

INNOVATOR

New directions in teaching & learning

TEACHING

by President John V. Lombardi

Universities are by definition highly complex organizations with multiple missions. Our research defines us as an intellectual center with a commitment to advancing the state of knowledge and a recognition that only through the extraordinarily difficult task of research and publication can we succeed in improving and understanding our world. Our teaching translates the knowledge gained through research into the organized and structured form required for education. Sometimes, in my conversations around the state, people ask me why we need the organized structure of a university for learning. While all of us can and should learn independently, and while everyone can use a library and gain knowledge while working alone, the purpose of university teaching is not limited to the acquisition of information. Instead, it is the organization and structure of knowledge as much as the information acquired that provides the extraordinary value of a university education.

The university and its curriculum form a model for the organization of knowledge, and its colleges, schools, and departments reflect what we know and how we know it. Our students come to the university not to acquire the bits and pieces of information of interest

today and obsolete tomorrow but to acquire the tools of knowledge that permit a lifetime of using information and acquiring knowledge. We teach the use of these tools in our courses in history, chemistry, languages, or the arts. The tools give the information substance, the structure of knowledge gives the information coherence, and the teacher provides the model for permanent learning. In this process, the teacher is paramount. Anyone can compile information, acquire data, and memorize facts. But we must be taught how to use the information, interpret the data, and evaluate the facts. Good teaching gives students a capacity for self-sustaining learning, a view of the organization of knowledge, and a grasp of the methodologies and disciplines of learning.

Good teachers give us an ability to recognize the related but different methods required to understand chemistry, history, languages, and the arts. Good teachers show us how to know when we know enough and when we need to know more. Good teachers provide us the tools to create and recreate the knowledge we will need throughout our lives.

To do this, our teachers require depth and breadth of knowledge, for the act of teaching presents but

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Message From the Director

The UCET Mission

When I joined the faculty as a new assistant professor, I was warned by a well-meaning senior col-



Dr. Constance Shehan

league that winning a teaching award was "the kiss of death" in terms of a future career at the University. Presumably, winning such an award demonstrated that one had confused priorities and quite possibly misallocated her/his time and energy to teaching rather than to "scholarship."

Clearly, the local and national climate surrounding the significance of teaching has changed over the past decade. To survive in the higher echelon of academia, it is no longer sufficient to be a successful grant getter and a prolific publisher. One must also be a talented teacher. Many of our colleagues, both new and estab-

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a small portion of a teacher's total understanding. Teaching requires preparation because the presentation of this small portion of knowledge must be done in context so that the purpose, focus, and result can be connected appropriately. Teaching requires constant scholarship because the knowledge out of which our classes grow changes endlessly, rapidly, and significantly. Teaching requires time outside of class because the careful evaluation of written work, the preparation of exercises, the creation of class materials, the academic conversations with students, and the curricular linkage of class to class and subject to subject must be done with care and attention.

Within the context of the research university, moreover, teaching gains an added dimension. For the teacher in a research university, the link between the process of discovery and the process of education is close and active, the translation time from research discovery to classroom is short, and the atmosphere of intense excitement and high critical standards that characterizes the research environment inspires a similar intensity in the classroom.

The University of Florida has an exceptional record of teaching performance. Our faculty's work in the education of students is productive and effective. The quality of our students is superb and the quality of our teaching receives constant validation by employers and post-graduation certifications of all kinds. Yet even with this exceptional performance, we have much to learn. We know we need to adapt our teaching techniques and strategies to take advantage of new technologies, we know we need to organize our curriculum more effectively, and we know we need to adapt to changes in disciplines and in the structure of knowledge. This is not news, this is the purpose of the university. This is not something that surprises the faculty, for they have been doing these things as a matter of course.

The Center for Excellence in Teaching offers an exceptional opportunity to enhance these continuing faculty efforts, to support the creativity that is our trademark, and to develop the initiatives that can improve our performance. I expect to learn much from the work of this Center, and I look forward to participating in its activities.

lished, need tools and resources to reach or maintain these expected levels of performance. This is the mission that UCET has undertaken.

The major functions of UCET are to:

1) *Provide orientation, instruction, and consultation about teaching and learning to new faculty.*

Our newest professors are caught in the middle of a paradigm shift. They have been trained at our nation's premiere research institutions and typically have had little or no training or experience in teaching prior to joining our faculty.

Those of us who were trained and hired under the old paradigm had the luxury of learning to teach through on-the-job training. Our newest faculty do not have this luxury. We need to help them excel in teaching from the very beginning of their academic careers.

2) *Facilitate the continuing development of tenured faculty as teachers.*

One of the greatest contributions we can make to our tenured faculty is to provide them with the tools they need to expand their teaching styles to accommodate the increasing diversity in learning styles that comes with the changing colors and voices in our classrooms.

We tend to use the same teaching styles in our classrooms that our professors used in teaching us. We need to increase our awareness of diversity in learning and update our teaching methods accordingly.

3) *Effectively prepare our graduate students for careers as educators.*

Increasingly, the success of our graduate students in the academic marketplace is determined by their demonstrated competence in teaching. We can no longer afford to operate our graduate programs under the assumption that if a scholar has mastered a body of knowledge, she or he can teach it without any additional training.

In this time of change in higher education, the good news is that we no longer have to discourage our new colleagues from committing their time and energy to teaching. We are free to say that teaching well is a pleasure we no longer need to hide.



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