with integrating instruction on the Davenport portal, student Panthermail account, Microsoft Word 2007, Turnitin.com, and the Blackboard learning interface into most courses, we examine and practice using those technologies which will increase students' appreciation for collaborative learning. The most commonly used technologies among my courses include wikis, blogs, and online bookmarking systems like Diigo, where students are able to save the URLs for researched web articles and instantly share them with the class to create a vast research repository on various topics.

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These methods are reflective of my awareness of the current need for our students to not only act as consumers of knowledge, but also as active and collaborative producers of it due to the growing need for graduates to be able to function within more complex, relationship-based business models. Discovery and innovation in the health care, business, and technology industries are the now the result of interactions between many players within and outside any given company. As a result, the knowledge students must acquire prior to graduation now also involves the formation of special social relationships within their professions.

It is my belief that educators should no longer simply deliver content or allow students to access it. Information is something through which and around which people interact; the ways in which I choose to create, integrate, distribute and use knowledge in my classrooms address this. User centered learning that builds a student's capacity to communicate, collaborative and create will help them excel in their chosen profession.

### **Measuring the Mystery**

All instructors are measured by the established methods of their institutions. These measurements are important because the information garnered from them informs the feedback used to shape and improve our teaching methods. At Davenport University, these methods include student evaluations and annual classroom observations and performance reviews; however, my success as an instructor can also be measured in other ways.

Other sources of data through which my teaching performance can be measured include, first and foremost, the evaluations of my peers and colleagues. They better than anyone are qualified to appraise my ability to engage in the scholarly activities of teaching English and Communication. Some measurements that fellow academics and academic supervisors can respond to include my:

- Development of course outlines (syllabi)
- Composition of assignment guidelines
- Integration of instructional technology
- Design of learning activities
- Construction of grade measures

Each semester I carefully review the feedback provided from students and my supervisors with the enhancement of these measurements in mind. Moreover, I endeavor to actively engage within my professional field through membership in professional organizations, conference attendance, and continuous research activities, so that the knowledge I am imparting to students through these peer-reviewed measured is the most accurate and relevant it can be.

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An indirect source of evidence for my teaching effectiveness would obviously also include the employer ratings of those students who have graduated from Davenport University. Although I am currently unable to tap into such employer evaluations, I am able to garner the feedback of the community organizations which partner with my classes in service learning. At the end of every such project, the service learning partner completes a performance appraisal of the student they have worked with; this feedback is reflective of their service learning performance, but it also affords me with knowledge about my overall teaching quality, curricular relevance, and course design. From this information, I'm able to draw inferences about my individual teaching effectiveness in these courses.

### **The Mysterious Rewards**

One of the reasons I chose a career in education was because I believe strongly that service to others makes the world a better place. Service and leadership, for me, are wholly inclusive of one another: Service is leadership. Leadership is service. In order to be a leader in my home, community, and field, I must serve the needs of others. This is important to me for one key reason: I would not be where I am today without those who felt it was important to give their time and offer their expertise to me as a student. Therefore, I must give back what I am able to when I identify an opportunity for positive change.

As an English instructor, I am motivated to teach by these ideals, my love of language, and my desire to help others share in the sense of empowerment that comes from being able to communicate effectively. The most rewarding moments of my career as an educator involve sharing those instances when students grasp the essence of a new idea or express confidence in their ability to communicate it in writing. These instances fuel my enthusiasm for the field and provide the motivation for the necessary hours of lesson preparation, grading and curriculum review.

I respect my students as individuals and strive to treat them fairly with honest regard for the differences that make every class each semester a singular learning community. I also endeavor to involve myself in activities that better Davenport University and I am consistently rewarded for these efforts by the positive interdependence that is exhibited throughout our organization. The greatest recompense imaginable would involve being a part of this amazing environment of leadership and core academic values for many years to come.