



**Promoting Student  
Transformation at the  
Community College:**

*If Everything Happens  
That Can't Be Done*

**Steven L. Berg, PhD**

**Promoting Student Transformation  
at the Community College:  
If Everything Happens That Can't Be Done**

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**HASTAC**  
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*Becoming Enlightened When Life is Busy*

**Dedicated to  
Lorain Berg**

# Introduction

The title for this book is very straightforward. But why the subtitle?

In his introduction to *is 5*, e e cummings wrote that he is “abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.” Although his poetry might seem randomly put together, his use of spacing, punctuation, and word choice is extremely precise. There are no accidents. Ironically, without this precision, his poetry would lack its excitement and movement.

One of my favorite poems by cummings has always been “if everything happens that can’t be done.” Incorporating references to books and a teacher, this is a beautiful love poem that concludes with the observation “we’re wonderful one times one.”

Teaching with mindfulness requires that we move as close as possible to cummings’ mathematical equation; that one professor times one student equals one transformative learning experience. I say “move as close as possible” because of the undeniable reality that the professor will always be the most powerful person in the classroom. But, as professors, we can use our power to create an approach to teaching in which our students are the primary beneficiaries.

When we apply cummings’ mathematical construct to our classrooms, we enter a world in which we discover that everything happens that can be done because we are working one times one.

For too many community college professors, a pervasive dissatisfaction has crept into too many of our lives. There are many reasons for job dissatisfaction. As one community college professor wrote to me when I asked for examples of the roots of dissatisfaction:

An assembly line feeling of teaching the same class over and over again while having little, if any, ability to getting to know these students while helping them through this part of their academic career. That is not well worded, but I teach intro to [discipline], and only this class now for six years. I don't ever get to interact with the students who take other [discipline] classes



*United We Stand*

except for those who fail my class and for some reason, sign up with me again. I have one office hour and students typically don't come to see me. Even if they did, what can I do? I'm not in much of a position where I am able to help them navigate the system. I have been an adjunct for 16 years. The chance that I will ever get any full-time position, forget tenure, is slim to none. I have no passion for my own work anymore between having no time and feeling stuck and let down by the very system that I'm supposed to be encouraging students to engage with. I feel like the poster child for Marx's alienated worker; sucked dry and waiting to die.

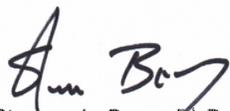
I have redacted the author's specific discipline because what this professor experiences is common among professors of many disciplines.

Unfortunately, most of the advice written for higher education faculty is directed at university faculty members whose priorities, working conditions, and students are very different than those of us who teach in community colleges. Advice that concerns working with "our" graduate students and teaching assistants has no value when a professor does not have graduate students or teaching assistants. Nor do most of us have to worry about balancing research with teaching. Teaching four or five classes per semester (for full-time faculty members) does not leave much time for research, which is not our priority anyway.

Part-time faculty members might "only" teach two or three classes at their institutions, but they might also be teaching two or three classes at two or three other community colleges. And if they are not teaching at other community colleges, they only earn a fraction of the salary of full-time faculty members while working other jobs to make ends meet.

And yet we persist.

Although it begins with a recognition of pervasive dissatisfaction, *Promoting Student Transformation at the Community College* is a book that focuses on how we can persist in our individual classrooms as we work to transform students' lives as well as our own. Although theory is discussed, this is not a book of theory. It is a book that provides specific examples that community college professors—and our university colleagues—can use to make Cummings' mathematical equation a practical reality. At the end of each chapter are practical suggestions for integrating theory into daily classroom practices.



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February 2020

# Acknowledgments

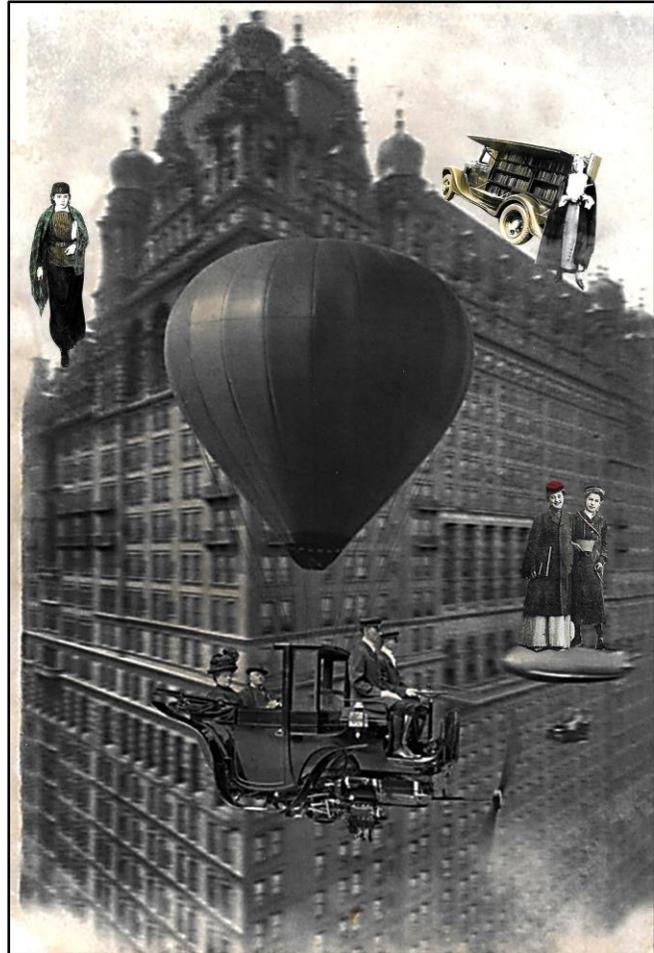
*Promoting Student Transformation at a Community College* has taken years to come into existence. Early versions of most of the essays in the book were initially published on my teaching blog, [By the Teaching of This Truth](#) [formerly *Etena Sacca-vajjena*], or on the [HASTAC website](#) where I also blog. However, I am not presenting rehashed materials. The essays have had significant revisions, some to the point where only the concept under consideration remains.

I am indebted to Deborah Diaek and Cathy N. Davidson who encouraged me to write this book and for continuing to encourage me to “think about it some more” each time I told them “No.” My students have influenced and edited essays as has my husband Riccardo C. Berg. The little dogs who surround me in my comfy chair as I write have also made their contributions—including the one who deleted a chapter after it had been edited. Fortunately, by the late 1980s I had already learned how to do backups.

Many of my former professors and teachers have had a positive influence on me: Mary Lea Schneider, W. Fred Graham, W. Glenn Wright, George Landon, Leeds Bird, Margaret Bird, Victor Howard, Jay Ludwig, and many others. Colleagues including Clark Iverson, Jjenna Hupp Andrews, Alexa Azzopardi, David Grant Smith, Steven Fischer, Josselyn Moore, Jessica Worden-Jones, Aaron Kasthan, Roger Wilson, Terri Wasyl Lamb, Alec Thomson, Kimberly Lark, Roger Winston, Nick Sousanis, Danica Savonick, Meir Bargeron, and individuals I have met through the Liberal Arts Network for Development (LAND), the Michigan Chapter of the National Organization of Human Success (NOSSMi), and HASTAC have pushed my thinking.

I also want to thank Sally *Webb* Eilersen who edited my papers when we were freshmen at Michigan State University. She, Glenn S. Sunshine, Christina Zahn, Gary Segorski, Linda Schmidt, and Ellen Morrison are still part of my life after 40 years.

More than a decade ago, I began to articulate my views through the lens of the Buddha Dhamma, particularly in the Theravada tradition. I am indebted to the Venerable Brahmanagama Muditha Maha



*The Transformed Classroom*

Thera and the Venerable Yatibu Sankichcha Theo for their spiritual guidance as well as to the members of the Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara for their kindness and support.

Corrie Bertara, Lisa Warrick, Susan Adams, Deborah O'Connor, Demos Orphanides, Joseph Miller, Kristin Keyes, Wayne Pricer, and Vivki Dixon have helped make my teaching run smoothly which made it easier for me to do more creative work with students.

Kaysi Holman and William Hunt provided early editorial assistance. Kaysi was also involved in the technical aspects of getting the book into its final form.

Katina Rogers made sure that arrangements with HASTAC ran smoothly.

Finally, I want to thank my brilliant editor Jay Polish who pushed me to be not only a better writer but to gain a more sophisticated understanding of concepts that are important to me and to the field of education. Jay asked probing questions and introduced me to books and articles that improved my thinking. Always kind, they did not hesitate to point out shortcomings in my arguments or examples of where my worldview limited my understanding of broader issues. Not only is *Promoting Student Transformation at the Community College* a much better book than it would have been without Jay, but I am also a better professor as a result of our interaction.

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*There is More to Life Than Surgeons Can Remove*

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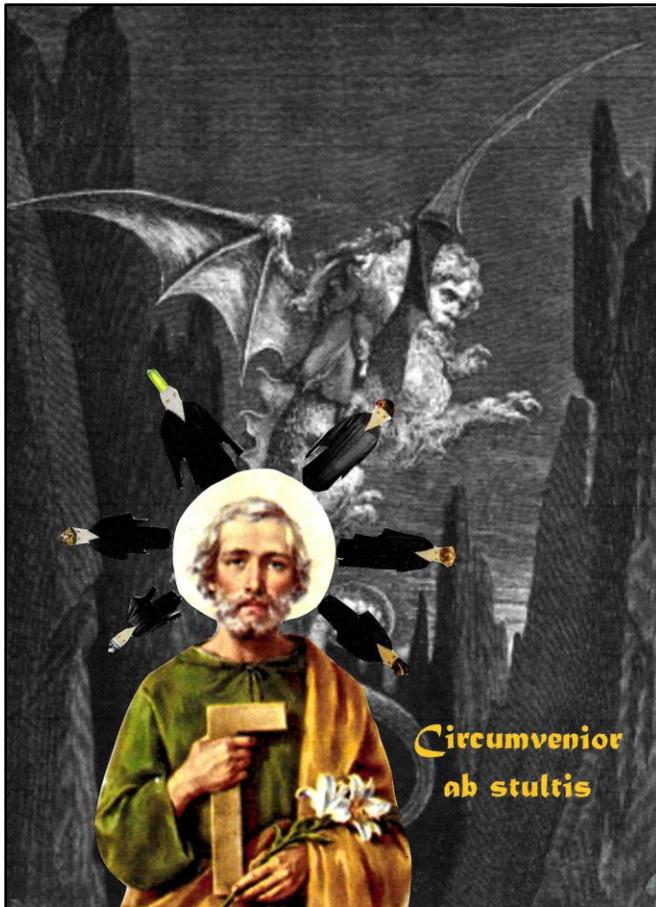
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# Overcoming Pervasive Dissatisfaction



*I am Surrounded by Idiots*

## Introduction

There are times when even the calmest of us want to shout out behind our closed office doors, “I am surrounded by idiots.”

On any given day, it might be our attitudes toward students who are being annoying through their actions or because we did not have a good night’s sleep. It might be the structural constraints at the college or society that make it impossible for them to perform at the level they desire. It might be administrators who do not support faculty members or who enforce foolish mandates that stifle innovation and good pedagogy. It might be bitter colleagues. And, if we are honest, we must admit that, on some days, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”<sup>1</sup>

To avoid pervasive dissatisfaction with teaching, I might need to make changes in myself both in terms of actions and attitudes. This includes changing my expectations of others including students, administrators, and colleagues. At other times, I need to take on

the responsibility of helping students make better choices even when I personally believe that they should have already learned certain life lessons. Sadly, there are times when I need to accept the fact that I cannot force a student to succeed if they don’t have the interest or background to be successful. When coming to this acceptance, I need to make sure that the problem is not a failing on the part of the student. Too often, systemic problems are the root of “shortcomings” I see in a student.

As we consider the issue of student “choice,” we need to be careful that we are not using the concept of choice as a blanket statement to cover all behaviors that we find problematic. Students—especially

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<sup>1</sup> This line is from a 1971 Pogo cartoon that was published on Earth Day in 1971. Pogo is telling Porkypine that the enemy to the environment is each of us.

those at community college colleges and commuter schools— have structural constraints that prevent them from making the “choices” they would prefer. I had an online student whose car died. She began to fall behind in the class because she did not have the money to pay for an Uber to take her to/from work as well as to the library where she used computers to do her coursework. Did she really have a “choice” to prioritize work over class?

Sometimes, an “irresponsible” student is not able to communicate their needs with us immediately. As I was working on the edits for this book, I had a student who had been very responsible in a previous semester begin skipping class and not doing his work. Had I not worked with him in a previous semester, it would have been too easy to write him off as a student making bad choices. However, it turns out that was having some serious health issues which he had not been able to communicate to me. Nor had he communicated that his partner for a project was a good friend of his who was keeping him caught up for the classes he was missing. He was struggling and making some excellent choices to deal with his situation. I just didn’t know it until I approached him.

Part of avoiding pervasive dissatisfaction is not to jump too quickly to the conclusion that students are “choosing” to be irresponsible when systemic or personal issues are actually interfering, forcing them to make the best choices they can under the circumstances. If you don’t have a certain level of income, you can’t pay for car repairs or daily Ubers. And if you are seriously ill, you might not be able to make it to class consistently.

I am a firm believer in venting *behind closed office doors*. As I was revising this introduction, a colleague came into my office, closed the door, and began expounding about people who are thwarting her teaching. Part of the reason that she picked my office was because she knew that she was venting to a sympathetic ear. But, more importantly, she knew that I would not repeat the justifiable criticism she was articulating in fairly blunt terms. After a few minutes, we turned our attention to some silly stories before she returned to her office. She felt better and no harm was done.

We all need a safe space to vent about students, administrators, colleagues, and ourselves. The venting is an important part of a process that can lead to positive change. My colleague will be fine because her venting was brief, temporary, and she will keep a realistic perspective on her situation. What she will not do is become a complainer who only listens to other complainers; a process that would only magnify the negative aspects of our jobs and lead her to live in a pervasive dissatisfaction.

The next time I saw my colleague was when we were both working with incredible students in the library. We might still be surrounded by the “idiots” she had complained about earlier, but neither of us had lost our perspectives. We were focused on students.

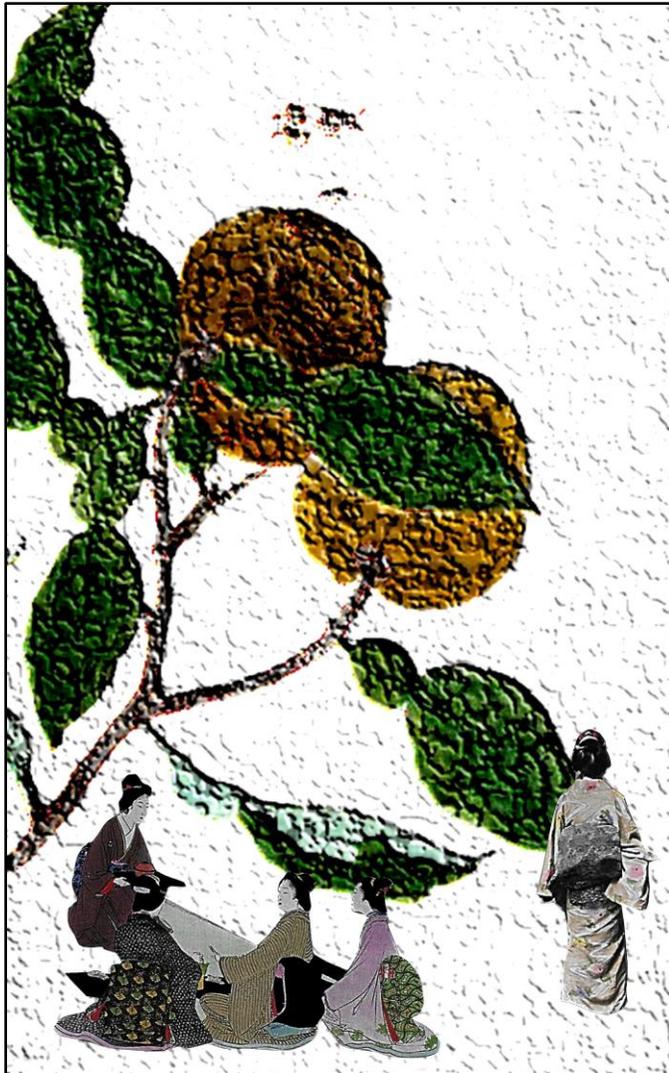
It can be argued that this chapter is venting with open doors, something that I find counterproductive to creating a safe and generative learning environment. For me, the difference between what goes on behind closed doors and acknowledging problems in public is one of degree. Venting is not meant to come to a solution. Public discussion—done properly—has a focus on solutions. Yet, we must realize that socio-political structures do not allow all members of the educational community the same safety with which to address issues in the public sphere.

I have the privilege of being a white, male, tenured professor, who is a union member. As long as I am not writing about LGBTQ+ issues, people generally ignore my sexuality on a public level. While I have a

large degree of safety, the same cannot be said of contingent faculty member, people of color, non-tenured faculty, women, certain religious groups, and others. We need to be cognizant of whose voices are not being heard because they are ignored or are not being voiced.

The college infrastructure can also impact how quickly professors can fall into despair. When I reported to a Dean who was inappropriately changing student grades, it was difficult to keep my perspective; especially after the Dean was promoted to Vice-President of Instruction even after an outside investigator documented the corrupt behavior. Why try to effect change in such an environment? My answer is that our students and colleagues are worth the effort.

The essays in this chapter provide insights on how not to forget that most of our students are wonderful as are most of the administrators and colleagues with whom we work. As long as we can remember that, we are less likely to fall into the pits of despair.



*Tea Under the Yuzu Tree*

## **Trimming the Yuzu Tree #1: Reflection on Our Inability to Help Some Students**

*Watching Dominic trim the Yuzu tree in my cousin's yard, I heard him express his concern that the tree will likely not bear much fruit. This is because the area where it was planted does not provide enough light. As Dominic explained, "It is not where you want it to be. It's where it wants to be."*

Dominic's words provide an insight regarding our inability to reach some students, even though we care deeply about their success.

While I do my best to encourage the success of all of my students, I have had to accept that not all of them are reachable. Some students lack a basic foundational background to be successful without assistance. Some of these students might not have had access to a thriving K-12 educational system. Others might be first generation. And others might be recent high school graduates or returning students who are experiencing college for the first time. We need to implement strategies on a classroom level (as well as an institution level) to assist these students. For example, on the second day of class, I "teach" my syllabus using an

activity developed by Dr. Aaron Kashtan in which I ask students to compare the syllabus for my course with syllabi from their other classes. My focus is to teach students the purpose of the syllabus, how different professors approach it, and why various sections are included.

It is often difficult to determine whether a student is having trouble getting out of the shade or whether they have planted themselves in the shade. A student once made an appointment with me to discuss how to improve in the course. The day before the appointment, he didn't submit the required assignments. On the surface, this might seem to be a student who really doesn't care. But when I asked him why he had not submitted the assignments, he responded that he made a "stupid" decision and didn't do the assignments because he figured he would fail them anyway.

Although I would agree that the decision was "stupid," I can understand why he would make it. I have made similar stupid decisions myself. At a certain point, giving up seems to be the best recourse. Why continue to work when all you do is fail? Fortunately, I was able to recognize that the student was having trouble getting out of the shade and took the time to investigate what was holding him up.

One of my limitations as a professor is that I know that I cannot help every student stuck in the shade. For example, if I cannot get a student to respond, I cannot help them even if they want the assistance. What is important is that I don't assume that a student who makes a seemingly "stupid" decision is signalling that they made a conscious decision to plan themselves in the shade.

I remember one student who was so far behind in the class that there was no reasonable way he could complete his final paper. Fortunately, I was able to give him the opportunity to be successful in the class. In conjunction with my college's Exam-A-Rama, I would meet with students in the library from 8:00 am to 11:59 pm one day the week before classes ended.

This student came to the library to see me shortly after 9:00 am and we discussed his lack of success. After finding out that he had no plans for the day, I told him that if he was willing to work with me, I would coach him through his paper one step at a time. He welcomed the offer, but needed to go home to get his course materials. He left and never returned.

In another case, I tried to work with a student who made erratic appearances and often disrupted the class when she was present. However, she seemed to have a spark of interest. Eventually, we had a meeting with the dean during which I offered to meet with her to help her catch her up on the course. She rejected the offer. She had planted herself in the darkness of venting and had no desire to move to the light. After the meeting with the dean, I never saw her again.

In both cases, my offers to provide assistance were legitimate. Yet, as Dominic might have counseled, "It is not about what I want for the student. It is about what the student wants for themselves." To overcome the pervasive dissatisfaction that can come from a student's "unwillingness" to accept assistance, I need to realize that I cannot know their motives. A counter intuitive decision might make sense as a short term strategy. For example, the "irresponsible" student who did not purchase their textbook might have used the money to fix a tire on their car so that they could drive to campus for class. Unfortunately, we rarely get to learn a student's motivation which might be impacted by psychological, systemic, or other factors.

As faculty members, we need to accept that there is a limit as to what we can do to assist any particular student. We need to remember that, in spite of our best efforts, we ultimately have no control over a student's decisions. We cannot force a student to be present or prepared.

I vividly remember a student in one of my evening classes almost 30 years ago. He attended every class period, but he kept nodding off in the back of the room. Yet he was a dedicated student who truly desired and valued his opportunity for a higher education. The problem was that after a full day of work, he had trouble keeping his eyes open during a three hour class. At the time, my classes were less engaging than they are today, so my pedagogical approach certainly contributed to his difficulty.

More recently, I had a student whose mother had serious health problems. Even when she was present in class, her mind was on her home situation. Because of technological advances, we could use email to help her stay engaged in the course even when she was not present physically or mentally. Also, because of improvements in my teaching—especially having students sit around tables instead of in rows—she developed stronger ties with colleagues in the course who also took on the responsibility of assisting her.

Although I cannot force my students to be "present" in the hegemonic sense of the word, it is my responsibility to offer them as many options for being present as possible. Offering a variety of methods for participation enables my students to show up in ways that are meaningful for them, rather than

assuming the worst and punishing them for not being "present" in ways that are immediately identifiable to me. I know that I often only appear to be physically present and not caring when, during a professional development seminar, we are asked to write down our reflections. Reflection takes time and I cannot do it immediately so I sit quietly while others finish the task at hand. It appears that I do not care to be present, but, later that day or the next, I am recording my thoughts in great detail in my journal.<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, it has become easier for me to accept the reality that for any number of reasons, a student might not do well and it is not always possible for me to assist them. When I almost failed out of graduate school for drinking like a fish, it was not the fault of my professors. Because I was a secret drinker, it was not their fault that none of them recommended that I get treatment for my alcohol abuse. But Dr. Sam S. Baskett did have a talk with me about my poor performance. He did his part as best he could. Even if I had not stopped drinking three months later and had failed out of graduate school, my demise would not have been Dr. Baskett's failure. Dr Baskett was a success because he took the time to care about a troubled student and did what he could to assist me. It was ultimately my decision how to respond to his concern.

While I was fortunate to sober up, over the years I have seen too many people caught up in a cycle of addiction where "just say no" was not a viable option. In one case, I am aware of someone who was unable to enter a halfway until 24 hours after he had been released from a 30-day treatment program. The bureaucracy was essentially sabotaging his treatment plan. Fortunately, someone heard about this young man's plight and arranged for safe housing for him so he would not be on the street without support. If he had not come across a safe house that was not part of the official support system and he drank during the 24 hours when he was left on the street, would it be fair to say that he "chose to drink?"

I have seen similar situations where college bureaucracy fails a student and then blames the student for their seemingly poor choices. For example, an error/delay is made in the financial aid office and the student is dropped from their classes for non-payment. Because they have been dropped, they still need to jump through hoops to get their professors' permissions to add the class late. Until they secure these permissions and are re-enrolled, college policy forbids them to attend class. Did the student choose to fall behind while working to correct the problem?

Unlike the Yuzu tree, students are sentient beings with free will. We cannot uproot them and force them to make good decisions. We can only prepare the soil. But, while preparing the soil, we need to make sure that students are given support to move out of the shade.

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<sup>2</sup> When I attended a college sponsored training on 26 August 2019, we were asked to record our reflections on a worksheet and turn them in at the end of the day. People who did this were eligible for prizes. Even though I did not care about the prizes, I initially felt bad that I would not be eligible for prizes simply because I would be writing my reflections later. Then I noticed that the organizers had taken people like me into consideration. We had a week to submit our notes before the drawing took place. Even though I did choose not to submit my notes to qualify for a prize, it was really my choice and I was grateful that I had not punished because I could not produce meaning work in the moment.

## Judge Judy and Academic Success

*I feel that the dean's assistant doesn't like me. I made a request, and she laughed at me. The next day, I told her that I didn't feel she had treated me well, and she told me that she didn't care. I feel that if I make a complaint to the dean, the dean will take her assistant's side. I don't feel this is fair.*

—Complaint About the Dean's  
Administrative Assistant

My interaction with the dean's assistant took place at the end of a long day when I asked her if there was money in the budget to bring Judge Judy to campus. She laughed and asked if it had really been that bad of a day for me. The next day, as I was leaving campus, I stuck my head into her office and told her that I didn't *feel* she had treated me fairly the day before. That is when she rightly told me that she didn't care. It was just one of those amusing interactions we share.

But what if I had a serious complaint against my colleague? If I began my complaint to the dean with the words "*I feel*," the dean should give me her best Judge Judy impersonation while informing me, "I don't care what you feel." The dean shouldn't be interested in hearing *just* my feelings. She should want me to support my feelings with evidence.

My argument does not totally negate the role of feelings. My point is that they require support before they can be acted upon. "*I feel*" needs to be followed by "because..." It is not that Judge Judy doesn't really care about someone's feelings, it is that she wants to hear the because. "*I feel* my colleague doesn't like me because she will not acknowledge me when I walk into the office" is something that can be discussed and/or investigated.

I do worry that we can be too quick to disregard legitimate feelings; especially if they are rooted outside our own experiences or worldview. I remember receiving an email in which the writer referred to me as "dear heart." I replied that I was uncomfortable by the inappropriate intimacy and requested that the writer refer to me as "Steve" or "Dr. Berg" instead of the more romantic term. In the classic formula of an abuser, the writer responded that to say someone had a romantic heart was in no way romantic.



*Balancing Heart and Mind*

Whether or not this claim is true is irrelevant because that is not what the writer initially wrote. More importantly, my feelings were dismissed because the writer determined that I was wrong.

I remember a student who had taken offense at something I said to her. Had she just left me know what she felt, I would still be baffled by her response. Because she added the “because,” I was able to realize why she felt the way she did. In this case, the issue was my use of the word “issue” which, to the student, implied that she was having certain problems in her personal life. To me, the word was neutral. I was just acknowledging a situation she had mentioned. Without the “because,” we would have remained at an impasse where she was upset with me without my knowing why. More importantly in terms of structural issues that impact students, because she supplied the “because,” I have become more conscious of how I use the word “issue” with students. Arguably, there was nothing wrong with how I used the term. Yet, knowing that this could be a general concern for other students who do not have the confidence to confront their professor, I need to take more care that I am communicating to them effectively.

Judge Judy gives primacy to facts over feelings. But far too often, students know that in the world outside Judge Judy’s courtroom, the feelings of people who are white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, or part of the social elite have their feelings take primacy in rhetorical situations even if those who are not privileged have the facts on their side. Why bring up a concern if you know from experience that your professor isn’t going to take what you feel seriously anyway?

I recently shocked some students when I announced at the beginning of the semester that I was not sure if some of the grading procedures<sup>3</sup> in the course were still working as well as they originally did and that I wanted to know how the students felt. One student responded, “Overall your grading system works and *I respect that you’re open to adaptation, most professors are not as open as you are*. I say we keep the grading system as is” [emphasis added]. Because the question was posed at the beginning of the semester before students had any reason to trust me, I allowed them to post their comments anonymously. None of them took advantage of this opportunity. Even students who argued for modifications signed their names.

Early in my career, I was taught that “feelings were facts” and that we need to acknowledge people’s feelings about situations because those feelings were real to them. The problem with this advice is that even though the feelings themselves were facts, feelings do not constitute factual evidence. Just because I “feel” that the dean’s assistant doesn’t like me is irrelevant. What has she specifically done?

Unfortunately, in today’s marketplace of ideas, I have witnessed an increase in the number of individuals who—regardless of any other evidence—insist that whatever they feel must be accepted as truth. We live in a world where “fake news” is defined as information with which we disagree or which places us in an unflattering light.

I still vividly remember when I responded with factual evidence to counter an inaccurate meme. The person who posted the meme replied, “It doesn’t matter if it’s true. It’s a good quote.” The meme supported his feelings and facts didn’t matter. These cultural attitudes are drifting into higher education.

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<sup>3</sup> I find that the Pass/Not Yet grading system I advocate elsewhere does not lend itself well for the online courses I teach. Therefore, the online courses provide a combination of Pass/Not Yet grading and other procedures.

I once had a student who filed a formal complaint against me because she didn't feel it was fair that I offered to give her an additional three weeks after the course ended to still complete assignments she did not submit during the semester. She *felt* that my actions were unfair because she had other plans for the weeks immediately after the semester ended. Because she *felt* I was so unfair, she demanded that the college provide her with a full refund for the course she had failed. Unfortunately, it does not go without saying that administrators rejected her complaint. Readers of *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* know of cases where administrators have based decisions solely on student feelings regardless of the merits of the case.

The student who wanted a refund is an extreme case. A more typical example is the student who felt I had graded him unfairly when he did not answer the assigned question. My offer to allow him to revise the two paragraph assignment was insufficient because he *felt* he earned a higher score and expected that I give it to him based on his *feelings* even though he admitted that his answer was wrong. In another case, a student filed a complaint because she *felt* I made her feel stupid because I told her that I couldn't help her if she wouldn't read the course materials on which the assignment was based.

Although I joke about Judge Judy proclaiming that she doesn't care about someone's feelings, we need to be aware that feelings of our students do matter a great deal because those feelings are generally based on some time of evidence that they can articulate if we ask them to do so. In my classes, I tell students that not all opinions/feelings are the same; that we made a distinction between educated and uneducated opinions. The criteria for an educated opinion is whether or not it is based on evidence. If someone can add the "because" after they begin "I feel..." they will be taken seriously.

When a student tells us that they feel something, we cannot really turn ourselves into Judge Judy and gavel them down. We need to ask, "Why do you feel that way?"



*Dōmo-kōmo Taking a Class*

## **We Wouldn't Have Taken the Course**

“What will become of young adults who look accomplished on paper but seem to have a hard time making their way in the world without the constant involvement of their parents?”

—Julie Lythcott-Haims<sup>4</sup>

Former Dean, Stanford University

In 2015, Tara Shultz and her parents were in the news after complaining that four of the graphic novels in her English class at Crafton Hills College included nudity, sex, violence, torture, and obscenities. Ms. Schultz characterizes the four novels—which include Marjane Satrapi’s award-winning *Persepolis*— as

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<sup>4</sup> Lythcott-Haims, Julie. “What Overparenting Looks Like from a Stanford Dean’s Perspective.” *Mindshift*. 9 June 2015. Excerpted from *How to Be an Adult: Break Free from the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kids for Success*. Henry Holt, 2015.

“garbage.”<sup>5</sup> While reading news reports about Ms. Schultz and her parents, I was especially drawn to a comment that her father made to reporter Sandra Emerson: “If they (had) put a disclaimer on this, we wouldn’t have taken the course.”<sup>6</sup>

“...**we** wouldn’t have taken the course.”

The plural is problematic. Ms. Schultz is a singular individual, and it is “she” who enrolled in Professor Ryan Bartlett’s English 250 course. Not she and her father. Mr. Schultz’s worldview that “we” are taking the course inhibits his ability to fulfill his parental responsibility to help his daughter develop into a mature adult, who has learned the life skills necessary to function successfully and independently in the adult world. When a parent becomes so immersed with their child, I cannot help but thinking of Dōmo-kōmo, a two headed gray demon from Japan. It is an image both humorous and frightening.

I have had dissatisfied parents who have tried to intercede with me on behalf of their children. Too often, these students are unaware that their parent has contacted me on their behalf. In one instance, my student was not amused when *she* was accused of academic dishonesty that her Dōmo-kōmo mother had committed without her knowledge.

Once, a Dōmo-kōmo father questioned why I had given his son an incomplete and threatened to pursue his concerns about my conduct with administrators. Because the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibited me from discussing his son’s grade with him, I was unable to inquire why he thought it was a good idea to criticize the behavior of a professor who had agreed to work with his son; especially when I could have just issued his son a failing grade. But what most troubled me about the brief exchange was that the father should have been having this discussion with his son, not his son’s professor.

A model of positive parental involvement was exhibited by a mother who sat in the hall outside the dean’s office while I met with her daughter and the dean. Unlike Tara Shultz’s father, this mother realized that “we” were not having a problem; that it was her daughter’s problem and that her daughter would need to fix it. I am sure that mother coached daughter on how to handle the meeting and was there to support her. But the mother rightly allowed her daughter to negotiate her own way in the adult world of which she was now a member. Things worked out well for her daughter.

When I first read the comment by Mr. Schultz, I wondered how long *we* would be taking courses together. Would *we* continue to take courses until graduation? Would *we* accept a job? Would *we* then deal with employment issues? At what point, I wondered, will Mr. Schultz allow his daughter to function as an independent woman. Age 25? Age 30? Never?

High school students do not need to advocate for themselves. They are assigned advocates in addition to their parents. The transition to college can be extremely disorienting to a student who is now

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<sup>5</sup> Schultz comment that “At most I would like the books eradicated from the system. I don’t want them taught anymore. I don’t want anyone else to have to read this garbage” was reported in Emerson, Sandra. “Crafton Hills College Student, Parents Protest Material in Graphic Novels English Course.” *Redland’s Daily Facts*. 11 June 2015. Retrieved 23 November 2018. The case is summarized well in Murphy, Anna. “CA College Student Challenges Graphic Novel Syllabus.” *Library Journal*. 20 July 2015. Retrieved 23 November 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Emerson, Sandra. “Crafton Hills College Student, Parents Protest Material in Graphics Novels English Course,” 11 June 2015.

expected to advocate for themselves. Unlike in high school where parents are expected to be involved in their child's education, college professors are forbidden to discuss a student with their parents unless the student has signed a release form. This release is even required of dual enrolled high school students whom have not yet reached the age of 18.

Like the mother who waited in the hall, Mr. Schultz could have coached his daughter on how to navigate in the adult world instead of treating her like a perpetual infant. Because his daughter was so disturbed by the novels, Mr. Schultz might have encouraged her to consider whether or not being an English major was a good career choice. As an English major, his daughter is going to encounter more novels that address issues in ways that she will likely find disturbing. Mr. Schultz might also have helped his daughter investigate the inconsistencies of her own thinking as evidenced by her Twitter feed.

Unfortunately, because Ms. Schultz was 20 years old when she publicly complained about her professor and the graphic novels he assigned, she will need to accept the consequences of her decisions as the adult she is. Although her father might still infantilize her, the world is going to evaluate her choices as if they were made by a singular adult—not as a child tied to her Dōmo-kōmo daddy. It is this singular adult who will reap the results of her decision to place her complaints about her professor in the public sphere. Three years after her complaint was made public, a Google search of “Tara Schultz” showed her complaint against her professor in the top search results.<sup>7</sup>

Tara Schultz will never be able to escape her past. The pervasive dissatisfaction that this may cause—to her, to her father, to her professor—could have been avoided had her father better prepared her for adult decision-making.

Although I cannot legally talk to my students' parents, I still need to deal with bad parenting. In an extreme case when a father closed my office door while threatening me, I had no choice but to call the campus police. Or when a mother wants to talk to me about her child, I cite FERPA. But, generally, I have to deal with not very effective parenting in the form of Dōmo-kōmo students.

Sometimes, I am able to have discussions with such students about the proper way to approach a professor. There are times when I will respond to a rude email from a student with “If I were in your position, I would write...” but “as your email is written, the only response you can expect is ‘No.’” Once the student emails me a polite email, I quickly reward them.

Modeling responsible behavior can also help students. I once posted an email from a student who complained that I had made an error.<sup>8</sup> Although I mentioned why I appreciated how the student approached me, my main purpose was to let students know that I sometimes make mistakes and they need to be sure to check the online gradebook once I tell them it has been updated. An unintended consequence was that the next student who approached me with a question about their grade used a similar style and approach of the student whom I had complimented.

Instead of increasing my dissatisfaction with bad parenting to the point where it becomes pervasive, I proactively take steps where I can to provide students with the soft skills they did not learn at home.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I completed my search on 2 November 2017.

<sup>8</sup> When I post such emails to the class, I make sure that the student cannot be identified.

<sup>9</sup> Many of these steps are found elsewhere in this book.



*Horticulture and Horses*

## **Of Horticulture and Horses**

During the 1920s, members of the New York literati would meet for lunch at the Algonquin Hotel. Known as the “Algonquin Round Table” or “The Vicious Circle,” they were famous for their witty banter. One day, when Dorothy Parker was given the word “horticulture” to use in a sentence, she responded, “You can lead a horticulture, but you can’t make her think.” Parker found an erudite way of expressing the common cliché, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.”

I think of horticulture and horses while meeting my students at School Daze, an event that is held each Fall on my campus that combines enjoyable activities and

information about the types of assistance that the college makes available to them. Each year, I see several of my students walk up to the event, sign the attendance sheet and then walk away without taking advantage of the opportunity with which they had been presented. For them, it was an opportunity wasted.

I remember talking to a frustrated colleague who had tried to work with a student who had shown up for class every day but sat in the back of the room refusing to participate in group-work and other class activities. The student was present without being present. My colleague can prepare engaging lessons but can’t force students to engage.

Each day after class, I email class notes to students that include a brief summary of the class, URLs that were cited during the lesson, a list of participation points, and a description of the homework. Most students appreciate these updates. Yet I am amazed at the number of students who will miss class and then not consult the class notes in order to come prepared for the next class. I can prepare the class notes, but I can’t force students to read them.

There was one student who emailed me an assignment he should have printed out for class. As a result, he did not receive credit for being prepared for the class activity that was built around the assignment. He expressed his appreciation when I offered to print out the assignment for him after class and still give him credit for having done the work on time. After class, he left campus without meeting with me. I can offer to assist students, but I can’t force them to accept the assistance.

I refer students to our Writing Support Studio, the Learning Assistance Center, academic/personal counselors, academic coaches, and other contacts. Whenever possible, I walk them to the office where

they can get the assistance they require. I can make referrals, but I can't make students utilize the service.

Margaret Price, in *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* rightly argues that we need to rethink the issue of presence. Generally, "'Presence' is usually taken as empirically obvious, and as such an a priori good." But mere physical presence does not mean that the student is engaged in class any more than the teacher's presence means that they are engaged. The "inattentive" student could have a physical or mental illness, a bad night's sleep, or something else on their mind.

I have gone into more than one class in which I warn students that if I appear to me less than stimulated, it is because I am ill. I even remember once when I told my film class that I feared that I might fall asleep during the movie we were screening and that if I started to snore that they should poke me. Imagine a student saying such a thing to their professor! But illness happens to them, too.

This does not mean that physical presence is never a requirement. Sometimes presence is important to the class; for example in a classroom where students are making decisions about what and how things are being covered. A writing workshop might also require physical presence. In those cases, Price advised that "If presence is a necessary component of the class, be direct about that." In my on campus classes, regular physical presence is necessary for success because of the types of classroom coaching and interactions we have. Yet, it is rare that physical presence is necessary on any given day. As a result, in my classes we have an understanding both that presence is important and that life gets in the way. When life gets in the way, we work to help each other catch up on what is missed.

Once I posted a sign on the door of my classroom that I was ill and had to leave campus. I felt bad because I did not, at that time, have a good way to notify students at the last minute that class was cancelled. When I returned to the next class, I assumed we would pick up where we had left off the day before I was ill. It turns out that on the day that I cancelled class, students had continued with their presentations. They were present and prepared and saw no reason that class could not be conducted in my absence. Instead of cancelling the class, they took down the sign.

The students who are "obviously" being irresponsible can lead to faculty despair. Yet it helps to recognize that a student might be pressed by external forces that do not allow them to make the type of responsible decisions we would prefer. As a colleague reflected in a discussion we were having after a student plagiarized in their class:

I've been thinking about it. My guess is that it is often fear [by the student] of something that feels bigger or scarier than getting caught. Fear that they will say it wrong and look stupid if they use their own words. Fear that they can't get it done in time. Fear of stuff that doesn't have to do with us at all — too much pressure at work or at home, or fear of missing out on activities with friends or family because of doing homework....I don't know. I could be wrong. But I like to think most of our students aren't sitting there thinking "I just can't be bothered. And my instructor is so stupid/silly/ busy/whatever that they won't notice..."

I am sure that some of my students think that I am too stupid, too silly, too busy, or too whatever. Others deliberately choose a strategy where they will do as little work as possible to complete their coursework. But other "obviously irresponsible" students are dealing with other issues such as fear that

does not make their irresponsibility so obvious. For example, we know that students are more likely to cheat the closer they are to the deadline. Instead of certain failure for failing the assignment, they might cheat instead of asking for an extension (which they might rightly know their professor will not grant). Students might also choose to cheat because they are embarrassed to ask for help.

To acknowledge that fear can explain why a student might commit plagiarism is not the same as excusing the plagiarism. As I tell my history students, just because I understand why a culture we are studying does a certain thing does not mean that I agree with the actions they are taking.

Sometimes, when life gets in the way for our students, we cannot provide the assistance that will make the student successful. A student who is hospitalized for a mental or physical breakdown might have to drop the course.

For dedicated faculty members, it is frustrating when students will not or can not take advantage of the opportunities we offer to them. But we need to remember that our efforts can greatly benefit students. Maybe we can't force students to do more than sign the attendance sheet, but we can continue to provide possibilities. Furnishing possibilities is part of our responsibility and one that we can't take lightly—even when some students don't seem willing to do their part. We are less likely to fall into despair if we remember that when some students can't do their part, it is not necessarily the case that they can't be bothered or think we are stupid or silly or busy or whatever.

## It Doesn't Matter Does It?

After someone posted a meme in Facebook, one of his friends commented that it was obviously photoshopped. The original poster replied, "It doesn't matter does it?"

I generally do not engage in such discussions, but I couldn't help but comment, "I think it matters a great deal if something is photoshopped and then passed on as a real image." The original poster disagreed. "The point the poster [creator of the meme] made was well made in my mind. I'm sure they were aware that it was a bit fixed."

I was horrified. How is it possible for someone to justify falsifying evidence because the resulting meme agreed with his political point of view? And how could he describe using photoshop to make a substantive change as a "bit fixed?"

This attitude is entering the college classroom at an increasing pace. In an extreme case, I have twice had students falsify email chains that they then submitted as evidence as to why I should change their grades. Both the students filed complaints against me. One of the students went so far as to argue that falsifying an email chain was not academically dishonest because it did not directly relate to the assignment; an argument that was initially deemed to have merit.

Our students live in a country where the White House has no qualms about releasing a modified video to justify taking away CNN reporter Jim Acosta's press credentials.<sup>10</sup> White House counsel Kellyanne Conway replied to criticism of this decision by claiming, "That's not altered, that's sped up."<sup>11</sup> When people at the highest levels of government can lie with impunity, why should we be surprised if some of our students follow their lead?

However, most of the "dishonesty" I encounter in the classroom stems from a lack of broad based reading; not from an intent to deceive. Because students don't have a full grasp of issues, they don't realize that they are citing sources that are not valid. They are passing on the inaccurate information in good faith. Students lack foundational knowledge prior to taking our introductory courses because it is



"If You Are Going To Speak..."

<sup>10</sup> Harwell, Drew. "White House Shares Doctored Video to Support Punishment of Journalist Jim Acosta." *The Washington Post*. 8 November 2018. Retrieved 24 November 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Martinez, Didi. "Kellyanne Conway says Jim Acosta video was 'sped up,' but not 'doctored.'" *NBC News*. 12 November 2018. Retrieved 24 November 2018.

the foundational knowledge that they are learning in our courses. If they were experts at understanding validity of sources—or other foundational knowledge—they would not need to take our introductory courses.

As faculty members we need to help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to understand what makes a credible source. The first step in doing this is to require broad based reading before students begin writing.

Once students have an area that interests them, I have them do library research using books with the help of librarians to gather information. I then scaffold the class so that they consult quality Internet sites, journal articles, Google books, newspaper articles, YouTube or other videos, and sources not written in English. I provide step-by-step directions to students on how to find resources in each of these areas and define terms such as “quality.” By the time students begin to develop the thesis for their papers, they have already consulted between 30 and 50 sources. As such, they are less likely to be fooled by false claims.

In addition to broad based reading, in order to best help students, we also need to move away from the common academic pedagogy of just defining quality sources which are safe for students to cite. For example, instead of teaching students to avoid .com websites or to look for articles from credible authors or sources, we need to put more focus on analyzing content.

We need to teach students fact-checking skills such as asking them to determine what evidence—if any—is cited by the author (if they even know who the author of the piece is). Are the sources biased or credible themselves? A lack of citations does not necessarily mean that an article does not have merit, but do they know enough about the topic to judge if the author is being accurate? If not, they need to verify assertions by finding the documentation that supports the author’s point of view.

If students are in their early stages of research or if they are citing articles in a non-research class that does not involve broad based reading, we can ask students to conduct Internet searches on the topic to discover whether or not what is written is consistent with what else is being published. Searches should also be made to check accuracy of quotations; especially to determine whether or not the quoted material is made up or taken out of context.

I teach students how to do Google image searches which they can use to determine whether or not the photographs show what they are reputed to show or whether or not they have had their meaning changed by cropping the image. Especially if the image is clearly deceitful, students need to be cautioned that the article itself might not be credible. Even if there is a stock image used, accuracy is important. I once read an article where the author was being critical of the institution where I teach. To illustrate the article there was an image of a large lecture hall. Our maximum class size is 31.

Especially for contemporary topics, students should be encouraged to check websites that specialize in fact checking. Websites like Snopes, Politifacts, and Truth or Fiction lay out their evidence so that the reader can judge the work of the fact checker. Teaching fact checking skills has become even more important than recognizing credible sources.

The lack of knowledge that many students have when it comes to verifying truth and relying on credible evidence can lead to a pervasive dissatisfaction and dread of entering the classroom. Instead of falling into a pit of gloom because students don’t know what we think they should know, it is better to accept

the reality of their ignorance<sup>12</sup> and to teach them the skills they need to be successful. Maybe they should have learned those skills before entering our classroom. But, as the old saying goes, “We need to teach the students we have; not the students we want to have.”

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<sup>12</sup> I use the word “ignorance” because later in the book I will discuss “Accepting the Reality of Our Ignorance.” To be ignorant of something is not a pejorative term.



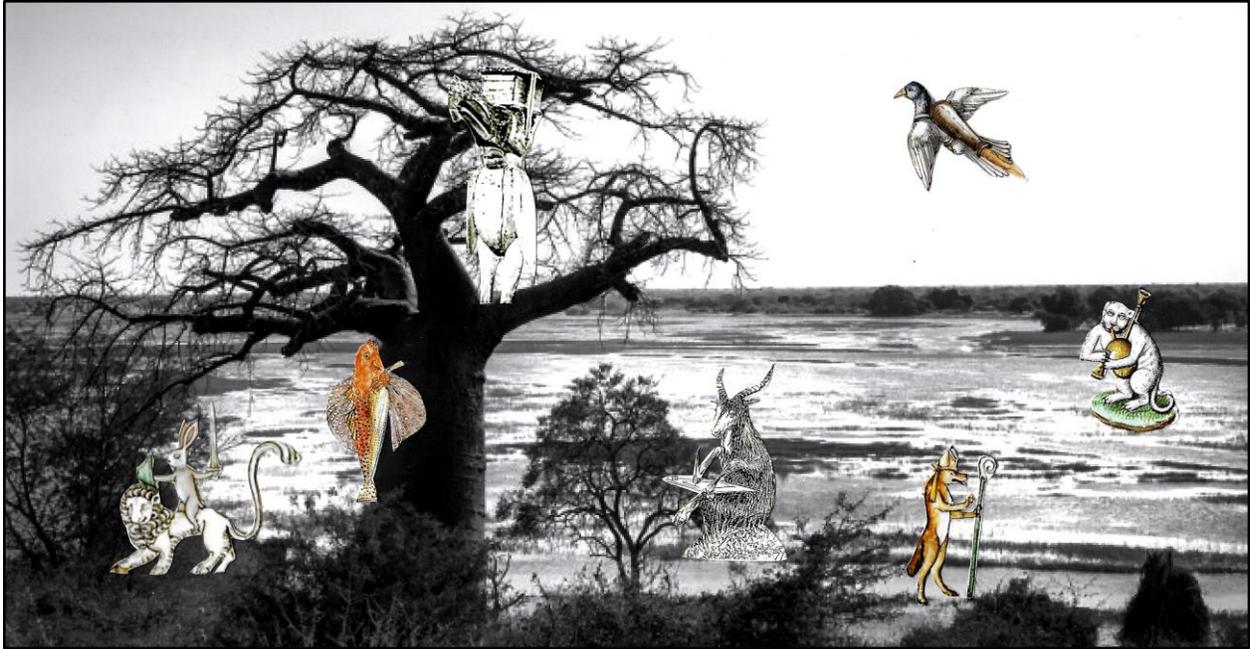
*Tips and Tricks #01*

## **Everyday Tips and Tricks for Avoiding Pervasive Dissatisfaction**

In twelve step programs, there is a saying that insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. Sometimes, the move away from pervasive dissatisfaction is to try a different approach that might change situations that lead to our dissatisfaction.

- Teach syllabus on second day instead of the first.
- Do something substantive on the first day.
- When teaching syllabus, teach how to read syllabi in general, not just your own.
- Offer varieties of methods for participation.
- Provide class notes or other email summaries of the class.
- Include a section called “Forthcoming” that allows students to access materials in advance.
- Reach out to students who are exhibiting “irresponsible” behavior to see if physical or mental health, transportation, or other issues are the root cause of the behavior. Students do not always communicate those issues with us without some prompting.

- Do not quickly jump to the conclusion that students are “choosing” to be irresponsible when systemic or personal issues are actually interfering, forcing them to make the best choices they can under the circumstances.
- Discreetly talk to the student before or after class or during break to see if everything is alright with them.
- Include a section in the syllabus about what to do when life gets in the way.
- State in class that students should ask you questions even if they don’t think you know the answer. Tell them you likely won’t, but you know where to find the information.
- Mention college services such as food pantries, learning support services, or offices for accommodations, mental, health, or veteran’s affairs.
  - Whenever possible, walk with students to support offices.
- Don’t get upset if you have to teach how to do image searches or other skills you want them to know. Getting upset changes nothing. Teaching the skills makes your life easier.
- While sometimes appropriate behind closed doors, venting is a dangerous luxury that can lead to increased dissatisfaction without facilitating change.
- As faculty members, we need to accept that there is a limit as to what we can do to assist any particular student.
- We need to recognize that our pedagogical choices can contribute to student difficulties.
  - Realize that even if something works for you that it might not work for everyone.
  - Teach strategies that don’t make sense to you or that you don’t use.
    - When you teach those strategies, let students know that they don’t work for you, but that they do work for some people
  - Ask yourself if a specific rule or requirement is really necessary.
  - Ask students if a specific rule or requirement makes sense.
    - If it doesn’t you might discover that the student is correct and you need to change.
    - If it doesn’t you might discover that you need to better explain the rationale so that students realize that you are not just being arbitrary.
  - Adopt that attitude that students need to do equivalent work; not identical work.
  - Provide choices for meeting course competencies.
- Prepare students for adult decision making.



*The Eagle Earned Demerits: An Educational Allegory*

# Providing a Flexible Classroom

## Introduction

In 1898, the *Journal of Education* published “An Educational Allegory” by Amos E. Dolbear writing under the pseudonym Aesop, Jr.<sup>13</sup> In his allegory, Dolbear is rightly critical of one-size-fits-all testing methods that are still being used today. Dolbear’s eagle received demerits even though he reached the top of the tree because he did not accomplish the task in the prescribed way. He flew instead of climbed. Dolbear’s duck was required to learn to run. The result was that “the time taken by the duck in learning to run the prescribed rate had so hindered him from swimming that he was scarcely able to swim at the prescribed rate.”

Too often, we become so caught up in the rules that we miss the essence of what we hope to accomplish. If the goal is getting to the top of the tree, does it make any difference if the student flies or climbs as long as they accomplish the goal? Good pedagogy is not finding the single best practice to enforce on all students. It is designing pedagogies that lead to student success.

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<sup>13</sup> Aesop, Jr. “An Educational Allegory.” *Journal of Education*. Vol. 1. Is. 14 (12 October 1898). 235. An essay concerning the development of animal allegories in education is “Everybody is a Genius. But If You Judge a Fish by Its Ability to Climb a Tree, It Will Live Its Whole Life Believing that It is Stupid.” *Quote Investigator*. Nd. Accessed 24 November 2018.

I am not arguing that there are no skills that everyone in a class needs to learn. But if students must do something in a certain way, we must be very clear on why the required process is important. For example, there is a correct way to write an author's name in a particular format. "Berg, Steven L." is wrong in APA which requires "Berg, S.L." If a student is in the sciences, they need to know that the correct way to get to the top of the tree for their discipline is a type of proper documentation that they likely will not learn in their English writing classes. When I teach formatting, I tell students about the time I had a manuscript rejected because I used the wrong formatting. I pose the rhetorical question, "Should an editor trust my research if I was too careless not to get the formatting requirements for the publication correct?" Proper documentation as defined by the discipline is a must for getting to the top of the tree.

In my classes, I require students to purchase a 1.5" binder with 31 pre-printed tabs. Students *must* follow these directions or I won't grade their binder at the end of the semester. I do provide students with the rationale for this requirement and hope that they understand that I am not simply being arbitrary because they have no choice other than to do what I say. But, for most of what we do in the classroom, such rigidity is not required.

When we require that our students make certain purchases, we must remain conscious of the financial reality faced by our students. We know that 67% of community college students work while in college with 32% working 35+ hours per week. Many attend school part-time because they cannot afford full time tuition and books. Requiring a specific type of binder and specific tabs is a big potential burden for students. I feel comfortable with this requirement, however, because at my particular institution, our college bookstore can supply students with the binder/tabs for less than \$10. Furthermore, I never use formal textbooks in my on campus classes. On those rare occasions when I do require a trade book, I set a maximum price of \$25,<sup>14</sup> but they are generally in the \$9.00-\$18.00 price range.

As professors, we need to be conscientious of any financial restraints placed on our students. Students frequently do not have the disposable income for "extras" which can be defined as anything more than tuition. For many students, this extra includes the costs of textbooks and lunch.

I have stopped requiring students to dress professionally for class presentations, in part, because students frequently do not have dress clothes to wear. And they do not have the means to purchase new clothes for one day of class. In the past, I have purchased clothes for students, but this is not a viable solution because to get my assistance, students would need to go through the often humiliating, class-based outing of themselves to tell me that they didn't have appropriate clothes to wear.

What if a student's anxiety prevents them from telling us what they need? Or if their family and/or culture prohibits asking for help in that way? What would happen differently in a curriculum that doesn't require such outing in order to pass? As I have grappled with these questions, I have come to another one that is even more disturbing to me. How many of my former students skipped their presentation rather than admit that they could not meet the clothing requirement?

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<sup>14</sup> The one time I exceeded my \$25 limit was when I taught a book that retailed for \$28. I wrote to the author, a friend of mine, that the extra \$3.00 better be worth it. They replied that it was currently selling on Amazon for \$18.00.

In this chapter, I am going to begin with the myth that, to have a flexible classroom, the professor needs to hide their political and spiritual beliefs. I will argue that there is a difference between using our backgrounds as individuals to influence the work we bring to the classroom and proselytizing. For students to know those backgrounds is not the same as proselytizing to students.

I will continue the chapter by building on Dolbear's criticism of inflexible rules before concluding with an essay about extending the classroom into our offices.



jumped to the incorrect conclusion that the film concerns the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and that I am showing it to advocate against President Trump's immigration policy. In 2018, students could have assumed that I was screening it in opposition to President Trump's position on immigration in general and specifically about his sending troops to the United States/Mexican border in response to the Central American migrant caravan which was heading toward America. In 2019, students could assume that I was screening the film in opposition to keeping children in detention camps.

*Immersion* was not written about DACA, which did not begin accepting applicants until five years after the film was released. Nor does it have anything specifically to do with the migrant caravan or the issue of detention centers or the President's immigration policy. But, as a professor, I need to be aware of the lens through which students might view the film.

So what, then, is the solution? While there is not, unfortunately, an easy answer to this question, transparency has generally worked for me.

From the beginning of the semester, I explain—and often repeat—that “While *Mr. Berg* might care passionately about your political views, *Dr. Berg* doesn't give a damn.” Because I am not prone to swearing in the classroom, the mild profanity adds to the impact of the statement which I follow up with specific examples. Sometimes, I tell the story of a former student who advocated that homosexuality is sinful. I explain that I disagreed with the student's analysis not because I am gay but because I prefer reading scripture—or any text—in its socio-historical context. The student took a more literal approach to scripture. His approach is valid and he earned a 4.0 in a class in which he argued that his professor was going to Hell.

This does not mean that all points of view have equal merit in my classroom. In my classroom, we distinguish between educated and uneducated opinions. For example, I once upset a student by asking him to provide evidence to support his argument during a class discussion. His response was that he had a right to his opinions. “While that is true,” I replied, “in this class you must provide evidence.” He decided to drop the course.

In this case, the issue was not the student's political views. In my role as arbiter of grades, I did not care about his views. The student could have earned an “A” in the course—if he provided evidence—regardless of his personal politics.

During the 2010 election, I became the darling of the young Republicans on our campus because I actively promoted many of their events, especially a speaker's series in which they brought the Michigan gubernatorial candidates to campus. Although I would not have voted for any of these candidates, I thought it was great that our students would be able to interact with the people running for governor, one of whom was eventually elected. That same year, I served as the faculty chaperone for a Republican fundraiser to help pay for the costs of this series. Students who knew Mr. Berg's political views were not surprised to see Dr. Berg show up.

Sharing political views in the 2020 classroom is much more dicey than it was in 2010. Reaching across the aisle is viewed with disdain by core voters who demonize those who disagree with them. When I used my letter writing for Vote Forward as part of a lesson during the 2018 campaign, I ran the risk of someone claiming that I was being partisan with this example. Yet, as part of the lesson, I explained how students could become involved in such Get Out the Vote efforts regardless of their political ideology.

Because I am transparent about my political views, use examples that are relevant to the classroom, am respectful of the views of others, and truly “don’t give a damn” when I wear my Dr. Berg hat, I have been able to successfully walk the ever narrowing path we find ourselves in concerning politics in the classroom. This allows me more flexibility in the classroom than if I were to follow the lead of the political science professor who won’t let his views be known.

## Teaching from an Ethical Foundation is Not Proselytizing

One of the potential criticisms of advocating that professors approach their classes from a strong ethical foundation is that someone could assume that teaching from an ethical foundation leads to proselytizing. However, there are significant differences between adopting a moral compass based on an ethical foundation, teaching about an ethical foundation, and proselytizing the tenets of an ethical foundation.



*Offering Dhamma*

Having a moral compass assists us in making appropriate classroom decisions based on positive values that promote student success. For example, an administrator once recommended that I be less flexible in my classroom. My class would be improved, the administrator essentially argued, if I did not make accommodations to students who needed extra time to do successful projects. The administrator also recommended that I should provide fewer choices for students to complete their coursework. These suggestions went so far against my ethical foundation that my moral compass directed me to not follow misguided advice that would hurt students.

Because my ethical foundation is student-centered, I find that listening to students improves my teaching. One simple example involves reporting on the participation points which students earn by successfully completing worksheets, homework, and other assignments that go into the student's class binder, which I grade at the end of each semester. Participation points are listed in the daily class notes I email to students and, at the end of each semester, I provide students with a sheet listing all of the documents for which points were earned and how those documents should be organized in the student's binder.

At the end of one semester, a student commented that it would have been easier if I distributed the participation points list more often throughout the semester. Other students agreed. Based on the ethical foundation in which my pedagogy is rooted, it was easy for me to make the decision to begin distributing participation points sheets more frequently.

Although my ethical foundation is rooted in the Buddha Dhamma, my pedagogical decisions do not promote Buddhism. They are the types of decisions that have compassion toward other sentient beings as the basis for my decision making; a type of compassion that is found in a variety of religious, secular, and personal ethical codes. A Christian colleague can obtain the same results from an ethical foundation that includes "Whatever you do for even the least of my brothers or sisters, that you do until me" as a key concept without promoting that their students adopt Christianity.

But what is the difference between rooting our pedagogy in an ethical foundation and crossing the line into proselytizing? As a lay Buddhist, one of the five basic precepts I follow on a daily basis is that “I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.” I have been a teetotaler for many more years than most of my students have been alive and think that alcohol and other non-medical drug use is harmful to individuals because it takes us away from mindfulness.

Even though I find my student’s alcohol and drug use to be problematic on a theological basis, my job is not to try to convince my students not to drink. As a professor, I can be concerned if a drunk student is disrupting class or I might refer a student who is exhibiting signs of addiction to counseling, but it is not my place to preach to students about their personal choices concerning alcohol use.

When instructing about Buddhism, it is perfectly acceptable for me to teach students about the five precepts and to explain the theological justification for refraining from intoxicating drinks. But teaching about Buddhism is not the same as trying to convince students to be Buddhists. In the same way, I can teach students about cannibalism without advocating that they eat each other.

There is a difference between being a teetotaler and a prohibitionist. The teetotaler chooses not to drink. The prohibitionist preaches that you should not drink either. By having an ethical foundation from which to guide our pedagogy, we are teetotalers; not prohibitionists.



*Because I Can*

## Enforcing a Foolish Consistency

The last time I tried to become a day sponsor for National Public Radio, I was unable to do so. This was more than 10 years ago and, at the time, I was using a hyphenated last name. The problem was that my hyphenated last name was too long to fit on the form. I was therefore unable to make a \$360 contribution to public radio; a contribution that I would likely still be renewing even though my last name is no longer hyphenated.

Although Ralph Waldo Emerson is often cited for his observation that “consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” he did not actually condemn consistency. In “Self Reliance,” Emerson actually argues that “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.”

It might have been reasonable for my local public radio station to want a certain consistency, but it was their desire for a type of foolish consistency that Emerson would condemn that caused them to lose my donation; a donation I gave to another organization. I am sure that, had he wanted to, the individual at my public radio station could have written my name in the margin or back of the form so that I could have made my donation.

One of the things that most students like about my classes is that flexibility is built into my syllabi as are alternative methods that students can use to complete projects. We practice the concept of equivalent but not identical work.

For example, if students miss class or plan to miss class, I ask that they complete a Time and Attendance Report. The purpose of the form is to encourage students to work with me in a timely fashion so that their absence does not cause them to fall behind in the course. In order to best assist students, there needs to be a consistency in the information I am provided: date of absence, reason for absence, arrangements they have already made to make up work, and whether they need a referral. Consistency also requires that I receive this information in a timely fashion. However, consistency does not require that I receive this information on the form I provide. Many students submit the information via an e-mail message or they schedule an appointment with me.<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes, the foolish consistency is imposed by administrative fiat and we must be creative to work around it. For example, at my college, we cannot schedule due dates in distance learning courses for days the college is closed. For valid pedagogical reasons, I want to keep Monday as the due date for

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<sup>15</sup> A more detailed about how the Time and Attendance report works can be found at Berg, Steven L. “Time and Attendance and Student Responsibility.” *Etena Sacca-Vajjena*. 11 August 2013. <http://www.stevenlberg.info/blog/a-104/>

assignments even if we are observing Memorial Day or the college is closed on some other Monday. To avoid foolish consistency I follow a two step process. First, I make the due date for assignments as the day before Memorial Day. College administrators are satisfied because I have met the letter of the law. Then, I add a caveat in which I automatically give students a 24 hour extension. Essentially, I make the assignment due on Monday.

As faculty members, it is important for us to balance the need for consistency without falling into a habit of enforcing a foolish consistency. I would never tell a student who emailed me all the necessary information concerning their absence that I could not help them because they had not reproduced the Time and Attendance Form found in their syllabus. We need to find a middle way to work with our students to help ensure their success. We need to consider the essence of our policies and procedures and lessons.

I remember a conversation I had with some students during final conferences. A student mentioned that his girlfriend had been in the hospital after having had emergency surgery the previous week; a detail I already knew because he had missed one day of class to be with her.

My student reported that one of his girlfriend's professors told her that she must take her final exam on the scheduled day even though she might still be in the hospital. If she did not take the exam, she would fail the course. The policy in his syllabus was no make-up exams and he was sticking with his policy because he needed to be consistent. There was no middle way for him to deal with the unexpected situation of emergency surgery. Fortunately, while her other two professors were going to hold her to the same standards as other students, they recognized that the circumstances demanded that modifications were needed in course policy.

After he completed his story, other students shared stories of foolish consistencies that they had experienced. None were as dramatic as that of their girlfriend in the hospital, but they all exemplified behavior that did not reflect well on our profession.

Although I might never donate to my public radio station, students will be better served if we do not set aside good pedagogy for foolish consistencies.



*First Birthday*

## **When Life Gets in the Way**

After working with students in the library, I returned to my office and read the following e-mail:

Dear Dr. Berg:

I left class early today. Life got in the way.

[student name redacted]

I realize that outside the context of the culture established in my classroom, the student's email might appear to be rude. Yet, I frequently have students inform me that they missed class or plan to miss class because life has gotten in the way. Some provide me with an explanation but I have no requirement that they do so. In order to assist them in making up the work they missed, all I require is that they inform me that life has gotten in the way.

I realize that some critics of my approach might argue that I am not preparing students for the real world because "life gets in the way" is not an acceptable reason for missing work. I would counter that the contract under which I am employed at my institution allows me to take days off—with pay—when life gets in my way.

Sometimes, such as when I take a sick or bereavement day, I do need to provide the college with an explanation for my absence. But I am not required to provide any explanation when I take a personal business day. If I can still be paid on days when I miss work when life gets in my way, why shouldn't I give assistance to students who miss class when life gets in the way for them?

I am aware that the "life gets in the way" explanation could be abused, but it is a risk I am willing to take. Not surprisingly, it is my experience that irresponsible students rarely contact me so that I can assist them to make up missed coursework.

While editing this essay, I took a break to inform students that "I might not be on campus tomorrow." If my symptoms had not improved and I had taken a sick day, no one from the college was going to investigate to see if I was really ill. They would have believed me, processed the paperwork, and made sure that I was paid while being home sick.

However, neither students nor I get unlimited opportunities to be absent without explanation. Although I have enough sick days to cite illness as the reason for missing class every day for an entire week, were I to try to do so, the college would ask for more documentation concerning my illness than they would if I took an individual sick day. In a similar way, I tell students that I do not make inquiries if life only gets in their way once or twice. But, if there is a pattern of life getting in the way, I will ask them for details. My purpose, I explain, is to allow me to make referrals so they can get the assistance they need to take care of their life issues.

A final concern I can see critics making is that students could use life gets in the way to miss class for frivolous reasons such as going on a vacation. While I may not approve of students missing class for vacations or for many other reasons they choose to be absent, I realize that the college might not approve of how I use a personal business day. If, for example, I am not ill but still wanted to miss class so that I could spend time relaxing with my little dogs, I am sure that the college would not approve of my decision. Yet, they would have no choice but to approve my request to take a personal business day.

Because a student will take their vacation whether I approve or not, I would prefer that they tell me they will be missing class so that I can help insure that their decision has as few negative consequences for them as possible. Especially because of the classroom culture I have created, I can engage a student in a blunt conversation about their poor decisions for missing class. Such conversations are easier to have if I am simultaneously helping them make up the missed work.

Life gets in the way for all of us. Therefore, I want to make sure that my classroom culture supports students who—like me—must sometimes be absent.

## Faculty Office as Food Pantry

At the beginning of each new semester, I finish my syllabi and print class handouts; the types of activities one would expect from a professor who wanted to be prepared for the new semester. However, I also restock the freezer in my office refrigerator with microwavable meals which I will not eat and make sure I had enough apples and bananas to last the week. Snack foods that I buy at the dollar store or that my husband finds in the discount bins in the local grocery market are replenished.



*Food Distribution*

Since I have had my own office, making it a welcoming environment has been important to me. It has original art on the walls and sculptures on the shelves. There are plants inside the office and a large terrarium outside my door. Sharing food was a foundation of my Polish Catholic upbringing, but having an abundance of food in my office has become an increasingly important part of my pedagogy.

A couple of years ago, a student did a “grab and go” between classes to pick up a bag of chips. As the student left, I realized that they had not simply picked up a snack, they had picked up their lunch. It then occurred to me that this was not the only student who periodically counted on me for much needed food.

Even though my husband includes extra food for me to share with students when he packs my lunch each morning, the next time I went to the supermarket after the grab and go, I brought the frozen meals to insure that there would always be food on hand for students. A week later, when the first student ate one of the microwaved meals, I realized that it was likely their only hot meal of the day.

Most of the students with whom I share food do not experience food insecurity, but some of them do. And because there is no way to identify students with food insecurity, I let everyone know about my husband’s yummy lunches and say he packs enough for me share. At other times, I find ways to mention that I always have food in my office.

I know that I speak from a privileged position when I write about the office food pantry. I am a full-time tenured professor with his own office who has enough income to purchase extra food. I am aware that adjunct faculty frequently do not have offices and their salaries are such that they might be visiting food pantries themselves. Furthermore, I am not arguing that faculty members should provide food for students. I am suggesting that those of us who have that ability might consider what we can do on an individual level.

Making one’s office into a mini food pantry, at worst, promotes a welcoming environment that encourages students to visit. But for students who are food insecure, having food in my office allows me to provide physical sustenance as well as intellectual stimulation.

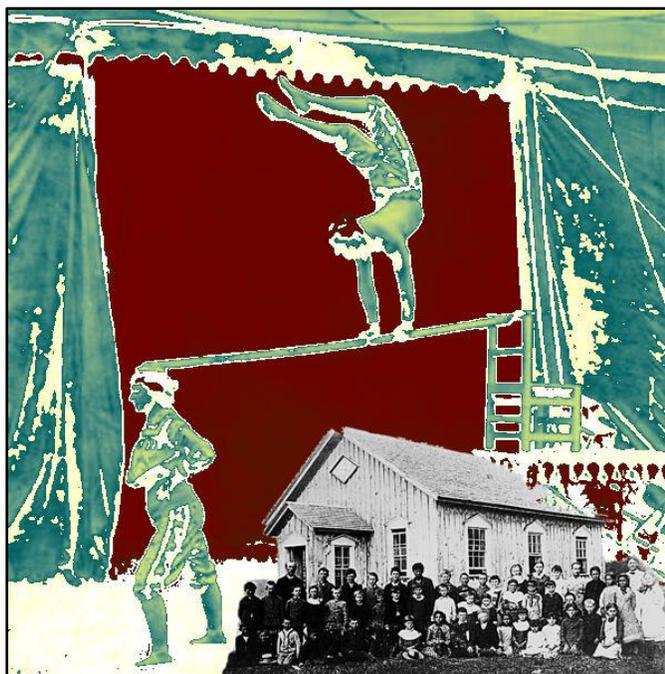
Since January 2019, I have expanded what I do in my office into the bay outside my office where I had previously established a Little Free Library. Students can now get food there: single serving meals, energy bars, fresh fruit, and other snacks. A colleague donated a microwave. Colleagues and students drop off food to share.

Although the office as food pantry is helpful, there are things that professors can't provide that prevent students from being able to commit all they want to to their work. For example, structural constraints and oppressions prevent students from getting what they need. We don't have sufficient health care in this country. Our students have explicit roadblocks to getting insurance. Even if students have insurance, it is unlikely as good as the insurance full time faculty enjoy. Adjunct faculty rarely have insurance as part of their college compensation packages. Public transportation is often not available or accessible (either physically or financially). This is especially true in more rural areas as well as areas where gentrification has forced many students of color with low income to live.

While doing all we can to assist our students, faculty members need to realize that much of what our students face is out of their control. But that does not mean that we are exempt from doing what we can to provide flexibility to assist them.

## Everyday Tips and Tricks for Providing a Flexible Classroom

Moving to a flexible classroom is not something to jump into. Otherwise, we can become overwhelmed by the changes. Instead, providing flexibility is a gradual process that should be taken a step at a time. For example, moving away from formal textbooks was a gradual process that I could not have accomplished in a single semester. To revise all of the courses I teach in two departments would have resulted in chaos. Even though I began the process before there were so many Open Educational Resources available, it is not feasible to switch to all new OER textbook in a single semester unless you only have one prep.



*Tricks and Tips #02*

- Openly address political issues.
- Share your expertise even if it shows your politics.
- Be aware of how students will read politics into our class assignments.
- Make clear and repeat often your version of the mantra “While Mr. Berg might care passionately about your political views, Dr. Berg doesn’t give a damn.”
- Cite examples of students who passed your course even though they disagreed with your politics or position on an issue.
- Be transparent about your views.
- Remind students that not all opinions are equally valid. Make the distinction between opinions that are supported with evidence and those that are not.
- Realize that the cost of textbooks can be a barrier for students
- Adopt Open Educational Resources
- Help develop a departmental textbook and make it available online
- Whenever possible, adopt a trade book instead of a textbook.
- Consider if you even need a textbook for the course. Is there a cheaper way to present the material?
- Put a copy of your textbook on reserve in the library.
- Realize that other requirements can be barriers
- Do students really need to wear business attire? For in-class presentations, do students really need to wear business attire?
- Do students really need to buy a specific type of binder or notebook or some other supply
- Genuinely integrate student feedback into your teaching
- Listen for casual statements such as, “It would have been handy to have this earlier in the semester.
- Provide formal opportunities for feedback

- Adopt the concept that students should do equivalent but not necessarily identical work.
  - Ask students how they want to be graded or what types of assignments do they want to do
  - Provide options: “You can share your knowledge via a paper, video, class presentation.”
  - Allow students to modify assignments.
    - You can reject proposed changes that would not meet course competencies or skills embedded into the assignment.
- Teach from an ethical foundation that supports student achievement.
- Remember that life gets in the way.
- Make referrals
- You do not need to approve of student choices in order to support them academically.
- If you have an office, have snacks to encourage students to visit.
- Use creativity to get around foolish consistencies.

# Learning as Collaborative Equals

## Introduction

To illustrate this chapter with *Horror Story* might seem like an unusual choice. A gothic image that includes a man who has flayed himself arguably does not seem appropriate to highlight a discussion on collaborative learning. Yet, *Horror Story* shows what can be accomplished when learning is a collaboration among equals.



*Horror Narrative: A Student-Faculty Collaboration*

During a presentation about gothic influences, a student asked us to complete an exercise to help us better understand the concepts he

wanted to address. The class was excited to pull out crayons and markers to begin their sketching. I was so thrilled with the work I was doing that I used my sketch as the draft for *Horror Story*. The photomontage now hangs in my office and I enjoy discussing the collaboration with current students.

If there is any “horror” in treating students as collaboratives and colleagues and peers, it is that so many of them come to us having been battered by the structural inequities of the world and the education system. Some of this is due to their socio-economic status or family situations. Since joining the faculty at my current college 20 years ago, I have witnessed the demographic shift of our student body becoming both more ethnically diverse and also poorer. I need to note that this is a correlation without causation. We do not have a poorer student body because we have a higher percentage of non-white students. Our student body is poorer because of a decline in the job market and the lingering effects of the economic decline of 2008 and following.

Furthermore, almost all of our students are products of an education system that relies too heavily on high stakes testing than it does on promoting creativity. Others live with the stigma and structural barriers associated with being defined as developmental, remedial, disabled, or some other trait. As we establish a classrooms of collaborative equals, we need to simultaneously introduce a spirit of loving kindness into our approach to students.

Loving Kindness is the love of  $\phi\lambda\iota\alpha$  [*Philia*], which is the love of friendship between equals. Professors practicing loving kindness view their students as colleagues and learning as a collaboration. Viewing students as friends is a line that ought not be crossed, but the metaphor of friendship is a good one when considering classroom interactions. Friendship takes an investment of time. It also connotes a mutual respect.

In this chapter, I begin with a theoretical essay concerning reaching out to students with loving kindness. I then deal with the need to help students rediscover that they are valuable in their own right as we give them choices and rebuilt their trust. The chapter ends with a reflection that argues that classrooms work best when we realize that all of our students—as well as ourselves—are developmental.



*If You Are Without Warmth*

**“If you are without power and seek warmth...”**

One Christmas morning, as I sat in my warm home surrounded by little dogs, I received a text from my cousin, who was still without power since the previous weekend’s storm. Her home had been cold for the past several days. As she and her husband headed out of town to spend the day with family, her Christmas would not be lacking.

I consider myself close to my cousin and I knew that she lost power a few

days earlier, but I was unaware that she was still without power. Too often, we do not know the day-to-day details of the lives of the people to whom we are the closest.

As faculty members, we rightly know even less about the students who pass through our classrooms. These are students who—like us—lead complicated lives. Unlike my cousin who has years of experience navigating the joys and difficulties of life, most of our students do not have the same wealth of experience. Therefore, it is important that we provide space where struggling students can develop strategies for success.

The argument that our job as faculty members is to teach our subject matter—and that we cannot consequently be responsible for our students’ lives outside the classroom—does have merit. Yet such a position can be cited to justify a callousness that is unbecoming to members of our profession.

When students make poor decisions, we have colleagues who essentially proclaim, “To hell with them. They’re adults.” In such cases, a bad decision is often taken as a personal affront which can lead to anger toward the student. This is an anger that can lead to pervasive dissatisfaction. Like a person who tries to throw a hot coal, we are the ones burned by our anger; not our students.

Instead of becoming angry with students who become overwhelmed when they are stripped of their power by social, economic, and bureaucratic situations beyond their control, we should attempt to react with understanding and loving kindness. When an online student contacted me that her power was out because of Hurricane Michael, I did not expect her to find an alternative power source. Nor did I expect her to immediately catch up on her assignments once power was restored. Loss of power was only one of the issues she faced as a result of being in the path of a hurricane and her personal situation rightly needed to take precedence over her coursework.

Understanding does not mean that we must accept the student’s position. There are times when it seems clear that students are behaving irresponsibly when that is not the case. I still remember the student in a night class who kept drifting in and out of sleep. His “irresponsibility” was starting his day

twelve hours before class began because he worked full time while going to school. At the time, his only realistic choice was to take a night course or to not attend college. During the early 1990s, weekend classes and online courses were not being offered.

I can understand why a student makes a decision without condoning the actions that result from that decision. During most semesters, there are usually one or two students whom I watch fail the course as they compound their bad decisions. I do intervene with these students. However, at a certain point, I must accept that I cannot change their choices. I must also realize that systemic issues outside a student's control can control their choices regardless of the student's desire.

Understanding fosters compassion and compassion makes it easier for us to direct students to the help that they require. Sometimes, assistance can take the form of tutoring or providing academic advice. At other times, we can direct students to the Learning Assistance Center or some other campus office. In more serious cases, we can help the student make an appointment with an academic counselor who is trained to deal with the student's personal issues—something I did at least 10-15 times per semester before my institution eliminated our counseling services.

Acting with loving kindness does not mean that students will not suffer the consequences of their actions. It is not always possible for a student to recover from a bad decision during a particular semester or in a particular course; especially when the college does not offer services such as counseling that would assist the student. However, our compassionate actions, inspired by loving kindness, can lay the groundwork for future success. I remember sitting in my office discussing how a student could salvage his grade in my course while also agreeing with him that dropping his math class seemed like a reasonable decision. It is not that my math colleague had less compassion than I do, but the nature of the course was such that catching up would be impossible.

As a faculty member, I can neither legally nor ethically care too much about the details of my students' lives. Fortunately, acting with loving kindness does not require knowing personal details about our students. It does, however, require that we be willing to provide opportunities for students to learn skills that can bring equanimity into their lives. For example, in my syllabus I include a Time and Attendance process which provides students with the opportunity to make up missed work if they contact me. I generally require no more explanation than "Life got in the way" when students tell me why they have missed class or need an extension.

On Christmas evening after she returned home from visiting family, my cousin posted a message in Facebook that she had returned home to heat and that the temperature in her house was already 46 degrees. She continued, "If you are without power and seek warmth, you are welcome here." It is a sentiment that belongs on our office doors.

## To Reteach Students Their Loveliness

Many a brisk October day, I am on my hands and knees, covered with dirt, planting flower bulbs: tulips and daffodils and snowdrops and crocuses. Externally, the bulbs appear very bland and uninteresting. Their roots are practically nonexistent and do not seem to hold much promise. Yet, because I have faith in their ability, I tell these bulbs that they are lovely through my actions.

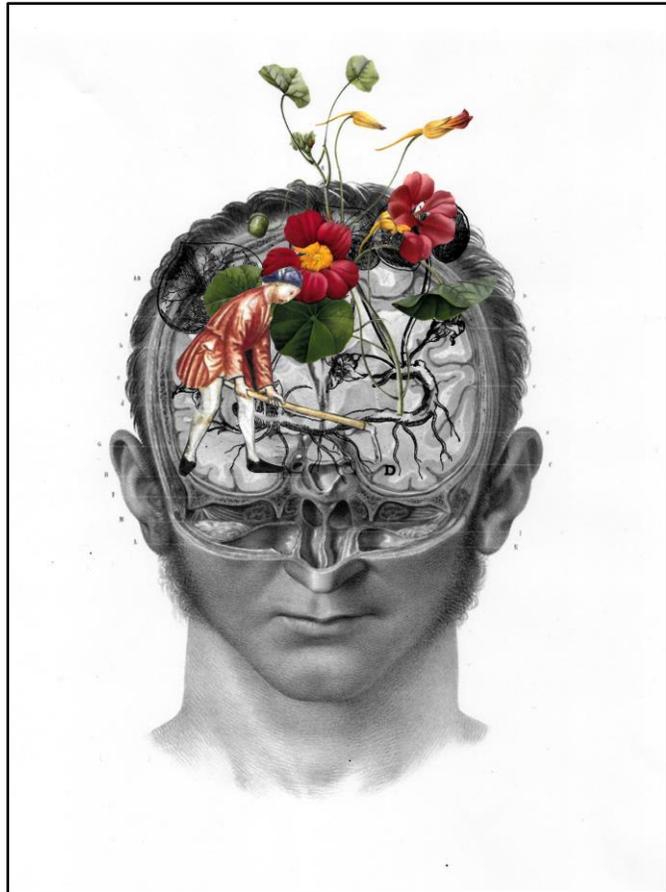
I delude myself if I think that I can force the bulbs I plant in my garden to grow. Nor can I force my students to learn. Growth and learning can only come from within. They are self-blessings, not blessings that I bestow. Yet, both are assisted in an environment shaped by loving kindness.

One of my cousins has discovered that, by the third grade, her students have already been taught not to express their creativity. I remember attending a Harry Chapin concert in which he sang the refrain for his “Flowers are Red” that repeat the words that a student is told the first day of class:

Flowers are red young man  
Green leaves are green  
There's no need to see flowers any other way  
Than the way they always have been seen

The boy was taught that, if he were to succeed in school, he would not be permitted to express the truth that there are “so many colors in the flower.” In fact, he will likely be punished for seeing every one of the flowers.

Because of this, part of our job as educators is to realize that it is sometimes necessary “to reteach a thing its loveliness,” as Galway Kinnell explains in “St. Francis and the Sow.”<sup>16</sup> Sharon Salzberg explains that “‘to reteach a thing its loveliness’ is the nature of *metta* [loving kindness]. Through loving kindness, everyone and everything can flower again from within.”<sup>17</sup>



*Growing Dendrites*

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, Anthony. “Loving Poems: Galway Kinnell’s ‘St. Francis and the Sow.’” *Anthony Willson: Poetry, Education, Research*. 5 February 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Salzberg, Sharon. *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*. Shambhala, 2002.

As early as the third grade, my cousin's students have been taught to view themselves as drably colored lumps that must go through the motions dictated by their teachers. They have learned, as Harry Chapin sings, that "There is no need to see flowers any other way than the way they always have been seen."<sup>18</sup> If they see flowers in any other way, they will receive poor grades. And grades are seen as more valuable than learning.

Approaching students with a spirit of loving kindness can often be met with suspicion by the students we are trying to help. They have been successful in their educational careers because they have internalized the message that creativity is not rewarded and that their own interests are not interesting. To take the risk of putting down roots is too daunting a task. Therefore, we must be patient and repeatedly reteach them their loveliness.

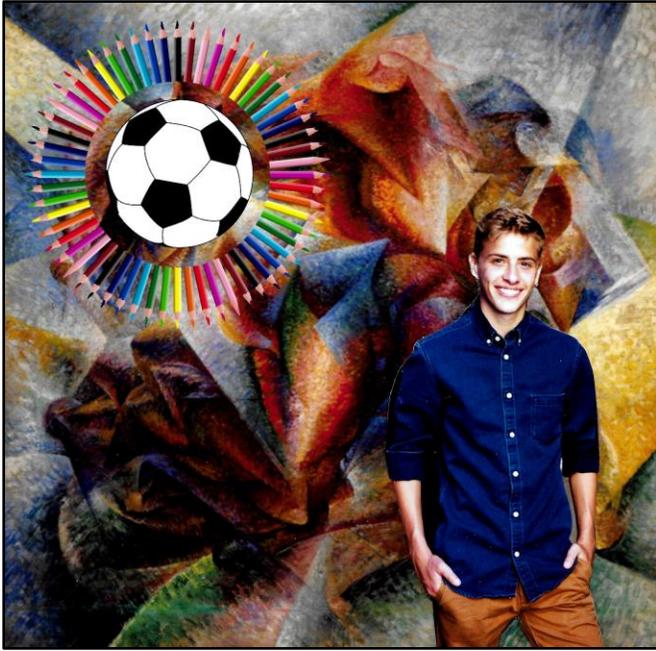
Some of the bulbs I plant in October find the courage to push up through the still frozen earth in late January or early February. Snowdrops have the most courage. While surviving the harsh realities of February in Michigan, they give inspiration to the crocuses that will soon follow them in March. Later the tulips and daffodils will find their flowers within.

Unfortunately, I cannot expect all of the bulbs I plant to flourish. Some will be so damaged on their trip to me that there will be nothing I can do to revive them. Others will be dug up and eaten by squirrels. Others will take too long to send down their roots and will not survive the winter. And when I am honest, I realize that sometimes I will not properly prepare the soil or I will overlook a bulb and forget to plant it. Sometimes, I will even harm one bulb while nourishing others around it.

While gardening in the spirit of loving kindness, I am able to reteach the bulbs that they are lovely and to help them find their flowers within. Approaching students with loving kindness gives them the same ability, a self blessing.

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<sup>18</sup> Harry Chapin's "Flowers are Red" was recorded for his 1978 *Living Room Suite*.



*The Scholar Athlete as Artist*

## **Trimming the Yuzu Tree #2: Reflection on Giving Students Choices**

*After watching Dominic trim the Yuzu tree in my cousin's yard, I heard him express his concern that the tree will likely not bear much fruit because the area in which it was planted does not provide enough light. As Dominic explained, "It is not where you want it to be. It's where it wants to be."*

Dominic's words are not meant to imply that the tree should get anything it wants. After all, he had just pruned it.

I often argue that "the less I teach the more my students learn." I also emphasize the importance of giving students choices, and I have gone so far as to turn major sections of

my courses over to students.

My goal in the classroom is to produce quality educational experiences for my students by allowing them to be shareholders in their educational endeavors. I have learned the art of the vague syllabus that includes the required components for a class without going into too much detail about how those components will be realized. For example, I might say that there will be an assignment that needs a student to "to demonstrate your ability to cognitively integrate and analyze the various dimensions of the humanities;" a departmental requirement of the history courses I teach. However, I do not spell out what constitutes the project. As a class we decide how to meet this requirement. Because I believe that students need to do equivalent work rather than identical work, there might be different ways in which students meet this requirement.<sup>19</sup>

If they can choose topics and take responsibility to teach sections of the course, they are more invested in their education and learn more. As an added benefit, the class becomes more interesting for all of us.

I am sure that some people would argue that students in an introductory course are not qualified to take responsibility for ensuring that course competencies are covered—that allowing students to be where they want to be would not lead to academic success. These individuals are correct. However, allowing students to be where they want to be instead of where I want them to be each day does not mean that I give up my responsibilities as a professor.

Plotting out a course plan with a specific schedule which ensures that course competencies are met, is much easier than allowing students to stand in their own light. Generally, I prepare multiple lessons for

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<sup>19</sup> When students are doing equivalent work instead of identical work, transparency is especially important. Various approaches to assignments need to be discussed during class.

the same day so that I can both accommodate student interests while insuring necessary concepts are covered. Often, I am modifying course plans while the class is in session.

Because I know the course material and realize that there are multiple ways to communicate course content, modifying my plans on the fly is not as difficult as it may seem. For example, while revising this chapter, I had just taught a class in which a student wondered out loud how the French thought of the French and Indian war. I used the opportunity to show students how to use Google to translate “Seven Years War” to “Guerre de sept ans.” I then showed how they could translate the websites they found after doing a Google search in French. This was not a lesson I had planned to teach until a few weeks later. But it is better to teach material when students are asking for it. Teaching material “out of order” is easy because I have designed a flexible syllabus.

Although this is a simple example, I do the same thing for larger assignments. For example, a student screened a short film at the beginning of a film class I was teaching. I then decided not to screen the film on which I had planned to base my lesson and, instead, used her film to teach the lesson I had planned for the following week. Because I was planning to cover the material anyway, it was really not much work to make this transition.

A too strong rigidity can actually impede student learning. I think of the time when Fred Krager, the first openly gay Presidential candidate made an unexpected stop at Schoolcraft College. When I contacted some colleagues about whether they would like candidate Krager to discuss the election with their students, a political science professor told me that they didn’t have time in their syllabus to have Krager spend 15 minutes in their classroom. It was an opportunity missed.

Especially on days when students are presenting, I have no idea what I might be covering. During student presentations, I take copious notes not only about the topic being presented but also about what I might be able to contribute to the discussion following the presentation. For example, while a student is giving a presentation on the French Revolution or the Reign of Terror, I might include “mandate from Heaven,” “Marat/Sade,” or “potatoes” in my notes, even if they are not mentioned by the student.

Later, when I build on the student’s presentation, I might contrast the European concept of Divine Right of Kings to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven. If students ask questions about the negative attitudes toward the First Estate (the clergy), I will screen “Marat’s Liturgy” from Peter Weiss’ *Marat/Sade*. And the subject of potatoes as a way to understand socio-economic issues and culture is fascinating—even to my students who give me odd looks when I tell them about my interest in the history of potatoes.

In order to help prepare students to approach course material from the perspective of their interests, I take them to the library and ask them to spend an hour reading anything that interests them. With each student, I then discuss their interests and suggest ways in which they can use their interests—and the background that comes from those interests—to approach course materials.

Unfortunately, more and more students are finding this assignment difficult because they don’t know the correct answer to the question, “What interests you?” They need reassurance that I am not asking a trick question.

Some will ask: “Do you mean that we should read something that interests us in the historical period we are studying?”

“No,” I answer, “you can read about anything that interests you.”

The will ask: "Can I read about [fill in the blank]?"

"Does [fill in the blank] interest you?" I respond.

"Yes."

"Then you can read about it."

It is a sad commentary that the results of high-stakes testing and parents who micromanage their children's activities and free time produce students who are frequently baffled by this assignment because they don't know how to answer the question, "What interests you?"

It has become harder to convince students that they can take responsibility for their educations; that they do not need to be content to stay within the lines their previous experiences have drawn for them. But it is worth the effort.



*Little Dogs Riding Fish*

## **Rebuilding Trust**

When Abuela entered our home, she was a fragile teacup chihuahua who had come from an abusive situation. She would lay silently in my husband's lap with her eyes closed. When not in his lap, Abuela would tentatively creep around the house cowering in fear when either of us approached her. Two weeks later, Abuela still moved awkwardly because of her past injuries, but she had gained weight and would run to the door, tail wagging, when she saw her Papi.

Abuela was the twelfth dog that my husband has rescued from a bad situation and joined two other rescue dogs in our home: Snooki and Lil Mama. Other dogs have entered our home since Abuela first made her appearance. Before I met him, my husband had rescued and rehabilitated dogs who went to live in safe homes where they are loved. According to my husband, "There is nothing that a little love can't fix."

It is amazing to watch the new dogs respond to the loving kindness they encounter in our home. Six months before Abuela joined our household, Snooki suffered from a very similar disposition. He cowered when anyone approached him, was skinny from lack of food, and so on. He is now a confident little man who explores the yard and takes care of Lil Mama who entered our home a month before Abuela.

Lil Mama, too, grew in confidence and has developed her unique personality. And, with time, Abuela reached Lil Mama's level of confidence. Eventually, both became as sure of themselves as Snooki. What we assumed would be less than six months of hospice care for Abuela ended up being a three year relationship.

The world has changed since I was a youth. Technological advances have given rise to problems of over exposure. People no longer fall into obscurity after experiencing Andy Warhol's '15 minutes of fame.' Instead, they launch their own reality shows or simply become famous for being famous. They are not the best role models for today's youth. The divorce rate is higher as is the accessibility of drugs. The economic situation, lack of jobs, and political extremism make living in today's America much scarier than the one in which I grew up.

Referencing the world in which I grew up is both natural and problematic. Our personal experiences can be both a source of knowledge as well as a limitation as to how we respond to students. While I believe that the world in general is scarier, I do not want to discount that the parents and grandparents of many of my students--especially students of color--grew up experiencing fears I cannot imagine.

Especially when I see students who are struggling with an uncertain future, I am grateful that I am not a teenager today. Many of our students have been damaged because they come from or remain in difficult situations. Because the educational system with the backing of socio-political realities in modern America has so brutalized students, many students are convinced that they cannot succeed.

When I was still a graduate student, I read an article by a professor concerning traumatized students. He asked questions such as, "What am I supposed to do with a student from [insert type of traumatizing situation]? Teach them how to write a paragraph?"<sup>20</sup> My response at that time was, "Of course. That's our job." And while I still believe that this is our job, my attitude has been tempered. Now, I believe that if we hope to teach our subject matters, it is more important than ever to prioritize creating a safe classroom environment.

According to my husband, it takes "love, a lot of patience, and time," to rebuild trust in one who has been traumatized. How many of our students have heard a professor or someone else in their lives say, "Trust me," only to be treated with abuse?

Whether we call it agape or metta or being decent human beings, we need to create classrooms where students can feel safe. We must do this before we can hope to effectively teach English or history or math or science or whatever academic discipline we profess. Love, a lot of patience, and time can rebuild the trust of our damaged students and give all students a firm basis for success.

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<sup>20</sup> Although this essay made an impact on me, after more than 30 years, I cannot remember the author's name, the essay, or where it was published.



Image Title: Underprepared → Prepared → Advanced → Excel

## Working with “Developmental” Students

Sometimes professors ask, “What do we do when we have both developmental and regular students in our classroom?” Unfortunately, this question is problematic. We should not make a distinction between “developmental” and “regular” students. We need to realize that all of our students are developmental; at least in the classic meaning of the word as reflected in the motto of the former National Association of Developmental Education: *“Helping underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, advanced students excel.”*

Unfortunately, in contemporary American education, developmental has become equated with remedial. Although I would like to continue to discuss developmental education as a process of transforming students, I am a realist who realizes that the conversation has changed and those of us interested in developing our students must change with the times. This reality was acknowledged when, in March 2019, the National Association of Developmental Education changed its name to the National Organization for Student Success. However, they did not change their motto which can remain an important roadmap for our work with students.

Instead of talking about developmental or remedial students, a better question for us to ask is “What do we do when we have students at different stages on the underprepared-prepared-advanced continuum in the same classroom?” However, an even better approach is to not worry about distinctions and instead focusing on universal design.

I focus on universal designs that allow me to appropriately challenge all students during the semester. I have found that if I first spent the time creating my course so that it will meet the basic needs of remedial students as well as those who require ADA accommodations, I make life easier for all students as well as for myself.

Whenever possible, I provide students with my teaching notes and PowerPoint presentations in advance. I make students aware in advance of readings that we will do during class time or videos that I plan to screen. While such reasonable accommodations are required for certain students under the Americans with Disabilities Act, there is no harm in making them available to everyone. In the same way that curb cuts make life easier for people in wheelchairs, they are also an advantage for someone pushing a stroller, on a bicycle, or who has trouble walking. Last year, I began converting all of my classes so that videos are ADA compliant; something that proved very helpful when I had a deaf student enroll in one of my classes last semester. Universal design before the semester begins, allows me to spend more time during the semester working directly with students because I don’t have to remember—or care about—which students require accommodations. Nor do I have to spend time converting course materials in the middle of the semester.

When students walk in on the first day of class, they see that I change the classroom geography to facilitate conversations. Tables are turned into what I call “islands” around which four to six students sit. On the first day, students have to move multiple times to meet as many of their colleagues as possible. After the first day, they settle into the seats that will be theirs for the rest of the semester; not because I assign them but because that is how human nature works. These random groups of students then grow into strong teams whose members support each other.

It is not uncommon for me to get emails such as these two:

Dr. Berg, I won't be in class today. I'm not feeling great. My classmates will fill me in on what needs to be done with editing our paper. I apologize. Thank you, [name redacted]

Dr. Berg, for the last few days I haven't been feeling well [so have missed a week of class.]...Everyone in my group has discussed with me what I need to do for the project so I'm still caught up....

In both of these cases, I don’t need to do anything to catch these students up in the course except to send them a two sentence reply thanking them for letting me know and wishing them a quick recovery.

Because students get to know each other, they become peer mentors. As the skills being taught change, so do the roles of the students. Not everyone excels at everything and the student who would be considered underprepared one week might be excelling during the next. This process is facilitated by having a variety of pedagogical strategies: art, presentations, readings, videos, lectures, projects, and more.

Often, students are asked to teach all or part of a class with their teammates. Among other pedagogical benefits of team work, students on the underprepared-prepared-advanced continuum work together to assist each other move to the next level. Although the course and classroom geography is designed so that students will rely on each other, I work with the teams to master a concept and then they teach it—in their own ways—to their colleagues. I will help them polish their ideas, but I won't come up with the ideas for them. When a student or team asks if I would approach a presentation or assignment in a certain way, I almost always answer, "No." I then continue, "But you have a very good approach that I would not have considered."

In order to make it easier to work with students from where they are at, I create a vague syllabus. This strategy allows me maximum flexibility during the semester to work with students on an individual level. In my classes, we talk about "equivalent" rather than "identical" work. As a result, I shy away from strict rubrics that tend to be prescriptive rather than serve as a path toward excelling. Just because one can tick off that they have completed certain tasks does not mean that they are learning or producing quality work. Instead, I talk about what makes up good writing based on a variety of audiences and then have students ask certain questions such as "Why should my intended audience care?" and "How does what I am writing contribute to the larger dialogue that is taking place on this topic?"

Answering these questions serve in lieu of a rubric and is more effective than the standard check off rubric.

#### *Standard Rubric*

✓ Specific audience identified

#### *Question as Rubric*

My intended audience should care because ....

Before the students can answer the question, they need to identify their intended audience which would get them a ✓ on the rubric. But answering the question provides a richer writing experience.

Finally, I spent time working individually or with small groups of students. The geography of the classroom facilitates such discussions. For example, I will ask students to work together in their teams on a certain task. Then I will go from island to island discussing issues with students. Often, the issues that come up are not directly related to the task at hand. However, this proves beneficial because it gives me a window into what students don't understand.

I also meet individually with students. Especially in my Composition II course and other courses that have a research component, we spend class time meeting in the library. All students are expected to talk to me during the class about their research and I coach them on the next steps each individually has to take. I will also schedule some classes where I meet with students in my office. I plan these days when most students are prepared or advanced and, therefore, can work on their own. I then meet with students who are underprepared or who think they are underprepared. I don't require that any specific student come to these conferences, but students who need the individual support generally show up.

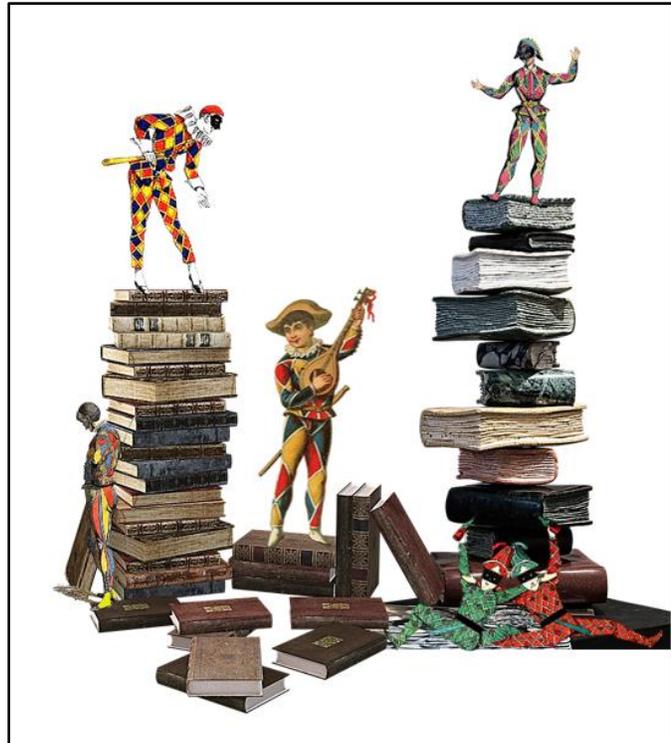
Best teaching practices require that we adopt the principles of universal design. Fortunately, by adopting these principles, we free up time for us to use our advanced skills to do targeted coaching in

the classroom, the library, and—for those of us fortunate to have one—our offices. When we don't have to worry about the barriers that separate us, adopting universal design allows us to facilitate collaborations of equals.

## Everyday Tips and Tricks for Learning as Collaboration

There is no way to get around the fact that the professor is the most powerful person in the classroom. Yet we can take steps so that we can interact with students as valued colleagues. By providing flexibility and encouraging students to participate in decision making, we become collaborators. One of the added benefits of this is that we--like our students--will learn new things during the semester. My students are always amused at how excited I get when they present information I didn't know or a point I had not considered before.

- Remember that we are burned by our anger; not our students.
- Adopt universal design in the classroom.
- Provide flexibility in your syllabus.
- Give sections of the course over to students.
- Allow students to help decide how course requirements will be met.
- Allow students to build on their interests.
- Avoid rigid rubrics.
- Write a vague syllabus. This allows for greater flexibility throughout the semester.
- Include a time and attendance section in which you acknowledge that sometimes "Life gets in the way."
- We need to realize that all of our students are experts in their own respects. Let the syllabus reflect that their expertise will be part of the course.
- Allow students to become peer mentors.
- Do not spell out what constitutes the project. Whenever possible, allow students to discuss ways to meet course competencies.
- Include the location and telephone numbers for campus support offices.
- Include art in your syllabus.
- We need to create classrooms where students feel safe.
- We need to be conscious of the assumptions we make about the world when they are based on our personal experience.
- What appears to be irresponsibility might have its roots in systemic issues over which the student have no control.
- If you give quizzes or exams, assure students that you will not ask trick questions. And tell them that if they find any to let you know because such questions are unacceptable and you will want to revise them.
- We do not need to know the details of student's situation in order to help them.



*Tips and Tricks #03*

- Remember that our students have been brutalized by an education system that forces them to abandon creativity.
- Change the seating in the classroom from lecture style into a way that promotes discussion.
- Talk to students individually about their research.
- Whenever possible, I provide students with my teaching notes and PowerPoint presentations in advance.
- Adopt a variety of pedagogical strategies.
- Practice universal design.

# Teaching with Compassion

## Introduction

By acting with compassion, we help our students diminish anxiety that can lead to a pervasive dissatisfaction in their lives. Before considering what needs to be included in a pedagogy of compassion, let me detail what is *not* part of such a pedagogy: lowered standards, giving some students an unfair advantage over others, and treating the student as customer. Nor does it presuppose that we consider our students as anything other than responsible adults.

If we have compassion for our students, we need to take actions to help them develop course competencies, but also skills that allow them to develop in their personal and professional lives. For example, when I receive a rude email or comment for a student, I will try to turn it into an educational experience. For example:

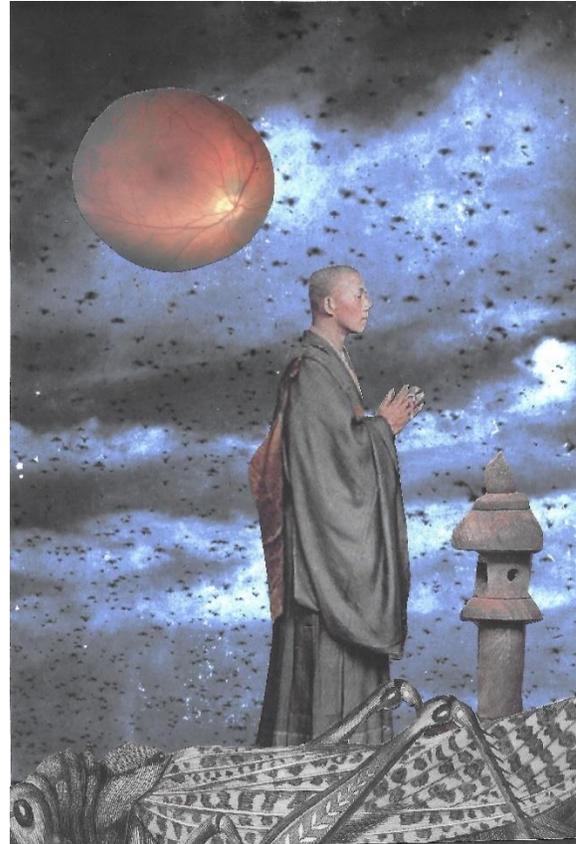
May I make a suggestion concerning tone in writing to a professor?

If I were in your situation, I would send a polite email which followed the course email guidelines (e.g. making sure that the subject line begins with [course redacted]). I would be sure to address the email using the professor's title and name (e.g. Dr. Berg). I would then apologize for overlooking the portion of the grading rubric that said a title page was required. I would thank the professor for already allowing me to revise and resubmit the assignment and ask if the professor would allow me one more opportunity to correct my mistakes.

As written, the only response you can expect from the email you sent is the answer "No."

In this case, the student wrote a very nice response and I quickly granted his request. I would never send such an email unless I was willing to work with the student. In another case, I wrote:

I know that you sometimes get impatient with email responses, so I now take such email [from you] in stride. However, in the future, you might come across as unreasonable at best and rude at worst. I know this is not your intent which I why I am bringing this to your attention. If everything is urgent, then nothing is urgent and people could just start to disregard you. "Oh," shaking their head, "It's another one of those emails from [name redacted]." They might not



*Cakkhupala*

even bother opening it. I mention this because I fear that you could set yourself up for difficulties in the future unless you make some modifications as to how you approach professors—or colleagues in the workplace. Ironically, the more time you are willing to give others to respond, the more likely it is that you will move to the top of their priority list.

I don't know if the student will heed my advice, but it doesn't hurt to give it.

In arguing for compassion, I am not saying that we cannot give up on a student. There are times when all of our efforts will come to naught. For example, I am no longer surprised at the number of students who will not take advantage of my offers to revise and resubmit their assignments for a higher grade.

We must also be conscious to not cross the line between being compassionate and being enabling. There are times when the compassionate response is “No.”

This chapter begins with two essays concerning establishing compassion in our professional lives. I then give an example concerning bereavement days that can serve as a model to change our thinking about the lives of students as well as an essay which encourages us to consider how teaching without having experienced a cognitive disability can sometimes cause us to lose compassion. The chapter ends with an essay arguing that we need to be like Maasai Warriors who use their power to advocate for compassion.



*And Yet She Persisted*

### **Trimming the Yuzu Tree #3: Reflection on the Complicated Lives of Students**

*After watching Dominic trim the Yuzu tree in my cousin's yard, I heard him express his concern that the tree will likely not bear much fruit because the area in which it was planted does not provide enough light. As Dominic explained, "It is not where you want it to be. It's where it wants to be."*

Dominic's words provide comfort to those of us who have compassion for our students and feel a sense of frustration as we watch their personal lives overshadow their potential academic achievement.

Our students have complicated lives. Too often, demands of family or work or other personal concerns overshadow their educational goals. While we want them in class, these outside influences encourage them to be elsewhere, often for very good reasons.

I, too, have a complicated life, and I have more life experience, which gives me skills at juggling various responsibilities. However, because I am human, the personal sometimes interferes with my educational responsibilities. For example, there was the time I cut my finger and had to schedule a doctor's appointment during class time. While I would have preferred that he check the stitches at a time when I was not teaching, I knew the doctor would not be willing to adjust his office schedule to accommodate my desires. My students were very understanding of my situation because they, too, have experienced the necessity of making hard choices between personal and academic commitments.

Over the years, instead of coming to campus, I have accompanied my father to the hospital for a medical procedure. There have also been times when I stayed home from campus when I was ill. Although my students do not have sick days or personal business days built into the syllabus as I have such days built into my contract, their illnesses and other personal business are no less legitimate than mine. As a result, I do my best to work with students who have to miss class.

Yet, there are limits when it is not possible to assist students even if they are dedicated. I once had a dedicated student, who had many legitimate personal reasons for missing class. As a result of her absences, she kept falling further and further behind. Unfortunately, it reached the point where it was no longer possible for me to work effectively with her in such a way that she could pass the course. While I wanted her to be in the classroom, she needed to be elsewhere.

I have heard colleagues callously take the position that such a student deserves to fail. Yet, it is possible to recognize that a student cannot pass a course because of circumstances that are no fault of her own. We would not blame my cousin's Yuzu tree for its failure to produce more fruit. Instead, we would recognize that external factors contributing to its lack of success. If we can be charitable to the Yuzu

tree, we should be able to honor a student's decision to attend to personal matters without blaming her for her "failure."

Several years ago, personal issues caused a colleague to drop his classes in the middle of the semester. Even though he could not fulfill his responsibilities by remaining in the classroom, we did not condemn him for being irresponsible. While we would have preferred that he continue to teach, we recognized that it was not about where we wanted him to be. It was about where he needed to be.

In the case of my student, I had to make the hard decision that there was nothing further I could do to assist her in passing the class. She needed to be elsewhere and I understood and supported her decision. But it did not end there. I intervened on my student's behalf and provided her with information about how she could get a medical withdrawal which would allow her to repeat the course without having to pay for it again. I also made phone calls and sent emails to appropriate individuals on this student's behalf so that she could get additional support.

While some students fail because of irresponsibility, any student can become overwhelmed by their personal lives. Whenever possible, I do my best to work with students so that they can successfully complete their coursework—even if they must complete the work after the semester ends. When such a response is not possible, I make appropriate referrals to colleagues who are trained to provide the necessary assistance.

## A Pedagogy of Compassion

My friend and colleague Clark Iverson has written that “compassion is a crucial element of a transactional production of meaning in classroom discourse, as opposed to the unidirectional pouring of knowledge into the students’ empty cups.” A pedagogy of compassion is meant to facilitate learning and to enhance discourse.

Our students are responsible adults who have adult responsibilities. They are also adults in transition who do not always know the unwritten rules that guide the academic classroom. Even as responsible adults, they are bound to make mistakes or bad decisions. Others lack skills they “should have learned” before entering our classrooms. A pedagogy of compassion encourages us to recognize that serving as mentors is an important role, which we play as faculty.



*Gesture of Teaching: Karuṇā Radiates From Metta*

I was once assigned to be a mentor to a new faculty member who was very talented and experienced. Yet, as a college, we recognized that she would need assistance in navigating the new environment in which she found herself. If an experienced faculty member can benefit from a mentor, mentoring is even more needed by our students.

Sometimes, while juggling complex lives, students make poor choices. Whenever possible, I try to turn choices into educational experiences. I will meet with students, discuss strategies for making better decisions in the future, and refer them to support systems on campus. Critics of a pedagogy of compassion argue that such an approach gives an unfair advantage to these students. While I understand their concern, a pedagogy of compassion is transparent and something knowingly available to all students.

During class, I talk about second chances and a willingness to work with students even if they make a poor decision. I acknowledge that many of my assignments are tough and that the worst-case scenario is that, after they submit the project, I will work with them to improve it. I used to grade, “Pass/No-Credit/Redo.” Now I do most of my grading as “Pass/Not-Yet.” In a “Pass/Not Yet” system, students who do not demonstrate the competency that is being assessed are allowed to revise assignments until they achieve mastery. If they don’t revise or achieve mastery, they would eventually fail the assignment. In reality, there is no practical difference between “Pass/Not Yet” and “Pass/No Credit/Redo.” However, “Pass/Not-Yet” places more focus on the process of passing and is a less threatening way to describe a pedagogical approach that is usually foreign to them.

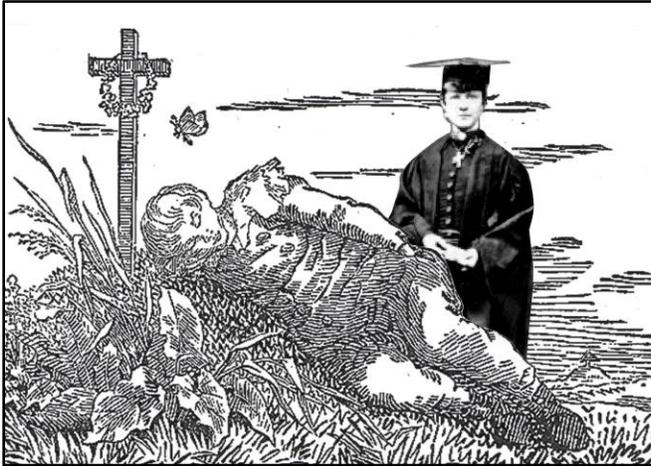
Critics of a pedagogy of compassion rightly point out that, during conferences, students might mention issues we are not qualified to address. But compassion does not mean that we need to delve into our students' personal lives or to try to fix their problems.

When I meet with a student, I will sometimes ask if they are having personal difficulties, for which they might want assistance. In doing so, I do not inquire about the nature of the problem and, if a student attempts to tell me something that is outside my role as professor or academic mentor, I tell them that I don't need the details. Instead, I refer them to another support person on campus. A pedagogy of compassion requires interventions and referrals. It does not require that we provide the services ourselves.

When given the opportunity to revise a paper or project, some students react to a pedagogy of compassion with a sense of gratitude. They take the necessary steps to improve both the assignment and their academic performance more generally. Others, as the critics of a pedagogy of compassion point out, take compassion for weakness and act as if I will accept any revision, even if it is superficial. A pedagogy of compassion provides an opportunity not multiple opportunities.

A pedagogy of compassion does not mean that the student needs to be coddled. I recall one instance in which a student informed a colleague that he was too busy to meet any time before 9:30 pm. My colleague appropriately responded "No." When a student stands me up for an appointment, I say "No" to future appointments unless they are scheduled during office hours. Instead of enabling self-destructive or irresponsible behaviors, sometimes the compassionate response is "No."

When life interferes with our academic responsibilities or we make a bad decision, we depend on the compassion of our students, colleagues, and administrators. Our students deserve no less from us.



*When a Grandmother Dies*

## **Bereavement Days for Students**

As I was preparing to take a personal business day, I could not help but think about a recent discussion concerning students whose grandmothers die during the semester. Often, these discussions begin with snarky comments about how convenient it is that grandmothers die during exam week.

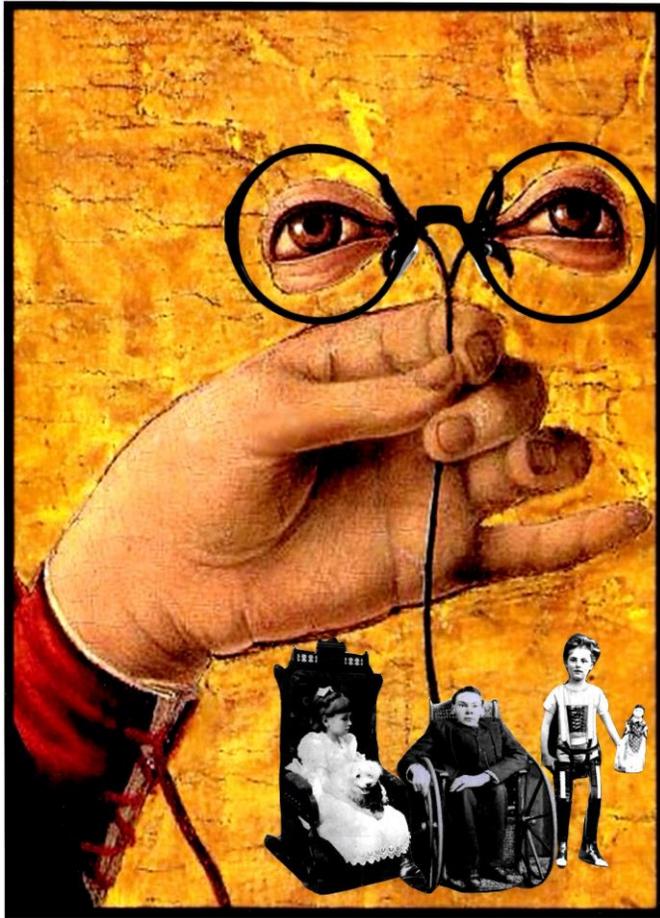
Generally, my contribution to such discussions includes the rhetorical question, “What do you do when a student’s grandmother dies?” My

answer, “Send a note of condolence.” In addition to the condolence note, I also work with the student to make up missed assignments and to stay current in the class.

The tricky issue of faculty determining the legitimacy of bereavement days is exemplified when I took personal business day to attend the funeral of Frank Arvid Cederwall (1924-2018). As a genealogist, I would describe Frank as my first cousin twice removed; a seemingly distant relationship. But, in terms of family dynamics, “Uncle Frank” was closer than a distant relative. Sometimes, a non-biological relationship might be much closer than the relationship a student has with their grandmother or some other relative.

When my students experience a death, I do not set myself up as a judge who decides if their biological relationship or lack thereof with the deceased justifies them missing class to attend the funeral. When a student simply tells me that they have to attend a funeral, that is enough for me.

When I read the snarky comments about it being “convenient” that grandma dies during finals week, I realize that grandma does not choose to die to get her grandchild out of an exam. And when a student tells me that they need to miss class for a funeral, I don’t care if they are paying respects to grandma or to their first cousin twice removed or to someone who has no biological relationship with them.



*Teaching While Underimpaired*

## Teaching While Underimpaired

*“People who do not have cognitive disabilities think they know what it means to have limitations but they do not.”*

— Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Quoted by Cathy N. Davidson in “Handicapped by Being Underimpaired”<sup>21</sup>

I clearly remember a 24-hour period during which I suffered cognitive disabilities; a period during which I was not sure if my cognitive abilities would return.

I had just suffered a ministroke. In the emergency room, I was unable to fill out the admission form because it was too difficult for me to form my letters. The effort to write the “B” for my last name was so taxing that I had to ask someone else to complete the form for me. With difficulty, I could process thoughts and answer questions, but I knew that I was not functioning at the same level I had been less than one hour earlier.

Fortunately, my cognitive skills returned and I suffered no permanent damage. But I still

remember the fear of knowing that I might continue to live in a cognitively impaired state.

Even though I wear glasses without which I could not function in the classroom, I remain fairly underimpaired; much less impaired than many of my students. In bringing up my glasses, I am not trying to trivialize students with “real” disabilities. In the United States, it is relatively easy to get glasses and to simply need glasses is not considered a disability because of the social construction and connotation of the word. Instead, it allows me to bring up the issue of who gets accommodations. For example, to qualify for accommodations, a student at my college--and other colleges as well—must first be certified by our Disabilities Office as needing accommodations.

At the beginning of every semester, I receive a list of students who officially qualify for accommodations in my classes. Sometimes the reason is cognitive. Sometimes physical. Sometimes mental. Never for socio-economic reasons which are not covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Yet the

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<sup>21</sup> Davidson, Cathy. “Handicapped by Being Underimpaired: Teaching with Equality at the Core.” *HASTAC*. 7 July 2015.

accommodation letter is not sufficient for students to receive accommodations until the student discusses the letter with their professors. No conversation means no accommodations.

Students transitioning from high school often do not realize that the rules for accommodations change; that just because they had accommodations in high school does not mean that they automatically get accommodations in college. In fact, it can come as a shock to those students that they no longer have a district paid advocate working with them and their professors as they had in high school. Often, they do not realize that they need to be their own advocates without any training on how to do so. For example, I used to be very annoyed when a student wanted to discuss their accommodations three minutes before the first class of the semester. Eventually, I realized that these students are acting in good faith but were ignorant of how to best approach their professor. I continue to handle the situation the same way by making an appointment with the student, but I no longer suffer from the self-imposed irritation that resulted in my own ignorance of how the dynamics of our exchange were playing out.

Because I have already built accommodations—which can also be called best practices—into the courses I teach, most of my students who qualify for accommodations do not need to ask me to accommodate them. For example, in the notes I send to students after each class, I include a section called “Forthcoming,” where I list readings, videos, or PowerPoint presentations that I intend to use during the next class. Having access to these materials in advance is not just beneficial for students whose impairments officially qualify them for accommodations.

Recently, I have come to realize that there is an even more important aspect to universal design as it directly relates to students who need accommodations but do not have access to becoming “properly” certified to receive them. In a universally designed classroom, students have access to accommodations anyway. Policy at many colleges do not permit a professor to offer accommodations to students who do not officially qualify for them. Yet there is no policy prohibiting professors for using universal design which offers the most common types of accommodations to all students.

Recognizing that we can be handicapped by our underimpairment allows us to realize that not all brains work the same. In 2012, Cathy Davidson wrote: “My brain doesn’t do comics, never has . . . but maybe some day it will. I used to marvel at my Dad, my brother, and my sister who would fight for the comics page. When my partner Ken shows me a hilarious New Yorker cartoon, I spend maybe ten minutes trying to fathom it and half the time hand it back, puzzled. It’s a form I admire so much but it eludes me . . . until I met Nick [Sousanis].”<sup>22</sup> This was three years before she experienced cognitive impairment due to excessive blood loss and just after her *Now You See It* (2012) was published. Just a few years ago, the acclaimed educator, who is now a Distinguished Professor and Director of the Futures Initiative at the City University of New York Graduate Center, could not understand comics.

When I first read Nick Sousanis’ *Unflattening* (2015), I could not fully understand it because I was not used to reading comics. The academic content as demonstrated in the text was easy for me to comprehend, but I really did not begin to appreciate the relationship between image and text until my third reading of the book and after discussing the book with students. My students embraced the book

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson, Cathy. “A Dissertation About Comics That is a Comic: Great Interview with Nick Sousanis.” *HASTAC*. 5 March 2012.

because they are used to reading comics and graphic novels. However, they struggled with the academic and historical references. We were both underimpaired in different ways.

Like Davidson, I do my best to acknowledge my underimpairment so that it does not negatively impact my teaching my teaching. Teaching *Unflattening* challenged me, but tackling the challenge allowed me to better understand what my students experience when I challenge them, especially those students who are grappling with their own underimpairments.

Fortunately, one does not need to experience cancer or a stroke or a significant amount of blood loss in order to have empathy for students who require accommodations. Some of us just need to remove our glasses—or read a comic—in order to see the world more clearly.



*Standing With Power and Compassion*

## **Using Our Power to Advocate For Compassion; or, What We Can Learn from Maasai Warriors**

Because of a project on which I was working with my colleague Jessica Worden-Jones and some students, I had the opportunity to meet several members of the Maasai Cricket Warriors including Sonyanga Ole Ngais and Richard Turere. These Maasai Warriors have much to teach us about power and compassion.

Several years ago, using their power as warriors and cricketers, Nagis and other Maasai Warriors took on campaigns advocating against nonconsensual female genital mutilation, supporting of HIV/AIDS awareness, advancing conservation efforts, and building peace. They stood up against the prevailing cultural norms and worked to educate the Maasai elders. And they are making changes.

Turere's advancements in compassion were initially directed at the lions he used to hate. As a boy of nine, he began to be "responsible for herding and safeguarding my family's cattle." The hatred toward lions resulted because "living on the edge of the unfenced Nairobi National Park our valuable livestock would be raided by the lions roaming the park's sweet savannah grasses, leaving me to count the losses." To counter the attacks, Maasai warriors would kill the lions: that is, until Turere used his knowledge to "come up with an innovative, simple and low-cost system to scare the predators away." His innovation was to connect LED lights to an old car battery. "The lights flash in sequence, tricking lions into believing that someone is carrying around the cows shed." Because the lions stay away from

the cow sheds, there is no need to kill them. The lions, the cows, and the Maasai are all winners as Turere used his power to work with other warriors in their conservation efforts.<sup>23</sup>

Especially those of us who are tenured professors need to follow the lead of Maasai warriors by using our power to advocate for compassion. Because we do not think about the non-consensual genital mutilation widely practiced on intersex infants, we generally do not consider female genital mutilation as a cultural norm in the United States. Nor do we need to worry about lions killing our cattle. But we have many opportunities to use our power to advocate for compassionate responses on behalf of students, adjunct faculty members, and staff. We cannot ignore those things that do not directly impact us, but need to stand up to injustices, bad policies, and other decisions that have a negative impact on the individuals at our institutions.

I have heard faculty members express concern that “If we say something, administrators will punish us.” That can happen. But what can the administrator really do to a tenured faculty member? For someone on probation or is working on a renewable contract, speaking up can cause a loss of job. But even if an administrator goes out of their way to make our tenured lives miserable, they cannot take away our livelihood without just cause.

Even before I was tenured, I was advocating for my students. I remember a professional development session when I was still in graduate school conducted by Dr. “Pompous.” At one point, Dr. Pompous suggested that we have students write about something they know about; something such as their first date. Even though I was new to teaching, I knew that this was a terrible writing prompt. Some students might not have had a first date. Others may have been sexually assaulted on their first date. The prompt was too specific and did not allow students the flexibility to avoid writing about a potentially traumatic experience unless they lied.

After Dr. Pompous gave his suggestion, I raised my hand and asked, “With a man or a woman?” In the late 1980s, it is not surprising that Dr. Pompous became very flustered; but not as flustered as a student who had been raped on their first date might have responded to his ill-informed prompt.

A friend at another institution wrote about technical problems she encouraged because “IT made changes without talking to us first.” As faculty members, we need to advocate for our voices as well as the voices of staff and students to be part of discussions; especially when bad decisions are being made. And if we are not included, we need to find ways to make our voices heard. Several years ago, a department at my institution kept claiming that a certain problem was unique to each of the faculty members who reported it. To counteract the official denial, we began to send emails to the dean each and every time the problem came up while we were teaching. Soon, the problem began to be addressed at the institutional level.

One of the risks of using our power to advocate for compassion is that we can lose the equanimity and drift into a pervasive dissatisfaction. Sometimes institutions move very slowly. I once spent four years trying to have an error corrected in an institutional document. This was despite the fact that there was 100% agreement that a change needed to be made. Sometimes, we find that we are Don Quixotes fighting windmills.

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<sup>23</sup> For more information about Richard Turere’s work, please consult his website: [lionboy.org](http://lionboy.org).

The advice a senior colleague gave to a new faculty member who had just been made to feel powerless is important:

I must admit, I step away from situations I cannot change and work like heck in situations I can. That, in fact, may be my survival guide. "Step away from situations you cannot change, work like heck in situations where you think you can make a difference and where the process is good and feeds you so that, even if you fail to make a difference, you grow stronger and learn from the process itself." That does not mean accepting the situations you cannot change. Not at all. But it does mean accepting where your particular reach and power cannot have an impact on a situation--and making choices for those situations that feed you, inspire you, and where you can be powerful and a force for change.

This advice cannot, however, be used to excuse inaction without analysis. It would have been too easy for Sonyanga Ole Ngais to think that as a lone individual he would be powerless to stand up with the women in his community against a strong cultural tradition supported by the elders. He would have been wrong. Richard Turere could have accepted the prevailing attitude that the only way to deal with lions was to kill them. He was willing to consider where he had power and how far it could reach before accepting defeat without trying anything. There are now over 750 families who are using Turere's invention to protect their cattle.

Although comparing our students and colleagues to cattle is problematic, we need to accept that metaphors have their limits. That being said, it is important that we fight the lions at our own institutions while realizing that there is no need to kill them.

## Everyday Tips and Tricks for Teaching with Compassion

The Buddhist tradition has the Karaniya Metta Sutta which begins “This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness, and who knows the path of peace” before listing instructions on how to radiate loving kindness from self to the world. Matthew 25:40 from the Christian scripture tells us that whatever we do to even the least of my brothers or sisters, you do until Jesus. In the Islamic tradition, there is a text--recorded in the illustration for this section--that instructs “Kindness is a mark of faith, and whoever has not kindness has not faith.” Although there are some philosophers such as Ann Randwho reject altruism, most religious and philosophical systems rightly recognize that it is through compassion that we make our world better on both the macro and micro level.



*Tips and Tricks #04*

- Give students “sick days” and “personal business days.” This is something that could be listed in the syllabus as well as discussed in class.
- Recognize that outside influences can cause a student’s “failure.”
- Students often do not know the processes that are required to get assistance. That should not annoy us; even if we include that information in our syllabi.
- Proactively work with a student who is having difficulties.
- We don’t have to provide all of the services ourselves. We can make referrals.
- We do not need to know the details of a student’s personal life to make a referral.
- Serve as mentors to our students.
- Don’t serve as judge to determine what is a “legitimate” illness or funeral when a student needs to miss class.
- Whenever possible, allow students to know what is forthcoming so that they can review readings, videos, and other course materials in advance.
  - Making this as part of universal design means that we don’t have to worry about accommodating students who require such services because they are already built into the course.
- Let students know about special circumstances withdrawals<sup>24</sup> and other special considerations that the college can make.
- Compassion does not mean we cannot say “No.”

<sup>24</sup> Special circumstances withdrawals are the name of the process my college uses that allow students who are ill or whom have had some other extraordinary circumstance to drop a class after the deadline without having the class appear on their transcript. In some cases, students are even given a refund for the course or a retake credit which allows them to take the course again without paying for it.

- Adopt a “Pass/Not Yet” or some other form of grading system that acknowledges that students master course skills at different times.
- Using our power does not presuppose that we consider our students as anything other than responsible adults.

# Finding Joy in Student Success

## Introduction

In “What the Bird with the Human Head Knew,” Anne Sexton observes, “Abundance is scooped from abundance yet abundance remains.”<sup>25</sup> In our work with students, there is an unending abundance of joy if we don’t lose sight of the daily benefits they put out into the world.

Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapter 1, a pervasive dissatisfaction can creep into our lives if we lose perspective. Sometimes, our

joy can wane when students do not recognize our efforts on their behalf because they are “only” attending a community college. It is what happens in “big boy college” that is important to them. Similar disregard for the work of community colleges can also come from politicians, the public, and even some of our colleagues. Yet we cannot allow these individuals to make us forget the abundance with which we are surrounded by the majority of our students.

Before we can accept what the bird with the human head knew, it is necessary for us to accept the reality of our own ignorance. If we cannot be comfortable with what we don’t know, it is difficult—if not impossible—to design the type of student-centered classroom from which abundant joy can flow.

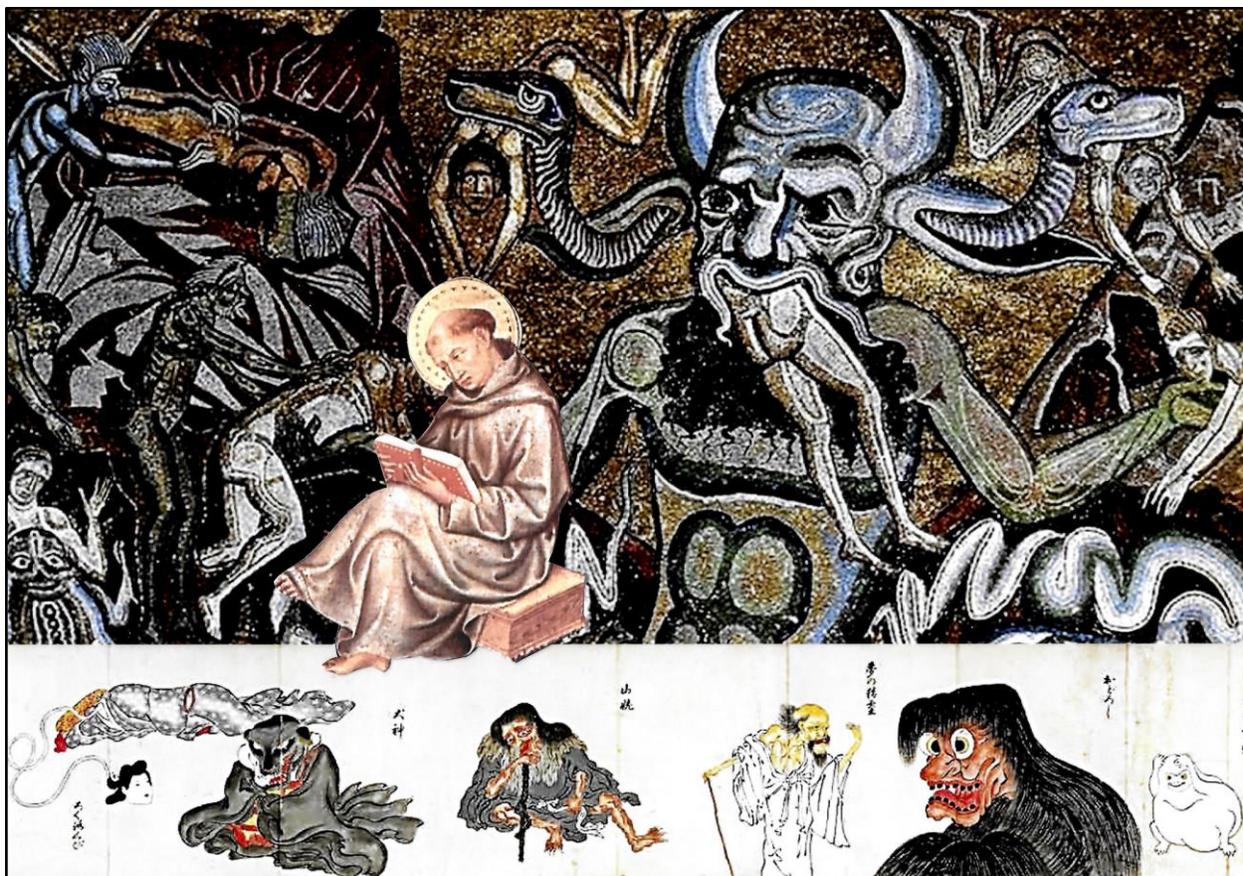
In addition to finding joy in the success of students, we should also share in the joy of our colleagues. By celebrating in the accomplishments of others, we can increase the world’s supply of joy.



*The Bird with the Human Head*

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<sup>25</sup> Sexton, Anne. “What the Bird With the Human Head Knew.” *Complete Poems*. Houghton Mifflin, 1984.



*Equanimity Surrounded By Detractors*

## “Big Boy College” and Community College Voices

A student posted a message in a public forum informing readers that his new semester at “big boy college” was about to begin. Since transferring from a community college, he periodically posts about his “big boy college” experiences. It is unfortunate that he does not appreciate the significant advantages he received as a student at his community college; advantages he could not hope to experience at “big boy college” had he gone there for his first two years of college.<sup>26</sup> Yet, he continues to take a demeaning stance toward his community-college alma mater and the professors with whom he studied.

I remember one spring semester when a university student taking one of my courses informed me that certain requirements for the community college class were not necessary at his university. My response was that “maybe our expectations are higher?” He is not the first university student with whom I have worked who was anticipating a blow-off class because it was offered by a community college. University students frequently struggle to meet community-college quality standards when they attempt to pick up a couple of “easy” classes during their summer breaks.

<sup>26</sup> I cannot cite specific advantages this student received because the list could be used to identify him.

When I first started teaching at Schoolcraft College, students would refer to our institution as Haggerty High, a reference to the road on which we are located. Then, the economy faltered, and students took a serious look at their education options. They began to realize that Haggerty High was not something on which they had to settle because they couldn't afford a good college. They began to realize that although inexpensive, Haggerty High and other community colleges provide them with a quality education.

What is more disturbing than when students assume that community colleges are inferior is when community-college faculty members conduct themselves as if we are inferior. One year, while coordinating a digital-literacy competition for Michigan community-college students, I arranged to have three university professors serve as judges: a co-founder of HASTAC who was then teaching at Duke University; the Director and CEO of *Hybrid Pedagogy* who was then teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Madison; and a former Andrew W. Mellon Fellow who is now teaching at Washington State University. After the judges were announced, a faculty member sent me an email asking "what can the community college student from an open-admissions school like [college name deleted] hope for from that level of judging?"

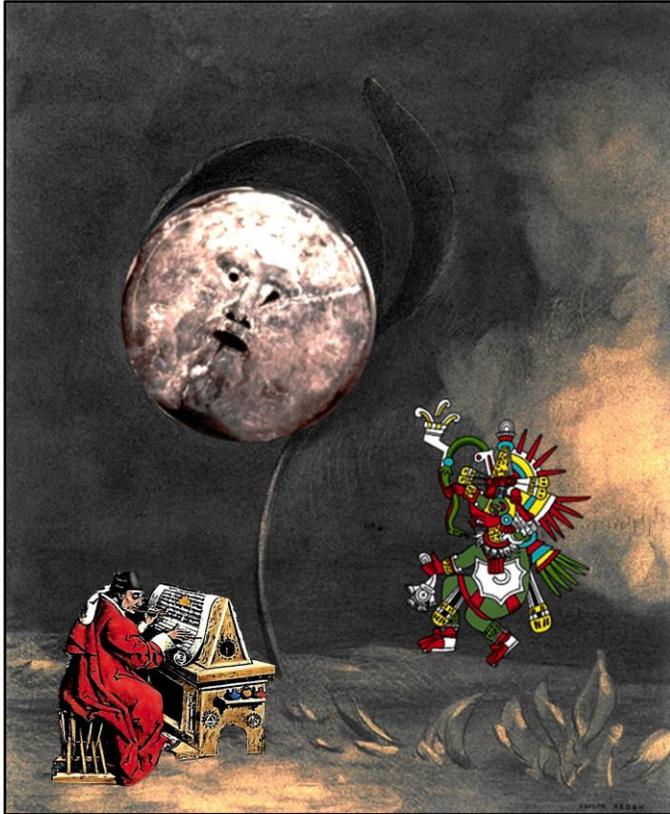
Ironically, when inviting these university professors to judge our contest, I was not as concerned about what our students could learn from them. I wanted those judges to learn from our students. The judges provided feedback that was extremely helpful for our students, but—more importantly—they were able to interact with and see the quality work produced by community college students. They have since incorporated that knowledge into their work promoting digital literacy.

While discussing vital educational issues, the voices of community-college students are practically non-existent. This is a problem that we can easily change.

Frequently, my students post comments to online articles. They join discussions that take place on *Hybrid Pedagogy* and HASTAC. They have also posted comments on articles published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. While engaging in public writing, community college students have no difficulty holding their own with university students, faculty members, and administrators.

In a conversation I once had with the author of two of the *Hybrid Pedagogy* articles which my students were discussing, he commented, "I'm excited to read some student response to this subject." He recognizes that, while considering effective syllabi and the pedagogy of classroom discussions, student voices are vital. In fact, I often find student observations to be more perceptive than comments posted by faculty members—including myself—and administrators.

Our students will either live up to or down to our expectations. When we believe that their voices count and translate that belief into our pedagogies, our students can start to believe that their voices count in our classrooms. When students engage in public writing, they are empowered. They learn that they are individuals who deserve to be taken seriously because they have serious contributions to make. The positive responses they receive from their contributions in the public square confirm the faith we have in them and the confidence they have in themselves.



*Accepting the Reality of Ignorance Leads to Wisdom*

## Accepting the Reality of Our Ignorance

In February 1989, I defended my dissertation on *AA, Spiritual Issues, and the Treatment of Lesbian and Gay Alcoholics* in which I traced the competing trends of individualism and perfectionism from the colonial period to 1935. I argued that Alcoholics Anonymous was successful, in part, because it was able to marry these two trends. I then analyzed the effect of the God talk in AA using lesbians and gay men as a model.

After successfully defending my dissertation, Dr. Mary Lea Schneider presented “Dr. Berg” to my friends, family, and colleagues who had attended my defense. It was an exciting moment both academically and personally.

After Dr. Schneider introduced Dr. Berg, I headed across the street with my family, friends, and colleagues to the Peanut Barrel where we threw our peanut shells on the floor while waiting to be served great sandwiches.

Later that evening, I had a party at Castellani’s Market, one of the first coffee shops in East Lansing, Michigan where my guests were treated to an open bar and enjoyed a latte or cappuccino or one of the other new types of coffee drinks which were not as common in 1989 as they have become in the twenty-first century.

On the day I defended my dissertation, I had the rare experience of knowing that I knew more than anyone else in the world on my topic. No one anywhere, including the talented professors<sup>27</sup> with whom I had studied, knew more than I did concerning my area of research.

Too often, newly minted PhDs stop there. We like the feeling of being the celebrated expert and desire to remain the celebrated expert. We cling to the illusion that we can hold onto the excitement of knowing more than anyone else. Unfortunately, faculty members who must feed their desire to remain the most knowledgeable person in the room are ill-equipped to design a class centered on their students instead of themselves.

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Lee Schneider. Victor Howard, and Milt Powell. W. Fred Graham served as the outside readers. Cathy N. Davidson resigned from my committee when she left Michigan State University for Duke University after years of working with me and just months before I defended my dissertation. Her resignation made it easier to set up the dissertation defense than if she had had to return to Michigan. Stephen Botein, my major professor in history, died in 1986 just after I had completed my comprehensive examination. Glenn Wright briefly served on my committee until my research interests changed. After he formally left the committee, he did continue to advise me.

Fortunately, the act of defending my dissertation also provided the antidote that can keep me from clinging to the sense of self-importance that I felt on the day I knew more than anyone else in the world concerning my research. That antidote was to realize the extent of my ignorance. In the grand scheme of knowledge, *AA, Spiritual Issues, and the Treatment of Lesbian and Gay Alcoholics* is pretty insignificant.

As professors interested in developing student-centered classes, we must first accept the reality of our ignorance and allow each student to become a content expert who can be—at various points during the semester—the most knowledgeable person in the room.

This is no false modesty. If I did not have confidence in my abilities, I would be too threatened by students discovering that I was not the all-knowing Dr. Berg who, one day almost 30 years ago—for the only time in his life—knew more than anyone else in the world on a particular research topic that was both important and insignificant. At best, I could only act as the fearful all-knowing Oz hiding behind a curtain in hopes that students would not see any hint of a lack of knowledge.

When I walk into the classroom on days I am responsible for the course content, I often have a “Plan B” and, sometimes, even a “Plan C” depending on how students respond to the lesson. I also have years of experience which allows me to do impromptu mini lessons when the need arises.

When students are responsible for the day’s course content, I can never be exactly sure what to expect. As students give their presentations, I am listening, taking notes on what I am learning, and jotting down ideas I can use to build on what is being presented. I—like the students—am both teacher and learner.

Even though there are days when students are assigned content responsibility, I have found that students sense that there is something different about the student centered class that allows them to begin taking responsibility for course content as early as the first day of class. A few years ago on the first day of class, Jacob Mulcahy-Miller suggested that we go to Candy Mountain and, after screening *Charlie the Unicorn*<sup>28</sup> we discussed unicorns and stolen kidneys instead of the lesson I had planned. Yet I was still able to teach the substance of my lesson using his example.

Although I complain about Mulcahy-Miller taking us to Candy Mountain, I know that my complaint is one of pride; of realizing that I was able to teach the lesson I had planned by treating his contribution as an alternative route to success and not a detour to be endured.

When I asked Mulcahy-Miller for permission to use this example and his name in an essay that I was writing, he replied:

Lol, wow. I feel special. First class of my first year in college and I was already teaching the teach! :)

It takes confidence to create a class where students can make significant contributions. Yet, at the time he took us to Candy Mountain, I was three times older than Mulcahy-Miller and had been teaching college level courses longer than he had been alive. However, as someone committed to learning, I can be mentored and learn from a distinguished professor who wrote her dissertation on *The Problem of Expiration in the Thought of Teilhard de Chardin: A Story of the Structural Limitations of the Teilhardian Synthesis* and an eighteen-year-old who was attending his first college class.

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<sup>28</sup> Steele, Jason. *Charlie the Unicorn*. Two Cows. 2008.

## Non-Teaching and Sympathetic Joy

Once when I took some personal time to attend a funeral service, students in my research-writing class met without me. Later that evening, I received the following note:

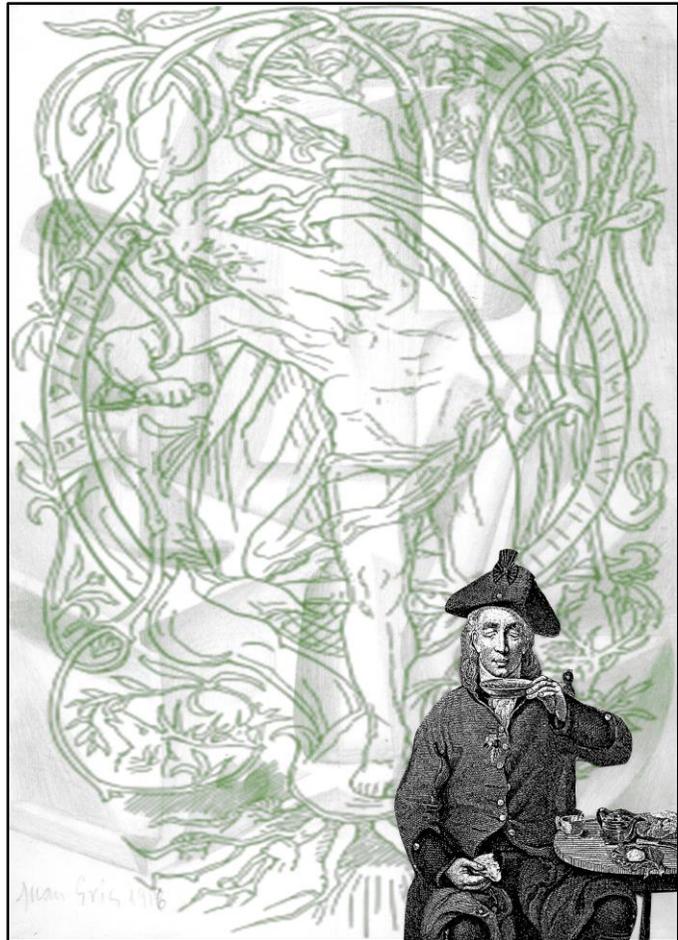
You missed a marvelous class session today. I thought it was very productive and the bulk of the class stayed until the end of the class period despite you not being there.

I was neither surprised that the students had a very productive session without me nor that most of the students stayed until the end of the period. Why wouldn't they? They were designing a fascinating project in which they took a personal interest. Two of their representatives met with someone, who had been recommended by the dean of students. The representatives then invited this person to attend class—the class I missed.

From the two-sentence report I received, I knew that the day was productive. I also knew that, once I finally received the details, I would be expected to do everything possible to support a project that I already knew did not fit the specifics of what I had planned to teach this semester.

Several years ago, during a conference session on “The Less I Teach, the More My Students Learn,” one of my student co-presenters<sup>29</sup> explained that the class he had taken had done something specific. Then he said that the class had done something else and then they had done something else. He concluded by excitedly proclaiming, “At this point, Dr. Berg hadn't taught us anything!” The audience laughed. They also realized that the student had obviously learned a great deal in a class where I had not taught him anything. He had learned as much as he did because students were given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning.

Then there was the day when I became so sick after arriving on campus that I had to leave early even though I had no way to warn students that class was being cancelled.<sup>30</sup> The next class period, I said that we would start with the student who was to present the day I cancelled class. It was then that students



*Enjoying a Hot Beverage*

<sup>29</sup> To say that this student was a co-presenter is a bit of a misrepresentation. I was sitting in the back of the room drinking coffee while he and his student colleagues did “my” presentation for me.

<sup>30</sup> I now use Remind.com to communicate with students via text message.

informed me that this student had given his presentation during the previous class period. In confusion I asked, "But wasn't there a sign on the door cancelling class?" It turns out that the students took down the sign. They were present and prepared for class and didn't see any reason why it needed to be cancelled.

Once, when I told the story of the uncanceled class to a colleague, their first response was to ask, "How could you grade the student if you weren't there?" This person had totally missed the point of the story. Because I work so closely with students, I already knew he would earn an "A" for the presentation. What was important is that the students felt empowered to take down the sign and meet without me.

Although I am fond of saying that "I try to teach as little as possible," I am aware that the role of faculty members in the classroom is vital for student success. It is faculty members who create a culture of learning in our classrooms and provide students with the skills they need to be successful scholars. If we do not lay the groundwork, students would be unable to take responsibility for their own learning.

Unfortunately, the less we try to teach in the traditional sense, the more we open ourselves for critique. Extrinsic rewards for those who try to change systemic problems are rare; especially from those whose systems we are trying to change. Fortunately, sympathetic joy allows us to participate in each others' successes. For example, when I was telling a team of students that they would need to consider certain issues as they designed a survey, one of the students told me that they had already discussed those points. After all, she explained, "I have taken psychology."

I rarely have the opportunity to hear a student explain what he or she learned in my class. But, if I listen to students talk among themselves while I am "not teaching them anything," I am able to see them apply the knowledge they learned in other classes. These were classes in which my colleagues placed a value on student learning instead of simply teaching students. And I have faith that my colleagues benefit from my non-teaching as I benefit from their focus on student success.



*Of Caffeinated Goats and Students*

## **Losing Control in a Student-Centered Class**

Before I was able to begin my presentation in Ancient World History, a student asked a question that turned into an hour-long discussion. The sidebar led to me scrap my presentation. Scrapping my presentation required that I totally revise the first unit I was in the middle of teaching in such a way that nothing I had prepared would work anymore.

Students left class that day with a homework assignment that put them in control of the next class's lesson and possibly next week of classes as well. Eventually, they will have to design an appropriate assessment for the unit because the assessment I designed had become irrelevant. As they were walking out of class, they were already talking about their plans for the next class and how excited they were to continue that day's discussion which was far more sophisticated than what I had planned to teach that day.

It was only the fourth day of class, and I had already lost control.

When I recounted this story to a friend, he asked, "So, forgive me, but if the students are in control of Monday's lesson and will prepare an appropriate assessment to show their learning, then WHAT DO YOU DO?" My friend asked his question to tease me in the same way I needle a minister friend each time I suggest that he only has to work one day a week. But there is a serious component to the question that should be considered.

If our classes are student centered in such a way that students teach significant portions of the class, what do we do as professors? Or, in other words, why should the college pay me to sit in the back of the room with my cup of tea while my Ancient World History students teach class?

It would have been much easier for me to show up for class and discuss the videos I had already prepared than it was for me to sit in the back of the room feverishly taking notes so that I can appropriately respond to the information my students present. Because I was not in control of the presentation's content, I had to be extremely attentive and actively engaged in the class discussion so that I could make sure that, regardless of what students choose to present, the skills they need to develop in terms of the course competencies were met. Fortunately for students, I am not unique in my interest in providing student-centered classes that provide them with both course content as well as skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I once read a Facebook post by a university colleague who announced, "My Romanticism course is broken. Now I'm hoping that... the participation of my class can help me put it back together again." As part of the discussion, he admitted that it was he who broke the class by destroying the assumptions that were found in the syllabus. I knew he had laboriously taken time to develop that syllabus. Now he and his students are "spending the rest of the semester reinventing a Romantic Lit survey for Electracy."

Through the grapevine, I have heard that someone with whom I work believes that my non-teaching makes a mockery of our work as professors. Because I do not know the identity of my critic, I can only speculate as to my colleague's worldview; a worldview that does not recognize the benefits of the student-centered classroom or the work involved in allowing students to make significant course decisions. Although my friend was joking when he posed the question to me, I could imagine someone who has been successful in a traditional classroom all of their life viewing my non-teaching and seriously asking, "WHAT DO YOU DO?"

Fortunately, we have answers to the hard questions. Our willingness to lose control of our classes or to announce that our well-designed syllabus is broken is actually a sign of dedicated teaching, rooted in sound pedagogy. Our non-teaching produces student engagement that leads to learning, and we take joy in the accomplishments that grow from such engagement.

After one class discussion, I received the following message from a student enrolled in the ancient world history course in which I lost control.

This article was given to me by a Muslim friend of mine. I remember you had said you were not very clear on [a Muslim] creation story, and neither was I, but this link should be a very good representation of their beliefs.

Discussing class with a friend and finding this article does not benefit the student in terms of their grade. But, as of the second week in a student-centered class, this student was no longer primarily motivated to get a good grade. They had become engaged with subject matter and wanted to learn. And they wanted to help me learn as well.

What do we do as student-centered teachers willing to lose control? Among other things, we provide a foundation of student engagement that allows students to focus on learning instead of grades. Instead of trying to game the syllabus, they can spend their time enjoying a learning process where they will learn more than what is required by the syllabus.



*Come on it, the Water's Fine*

## **Swimming in the Deep End**

A colleague once commented that she admired the quality of work that I am able to get my students to achieve. She continued by telling me that she often feels as if she were watching me swim in the deep end, while she hugs the edge of the pool wearing a life preserver. Concerning the pedagogical strategy we were discussing, her observation was accurate. But that is not the entire story.

I often watch my very dedicated colleague swim in the deep end as I clutch the edge. I cannot hope to get the quality work from my students that her students are able to produce under her guidance.

I am very grateful that my colleague's leadership skills have facilitated various campus events. These are events that I have neither the skill nor the temperament to organize. Students at our college profit from her commitment to quality education and her willingness to venture into the deep end. She swims by while most of us watch while clinging on to our life preservers.

Students in my classes learn important skills which they do not have the opportunity to learn in most of the other classes they take. But, if all faculty members taught like I did, students would obtain neither the quality education nor the transformative experience a college education offers.

First, not all students are well suited for the radically student-centered type of class I teach. Many need the structure that some of my valued colleagues provide. Other students find that some quality courses, taught by colleagues, are too rigid and welcome the freedom I offer them. We cannot each be all things to all students.

The second issue is that I cannot adequately teach all of the skills students need for success. I do what I do very well. But I am not very good at covering the skills that my colleague incorporates into her classes. Students need to swim in the deep end with both of us, as well as other faculty members who excel using pedagogical approaches very different from our own.

Several years ago, I had a student who really liked my teaching style and did very well in the course he had taken with me. I enjoyed working with him throughout the semester. But because he wanted to be a high-school history teacher, I told him that he should not enroll in any other history courses I taught. As a future history teacher, he needed to be exposed to a variety of approaches to the study of history and he could only get that exposure by enrolling in classes that were taught by professors whose approach was different from mine.

Too often, educational debates forget that students need to be exposed to a *variety* of best practices. Students would be harmed if a specific best practice were to be universally adopted. I can imagine someone arguing “But don’t you think that compassionate teaching practices should be universally adopted?” Of course I do. But I would make a distinction between adopting compassion and requiring specific types of compassionate practices. For example, I would not want to see a requirement that professors must allow students to revise assignments because doing so is compassionate. As I argue elsewhere, sometimes saying “No” is the compassionate response. Also, should students be allowed to revise assignments in which they exhibit gross academic dishonesty? Or what if they submit their revision after the semester ends?

In her TED talk (which I learned about while watching another colleague swim in the deep end), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains in *The Dangers of a Single Story* that while we can learn valuable lessons from a single story, a single story is dangerous because it never gives the full perspective. If, to use one of Adichie’s examples, we were to rely on the single story found in *American Psycho*, we would need to conclude “that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers.”<sup>31</sup>

In a lesson on narrative, I incorporated Adichie’s and—by extension—my colleague’s view of narrative by screening *The Dangers of a Single Story*. Yet, the course remained primarily my narrative. The narrative of my class is a valuable single story taught from the deep end of the pool, but it remains a single story that needs to be supplemented with other narratives, taught from the deep ends of other pools.

It felt good to have my colleague recognize the hard work that it takes to swim in the deep end, while promoting student success. But, as someone committed to quality education, I am equally excited to put on my life preserver and cheer her on as she, too, swims in the deep end.

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<sup>31</sup> Adichie, Chimamanda. *The Dangers of a Single Story*. TED Talk. July 2009. Retrieved 29 November 2018.

## Everyday Tips and Tricks for Finding Joy in Student Success

Working with just one irresponsible student can dominate our time in such a way that the pervasive dissatisfaction discussed in the first chapter can seep into our lives like a spreading fog that obscures the abundance of joy around us. Yet we have so many student successes on a day to day basis. We can increase those successes and the joy we find in them by adopting practices that support student transformation and achievement.



*Tips and Tricks #05*

- Our students will live up or down to our expectations.
- As professors in a student centered classroom, we provide the foundation that leads to student success.
- When possible, allow students to conduct class even when you are absent.<sup>32</sup>
- Give control of classes to students.
- Students are empowered when they do public writing.
  - While engaging in public writing, community college students have no difficulty holding their own with university students, faculty members, and administrators.
  - Frequently, my students post comments to online articles. They join discussions that take place on *Hybrid Pedagogy* and HASTAC. They have also posted comments on articles published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*.
- Allow students to become content experts in our classes.
  - Allow students to teach the teacher.
- Encourage students to incorporate their knowledge from other classes into your classroom.
- In the course methodology or some other section of the syllabus, invite students to share course content from their previous experiences. Reinforce this with announcements in class and other class activities.
  - I sometimes tell students that I am preparing nothing for the specific class period because they are supplying the content. Content might be videos or memes or something else that they bring to class.

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<sup>32</sup> Be sure to check your college policies before doing this. Because of liability issues, I have had to stop allowing students to meet in the classroom when I am not present. However, they can meet in the library without me.

- Remember that a best practices are not universal. Students need to be provided with a number of best practices from a variety of professors.
- When you walk into the classroom on days you are responsible for the course content, have a “Plan B” and, sometimes, even a “Plan C” you can use depending on how students respond to the lesson.
- When students are responsible for the day’s course content, you can never be exactly sure what to expect. As students give their presentations, you need to listen, take notes on what you are learning, and jot down ideas you can use to build on what is being presented.

# Reducing Fear and Empowering Students



*You Forgot I Was a Seed*

## Introduction

Gil Fronsdale explains that “honest awareness of what makes us imbalanced helps us to learn how to find balance.”<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, our students generally have not reached the level of emotional maturity to find balance on their own. This is not because of some failing on their part, but because they are young. Even non-traditionally aged students are going through periods of transition that can keep them imbalanced. As such, they are unable “to look over the whole situation, not bound by one side or the other.”<sup>34</sup>

Much of the imbalance that students experience stems from fear combined with a lack of agency in their lives. When I say that students have a lack of agency, I am not arguing that they have no agency. What I want to do is emphasize that there are systemic issues both within and outside the college that students cannot control or over

which they have minimal control. For example, when local K-12 districts close for a snow day yet the college remains open, students often need to miss class in order to care for younger brothers and sisters. Other students miss because they have no child care for their own children. To argue that these students have the agency to choose whether or not to attend class recognizes that there really is no viable choice for these students.

When a potential snow day is anticipated, I plan a lesson that students can do at home. The revised lesson often includes a video that students can watch with their children or younger brothers and sisters. I then screen the same video on campus for students who are able to attend class. Even if the

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<sup>33</sup> Fronsdale, Gil. “Equanimity.” *Insight Meditation*, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Hahn, Thich Nhat. *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books, 1999.

storm knocks out Internet service or the student does not have Internet at home, it is easy for them to make up the missed work at a later time.

Not just do I make alternate plans, I let students know *in advance* that I am making these plans. That way, they don't have to worry about child care and their responsibilities at home.

We can also reduce fear by speaking of our own failures. It is no secret that I almost failed out of graduate school because of excessive drinking. I will joke with students that my recipe for a mixed drink was when you dropped ice into your Scotch or vodka; something I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

I also share my writing failures with students and share stories about when I have run into problems in professional settings; such as when a laptop computer jumped out of the back seat of my car and self destructed on the pavement as I was walking into a meeting during which I and some colleagues were asking for a \$2,000,000 donation from a company for the non-profit agency for which I worked. Or there was the time I had a manuscript rejected simply because I used MLA formatting instead of APA formatting.

Finally, I set up my classes to allow students to fail assignments without failing the class. Elsewhere in this book, I go into more detail about my Pass/Not-Yet grading, my views on universal design, and other techniques techniques to help insure student success.

Students need to know that they can succeed or they might not try. The level of fear and uncertainty is so much higher today than it was even just a few years ago. As professors, we have a responsibility to assist students to reduce their fear. While doing so, we are able to empower them.

## Speaking of Failure

In “The Invention of Failure,” Dr. Cathy N. Davidson rightly argues that we should eliminate “flunk out” courses, which have traditionally been defined as rigorous and demanding simply because so many students fail them. Instead, she proposes developing rigorous and demanding courses, which both set a high bar of excellence and where all students could theoretically earn an “A.”<sup>35</sup>

While considering the invention of failure and its legacy, we also need to address the fear of failure that millennial students bring to the classroom.



*Overcoming the Fear of Failure*

Today’s younger students have too often been raised in environments that are overly protective. They have experienced “competitive” sports where no score is kept and everyone gets a trophy for simply showing up. These students have lived with helicopter parents who solve difficulties for their children instead of letting their children grow into adulthood by learning from their mistakes. Unfortunately, some of these “children” are already in their 20s.

Rigorous standards can be threatening to students who have not been permitted to experience failure. As a student once told my dean, “I don’t want to think. I want Dr. Berg to tell me what he wants.” This was a bright student who could have easily met the expectations of the course, but they were too afraid of failure to even risk starting out on the path to creating substantive, original work.

Some of the strategies I have been incorporating in my syllabi to address the fear of failure include:

### **Participation = 100%**

If students attend class regularly and do their homework, they are essentially guaranteed an “A” in the course. Yet, while the guaranteed 100% is comforting to students who fear failure, high expectations mean that students cannot get a trophy by simply showing up for class. Students must be present and prepared. For example, students who don’t complete the required research for class will be permitted to participate in the discussion, but they will not earn any participation points.

In addition to daily activities, students also receive participation points for more substantial work. An assignment’s participation points can be worth 5%-15% of the total course grade. To include such assignments as part of a participation grade makes them less threatening to those students who fear failure.

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<sup>35</sup> Davidson, Cathy. “The Invention of Failure,” HASTAC. 11 January 2015.

It needs to be noted that participation is not as simply as I present it here. In my classes, we have an understanding that sometimes life gets in the way. When that happens, it is possible for students to make up participation points even if they were not physically present on a certain day or had not fully prepared for that day's activities. Furthermore, as I argue elsewhere in this book, there are many reasons why a student might not be present or prepared.

For example, "I could not get out of bed today" might be a legitimate reason for a student suffering from anxiety or depression. Or an "irresponsible" student might have spent their textbook money for a new car tire so that they could make it to class. Even a student who is physically present in the classroom might not be engaged because they have not eaten and don't know where their next meal will come from. As someone who arrives to campus a minimum of one hour before his first class, I once had to call the college to let my students know that I was running late because I-275 had turned into a parking lot in which I had already been sitting for 45 minutes.

### **False Rubrics**

Because I do not assign topics and instead insist that student projects grow out of broad-based reading, students can fear failure because they are not handed a rubric defining the specifics of their lightning talks or other major assignments. To help allay their fears, I give students a list of the types of references they will be consulting. It looks like a rubric and fearful students find comfort in being able to check off each step as it is completed.

I refer to this as a false rubric because it provides comfort without providing the specific details the fearful students want. Such overreaching details would get in the way of quality research.

### **Small Steps**

The first research assignment I give each term is for students to look up their broad topic (e.g. the Civil War or contemporary education) in Wikipedia and to do an internet search concerning their topic. Because Wikipedia and Google are familiar to them, students do not experience a fear of failure. By the time they are asked to consult sources not written in English, they already have a series of successfully completed assignments and do not fear being asked to do the seemingly impossible.<sup>36</sup>

### **Teaching Previous Student Work**

I regularly assign essays written by previous students. By assigning the work of previous students, current students are able to see the results of a process that they do not yet comprehend. I have created the *Scholarly Voices* website<sup>37</sup> to publish student work. My students as well as the students of colleagues from around the country publish essays on the HASTAC website.<sup>38</sup>

### **Focus on Revision**

Even if they totally bomb an assignment, I assure students that the worst-case scenario is that I will help them develop the skills they need to revise the assignment into a successful project. The focus on

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<sup>36</sup> Students use Google translate to locate non-English sources.

<sup>37</sup> The URL for Scholarly Voices is <http://scholarlyvoices.org/>.

<sup>38</sup> The URL for HASTAC is <https://www.hastac.org/>. On HASTAC, we have created the Scholarly Voices ""Scholarly Voices"" is a group which can be found at <https://www.hastac.org/groups/scholarly-voices>.

revision not only lessens the fear of failure, but it also reinforces the concepts of continuous improvement and building on success.

Another advantage is that I can push students to experiment and to take risks with their writing and research.

### **Scaffold Assignments**

By focusing on revision, I can set aspirational goals that exceed the ability of my students. Because they don't fear failure, students work toward those goals *and generally accomplish them*. For example, instead of saying that a research paper/project is due on a certain date, I scaffold the assignments in the following way:

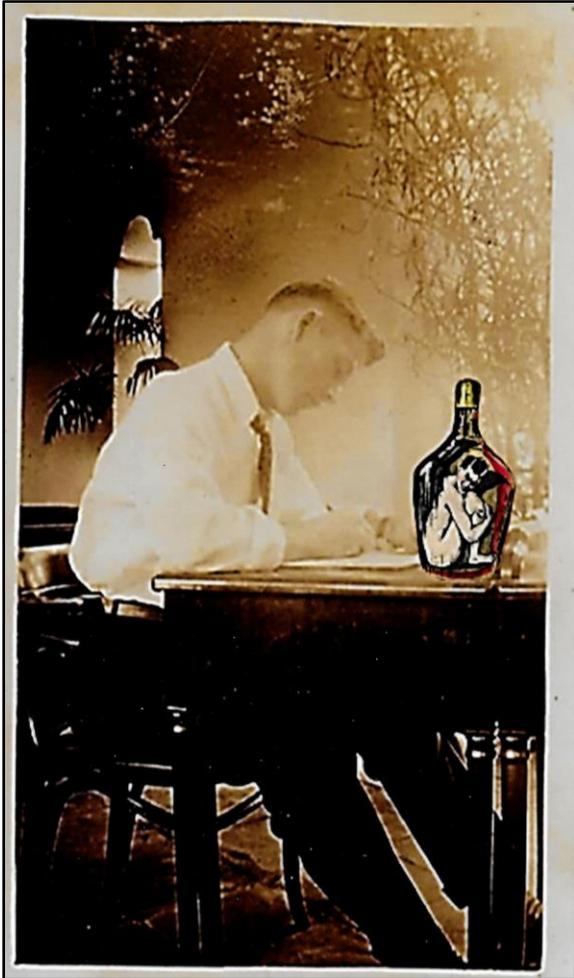
1. Select something that interests you.
2. Complete Wikipedia worksheet which give students an overview of their area of interest.
3. Do library research on topic while working with a librarian and me. (This is done during class time).
4. Find a minimum of five quality Internet sources on your area of interest.
5. Create an annotated bibliography of those sources.
6. Repeat steps four and five for each of the following: journal articles, Google books, YouTube videos, newspapers, and non-English sources. Note: No more than two of these strategies is assigned at any given time.
7. Work with me to select a topic for their research paper/project. Note: During the research process, I have been meeting with students to direct their research, but I don't allow them to define a *specific* research topic until they have an understanding of the material.
8. Draft manuscript.
9. Revise manuscript.
10. Repeat step nine as often as necessary and time permits.
11. Submit final manuscript.

### **Ironically...**

Ironically, as I have taken steps to lessen students' fear of failure, I have actually raised the expectations and rigor of the courses I teach. By breaking the research process into even smaller steps, I require more research than I have previously expected when I taught research in larger chunks. My students typically consult 40-50 sources which they have annotated even before they have decided on a specific approach for their research papers/projects. Because they do them just a few at a time, the quantity sneaks up on them.

### **Some Students Still Fail**

Even when classes are designed for success, some students will fail certain assignments and the overall course. Others will have events from their personal lives take an unrecoverable toll on their academic lives. Others will make bad decisions that lead to failure and (hopefully) future learning. But, as Davidson argues, we should not design our courses in such a way that guarantees a certain percentage of our students will fail. Rather, we need to design rigorous courses where all students can theoretically succeed.



*Almost Failing Out of Graduate School, 1983*

## Teaching Our Failures to Benefit Students

One day, I drafted an incredibly boring essay. There was a kernel of quality in the draft, but I would need to cut at least 75% of the text before I could hope to produce anything publishable.

I was not the least bit concerned about the bad prose I drafted. I have a folder of abandoned drafts on my computer, some of which I will return to and others that will rightly stay abandoned forever. All writers produce failed prose. Even though the essay failed, my students still benefited from reading my failed prose and then discussing it in class.

We provide students with valuable insights about the writing process and help them gain critical thinking skills when we share our own failed drafts with them. In addition to showing students my published writing, I will sometimes ask them to help me edit failed manuscripts in order to make them fit to print. Students critique my work and help me to improve. By assisting me in editing my less-than-sterling drafts, they learn a great deal about the editing process.

More importantly, this process empowers students who learn that they can provide meaningful feedback

to their professor. By seeing me in a vulnerable position, it makes it easier for them to be vulnerable as their own work is edited.

I first began sharing drafts with students when I was a graduate teaching assistant at Michigan State University. At that time, we used a technology called the mimeograph machine. I would write papers with my students by feeding a purple ditto master into a typewriter. After typing the text, I would secure a special machine to print out copies of my manuscript for my students. The papers would come out as purple text on a white sheet of paper. Because neither self-correcting typewriters nor computers were readily available at that time, it was not possible for me to edit while drafting; something I do today.

Once when I shared the purple text produced after taking the ditto master directly from typewriter to mimeograph machine to an undergraduate class, one student commented, "You intentionally garbled this, didn't you?" My response: "No. This is what all my drafts look like."

I know I am not alone when I say that I don't want most people to see drafts of my writing. However, I think it is important for students to see drafts; especially those that are most embarrassing.

In addition to sharing work in progress, we can also share mistakes we made in our professional lives. For example, I am upfront that I almost failed out of graduate school. I joke that it is difficult to do quality research while drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. I will even give them my favorite recipe for a mixed drink: drop ice cubes into your Scotch or Vodka. In discussing my alcoholism, I do not go into details about my addiction or recovery. Not only are the details none of their business, but sharing such details is not appropriate for the classroom.

When mentioning my failure in graduate school, I am able to model that there is recovery from our mistakes. I am also able to discuss services my institution provides to students as well as the endowment through which my family provides second chance scholarships.<sup>39</sup>

Lesser failures, such as that I had a manuscript requested because it was in the wrong format, can also be shared.

I also take responsibility for problems that develop in the course even if they were not my fault. Once, many of the course materials disappeared from our course management system after I had completed updating them for the new semester; a problem that was not my fault. But, as I wrote to my students after the problem was discovered:

We have had a bit of a rough start this semester with course materials not being available, a messed up grade book, and the wrong date on a quiz. I fear that we will discover other errors.

Instead of speculating on how these problem happened, as the professor of record, I need to take full responsibility for the problems and make sure that things are right.

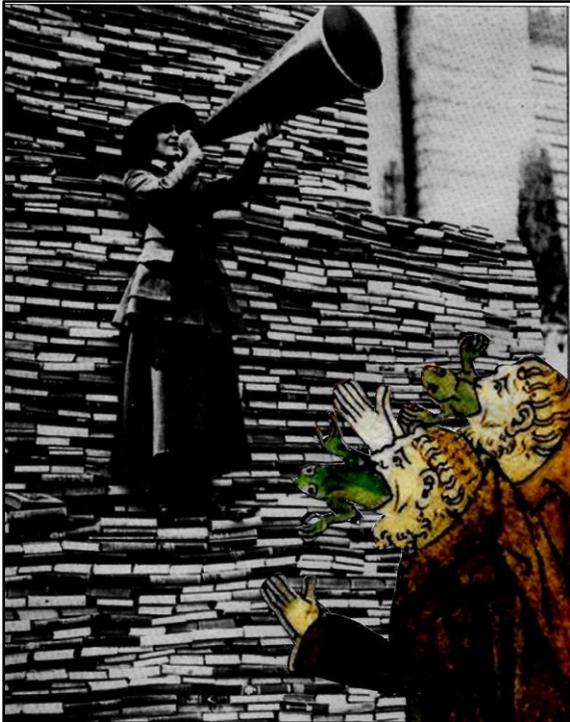
There was a failure in the class and, as President Harry S. Truman maintained, “The Buck Stops Here.” This is an important message for students to learn and one we can help them learn when we model that behavior.

We all experience failures in our lives; sharing those failures with students can help them become better students.

Postscript: While working on this book, I taught the draft of one of the essays as well as the improved revision in one of my classes. The students responded that the original was better. After hearing them explain their position, I had to agree. That essay has been revised again (and again). Empowering students has its benefits.

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<sup>39</sup> The Berg Endowment provides scholarship to students who are on academic probation or academic dismissal whom had at least one good semester.



*Educating the False Prophets*

## **You Have a Right to Your Opinion— But Not in My Classroom**

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of speech. As a result, many individuals are under the mistaken impression that all opinions are equal. This is not the case in my classroom.

My stance against certain opinions is not based on ideological reasons. Rather, I make a distinction between informed and uninformed opinions. There are opinions rooted in evidence and those that are not. In an academic setting, we do not deal with feelings. Instead, we deal with facts and logic.

Early in my career, during a discussion being held in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, a student began expounding certain racial theories. When I asked for supporting evidence, his response was, “I have a right to my opinion!” He was not amused when I informed him that we could not consider his opinion unless he

could provide his colleagues with supporting evidence. He dropped the course.

Several years later, I had a student voice her opinion that I was trying to advance my religion because a course lesson was inspired by the life of Muhammad Iqbal, one of the intellectual founders of Pakistan. After she was informed that I am not a Muslim, she continued to argue that my purpose in teaching Iqbal was to advance my religion. That was her opinion, and she was sticking to it.

More recently, I had a student complain about the approach I was taking in one of my courses. When I pointed out that his absentee rate of 33% made it unlikely for him to understand the pedagogical basis for the course structure, he informed me that he had a right to complain and that he had a right to his opinion.

Opinions that are not supported by evidence, contradict evidence, or are determined prior to investigation do not have a place in academic discourse. In my classroom, such opinions are not open to discussion because there is no substance to discuss.

To paraphrase a colleague, it is our job as professors to help students learn that they are not the center of the universe. There are things that matter, existing outside of their opinion, their history, and their identity. We also need to help them appreciate that it is worth spending time with those things and learning from them.

In my classes, I teach authors with a variety of worldviews and many of them provide perspectives which challenge my thinking. Students are surprised when I mention that one of those authors—an author that I clearly respect—believes that I am going to hell. Although he is sure that I will be damned for eternity, his historical perspective is well argued and worth considering.

I also make sure to support my opinions with evidence and that my informed opinions are open to debate. For example, during one ancient world history course, I presented my case that the birth of freedom begins with the Battle of Thermopylae—an earlier date than the informed opinion advanced by a documentary I had screened. During the discussion, a student countered my argument by citing evidence concerning the small percentage of Greek citizens who were considered free in 480 BCE. This student—and his colleagues—were not required to agree with my opinion about the birth of freedom, but they did have to respect it and consider it because it was an informed opinion. In the same way, I need to respect and consider the informed opinions of students, even when I don't agree with them.

We will always be confronted with those students who would prefer to drop our classes rather than to develop informed opinions, are content to maintain their opinions even when the factual evidence contradicts them, or will persist in advocating opinions prior to investigation. Most of our students, however, are open to accepting that there are things that matter existing outside of their opinion, their history, and their identity. Students are more willing to do so if we model the same behavior ourselves.



*Providing a Transformative Learning Experience*

## The Devil's Den of Ignorance

While attending the 2014 Michigan Developmental Education Consortium Conference, I had the pleasure of hearing the keynote speaker, Consuelo Kickbusch. Kickbusch share her story about growing up in a small barrio in Laredo, Texas, which was called “El Rincon del Diablo,” or the “Devil’s Den.” During her presentation, Kickbusch recounted a climactic moment in her junior year of high school when students who wanted to attend college were asked to go to the cafeteria and the other students were told to go to the gym. Kickbusch went to the

cafeteria. Her friend went to the gym.

Kickbusch’s story is one of an individual who was determined to overcome obstacles to achieve academic success. Her message about how to reach students like her is worth hearing. But what about her friend? How do we reach those individuals who do not have the desire, determination, or access to succeed?

In our role as college professors, there is little—if anything— we can do for Kickbusch’s friend who went to the gym instead of the cafeteria. Those students have been lost before we have the opportunity to engage them on our campuses. But what about those students who make it campus and still do not have Kickbush’s determination to succeed?

After Kickbush’s presentation, I spoke to an MDEC colleague whose son once told her that he had done enough to pass one of his college courses, and, therefore, he did not have to attend any more of the class. This was a class for which he was paying approximately \$500 per credit hour. Unlike Kickbush’s friend, my colleague’s son came from a privileged background, which had provided him with the academic and social basis for success. Yet he chose not to succeed.<sup>40</sup>

Four years later, a community college colleague of mine shared this experience.

Empowering my students makes my job fulfilling. One student, in particular, stands out. She is a young Hispanic mother and the first in her family, including relatives, to go to college. Her mother told her she was too stupid to go to college and she would fail, but she wanted a better life for her children. She would talk with me after class and her life had been unimaginably hard and heartbreaking, but by encouraging her to speak in class and by providing some philosophical insights when we talked, I helped her build confidence and deal with a particularly troublesome

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<sup>40</sup> Throughout this book, I frequently discuss socio-cultural and system reasons that impact student choices and caution that what appears to be a choice might be fundamentally out of a student’s control. However, there are students, such as the one cited here, who choose mediocrity and just doing enough to get by.

event in her life. On occasion I'll see her in the hallway and she is happily on her way to getting an associates in the healthcare field. Every semester I have students who, all of a sudden, realize I'm teaching them to think and act purposefully in their lives, and when their faces light up, it's rewarding. This, for me, makes all the drudgery worthwhile.

At my institution, our mission is “to provide a transformative learning experience designed to increase the capacity of individuals and groups to achieve intellectual, social, and economic goals.”

Unfortunately, being open to a transformative experience threatens the status quo, and too many individuals are not prepared to take the risks and responsibilities required for improving their lives.

While it might be too much to expect a high-school junior from El Rincon del Diablo to summon up the courage to go to the cafeteria without support from others, once students enter our classrooms, it is imperative to do what we can to support them “to achieve intellectual, social, and economic goals.”



*Those Who Benefit from Universal Design*

## **Why I Don't Worry (Much) About Student Accommodations**

The week before each semester, I receive notices from our Disability Support Counselor about accommodations students need in my classes. Although I read the accommodations notices, I don't worry (much) about student accommodations. The reason I don't worry (much) is because I have already incorporated the most requested accommodations as standard practices available to all students.

Before discussing the specifics of accommodating students in my classroom, I want to reflect on non-academic accommodations such as having ramps next to stairs. As I walk from my office to the other side of campus, there is one part of my path where I can choose a ramp or steps. Although I do not need the accommodation of the ramp, I almost always take it. The ramp is

easier for me to navigate than the steps. As a person who is currently able bodied, I benefit from this accommodation.

In the same way that the ramp benefits me, all students benefit from many accommodations for which they do not officially qualify. For example, some students appreciate being able to preview a video or read a short essay before coming to class even though they do not require such an accommodation. Therefore, whenever possible, I try to provide all students with access to such materials in advance. They are neither required to consult the materials in advance nor are they disadvantaged if they do not consult them. But the opportunity is available if they want to take advantage of it.

When I give formal lectures, I make my PowerPoint slides available before class not just because I know that some students need the accommodation. I also know that most of the students who consult the PowerPoint before class or print it out to make it easier for them to take notes do not officially qualify for accommodations. Yet they still benefit from having the presentation available in advance.

Instead of giving timed exams, I have students do projects to demonstrate their learning. As a result, there is no need to worry about who in the class qualifies for extra time or requires a different room to take the exam. And all students benefit from the increased learning which projects provide over formal exams.

By making these accommodations available to all students, I also cut my workload. It is easier to post my PowerPoint in our course management system than it is to remember to send it out to certain students

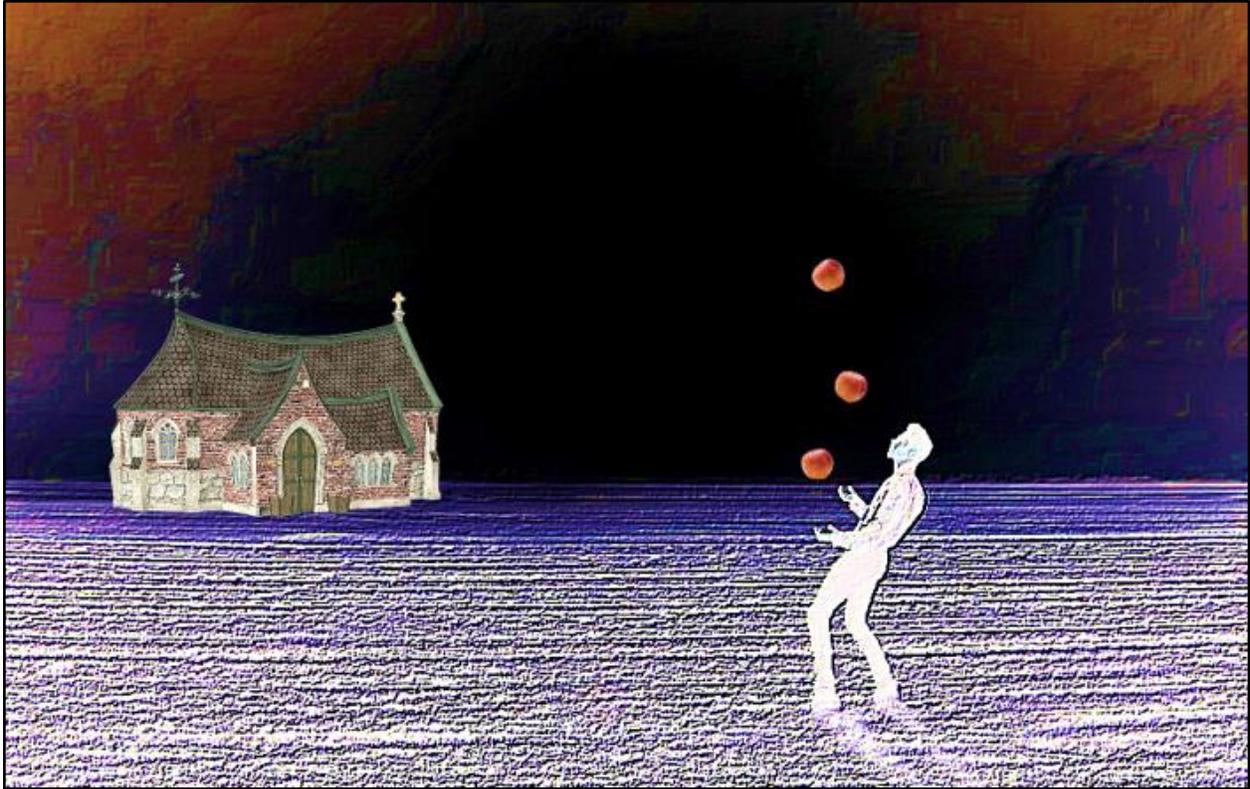
who requested the accommodation. In the same way, it is easier to send the entire class an email about a forthcoming video or essay than it is to send an email to the one or two students who require such an accommodation.

Although I don't need to worry (much) about accommodations for specific students because the accommodations are already built into the course, there are two types of accommodations about which I do need to worry.

First, there are accommodations that are not routine. Although I have begun routinely printing certain handouts in 14-point type, it is not feasible—or even helpful to most students—to have everything printed in such a large font. While a deaf student might benefit from a transcriptionist, there is no benefit to trying to make transcriptionists available for everyone. Some accommodations cannot be realistically incorporated into the class for all students. However, for the students who require such accommodations, I want to make sure that those students get the accommodations they need.

Second, there are some students for whom I cannot provide reasonable accommodations. For example, because of how I arrange my classroom and because I move around throughout the class period, it is not possible for a student to “sit in the front of the room” because there is usually no area that consistently serves as the front of the room. In cases such as this, I discuss the issue with the student so that we can develop a strategy that best suits their needs and the realities of the pedagogical approach around which my classes are designed. For example, I once had a hearing impaired student who wanted to sit near the front of the class to make lip reading easier. While the request itself was not possible, I made sure that wherever I was standing in the classroom that I was looking at them.

Because I have already integrated the most common accommodations into my classes, I don't need to worry (much) about providing accommodations to students who qualify for them. However, even if I did not care about student success, by incorporating as many accommodations as possible as standard components of the class, I make my job easier. Because I have structured courses in which I don't need to worry (much) about accommodations, my students and I both benefit.



*Tips and Tricks #06*

## **Everyday Tips and Tricks for Reducing Fear and Empowering Students**

Students enter our classrooms with fear. They don't know what to expect and have external pressures that they must succeed in an uncertain world. The more we move to a student centered classroom, the more fearful students become because they don't know how to "work the system" to insure success. Saying that students learn to "work the system" is not a criticism of students. Instead, I am critical of the systemic pedagogies promoted by the hememony that define success so narrowly that they crush the creativity that leads to transformative learning experiences out of students. As professors who care about student success, we need to do what we can to reduce student fear while empowering them in ways they never thought imaginable.

- Design classes to fascinate success.
- Modify grading.
- Have false rubrics that are really checklists.
- Take small steps.
- Teach previous student work.
- Focus on revision.
- Scaffold assignments.
- Share your failed work with students.

- Teach students why not all opinions are equal by discussing the difference between a simple opinion and one that uses evidence to support it.
- Respect the informed opinions of students even when you disagree.
- Teach authors who challenge your thinking; not just your students' thinking.
- Practice universal design.
- Make videos and readings available before class.
- Make PowerPoints and lecture notes available before class.
- Avoid timed exams.
- Make “accommodations” available to all students by including them in your course design
- Extended time on tests
  - Use projects instead of tests. Put quizzes in a course management system without a time limit.
- Providing notes in advance
  - Post your notes, videos you intend to screen, and so forth in the course management system or email to all students before class.
- Needing to leave class for medical reasons
  - On the first day of class, tell students who need to leave class that they should do so discreetly; that they don't have to ask to go to the bathroom or get something to drink.
- Don't start sitting in front of class
  - Especially if you change classroom geography by moving chairs and tables around, move around the classroom so that there is no front.
- When a potential snow day or other day where you anticipate large student absences, plan a lesson that students can do at home.
- If you use a video, make it family friendly so that the student can watch it with their children or younger brothers or sisters.
- Anticipate unofficial holidays: If you teach in Michigan, you can generally anticipate absences on November 15; especially if you teach in a more rural area so plan accordingly. Why November 15? It is the opening day of deer season.
- You don't have to approve to accommodate. I know that I will have younger students who want to vacation with their family the week after Easter because that is when K-12 schools take their Spring break. Although college my students are running on the college schedule; I don't fight the reality that students want to be with their families.
  - Let students know *in advance* that you are making these plans. That way, they don't have to worry about child care and their responsibilities at home.

# Learning and Unlearning



*Metamorphosis*

## Introduction

When I was up for evaluation in 2012, someone suggested that I could just photocopy materials from my previous evaluation. After all, they argued, “How much could things have changed in the past five years?” In the previous evaluation, I had cited some very innovative teaching techniques, which I had incorporated into my film class. Just five years later, what I was teaching in 2007 was no longer innovative and I should have been criticized had I not made changes in my teaching. In 2016, when I was again being evaluated, the innovative, student-centered strategies that lead to a positive evaluation in 2012 were no longer pedagogically exciting. During my next evaluation in 2020, there will be significant changes in teaching as I continue to grow as a professor.

Growth comes from a process of learning and unlearning. I learn new material in my disciplines as well as new pedagogical techniques. I also need to learn new technologies as they apply to my teaching. While I am learning, I also need to be willing

to unlearn techniques that are no longer viable. For example, when I first started teaching film in 2005, I chose short films that allowed students to experience more types of films than in a more traditional class. I spent hundreds of dollars to buy DVDs of short films. It was exciting and innovative. Eventually, I had to unlearn the strategy of selecting short films for my students. Advances in technology—especially the development of YouTube—made it possible for students to select short films for the class. Now students have more investment in the course and we view an even wider selection of films that I would be able to choose.

In this chapter, I begin with an essay about unlearning. This is followed by an essay about why we cannot expect students to learn on any given day; not because they are irresponsible but because of

how learning takes place. As I discuss in the third essay, we can foster mediocrity if we do not properly challenge students.

The fourth essay in this chapter explains the problems we have in teaching truth in which some have dubbed a “post truth” era. The chapter ends with directions for getting students to unlearn their casual writing style so that they can better perform in academic and professional settings.

As mindful professors, we cannot teach the same way we did four or five years ago—or even a year ago. We must wander on and bump into others who lead us to become better professors—especially the emerging scholars who both benefit from our experience and from whom we learn.



*Expanding Classroom Geography*

## **Unlearning Classroom Geography**

As a faculty member in the 21<sup>st</sup> century preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I need to unlearn—and help students unlearn—the definition of classroom community. Because my students and I live in a world that allows us to interact with others in a global context, we are not limited by the four walls that make up our assigned classroom.

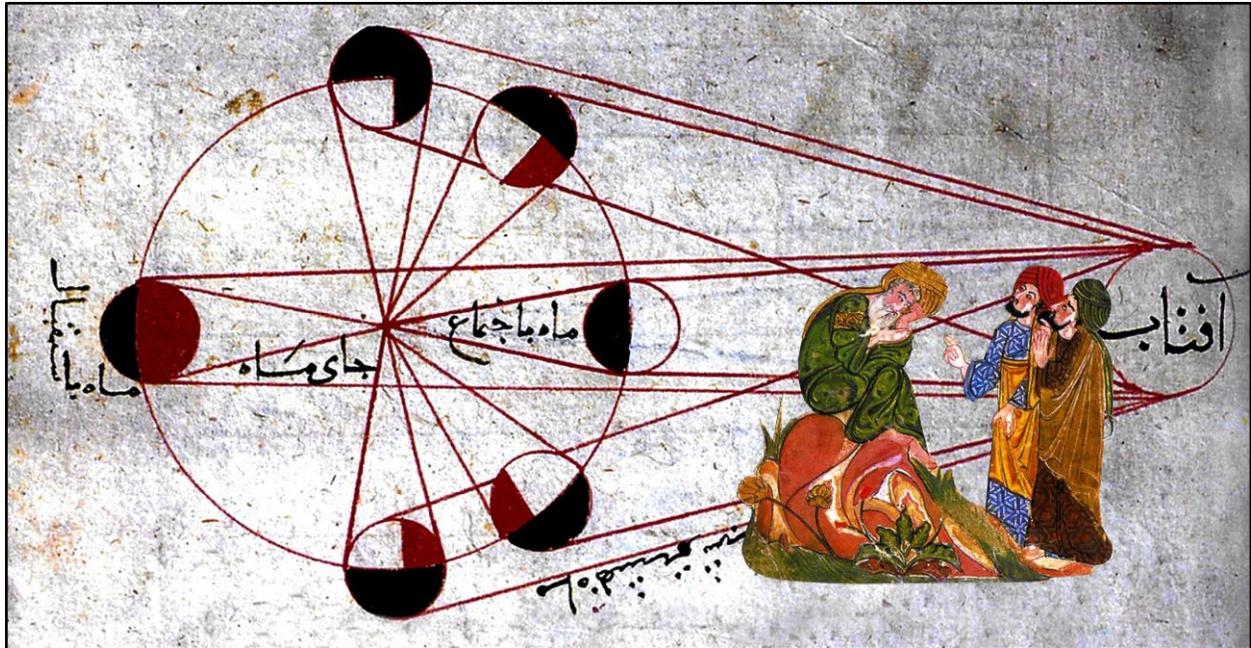
This is not a new revelation for me. Even before the Internet, I involved students in service-learning projects where they were required to interact with members of the community. Although we used to be effectively limited to our immediate geographic area, that is no longer the case.

In the late 1990s, I was one of the first three professors to offer an online course at Kirtland Community College in Roscommon, Michigan. There, I developed a strategy for bringing guest speakers into the online classroom. Although most of the students remained in the same geographic area and most—if not all—were simultaneously taking classes at Kirtland, we were able to invite individuals to interact with us who did not live in our geographic region.

Although my unlearning about the confines of the classroom began in the 1990s, unlearning is a continuous process. Learning to bring a guest lecturer into the online classroom was exciting in the 1990s, and I even presented the concept at a statewide conference. However, having an outside speaker became something to unlearn as well.

Today, my students and I are even less confined to the four walls of the Liberal Arts building at Schoolcraft College, where I teach most of my classes. Initially, I began to post student portfolios and other assignments online. Because of advances in technology, my introductory writing students can now design websites themselves—for free. Technology now allows me to have students in different sections or different courses collaborate with each other on class projects. In fact, I have had students work on projects where some of the co-authors have never met each other.

Unlearning the geography of the classroom is not an easy task, and I have been unlearning it for more than two decades; longer than most of my students have been alive. Helping students learn that they are not confined by the geography of the four classroom walls is now the challenge. Although some students are very excited to jump into the world of 21<sup>st</sup>-century possibilities, others remain hesitant—and sometimes overtly resistant—to venturing outside the confines of the classroom. But, in the spirit of solid pedagogy, we can unlearn together as we create a new paradigm for education.



*Socrates in the Islamic Golden Age*

## **Taught But Not Learned**

I do not expect students to learn the material I am teaching on any given day. This is not because of some fundamental fault with students, but because doing so is sound pedagogy.

When teaching material, my goal—especially early in the semester—is to introduce concepts that we will develop throughout the semester; not to have students actually learn it. Learning takes time and requires repeated application of key concepts. Through repetition using a variety of strategies, students learn the concepts before the end of the semester.

For example, I teach students a basic communication model by providing them when a chart which they fill in during a class lecture. If I were to have given a quiz during the following class period, students might be able to properly label the parts of the basic communication diagram I presented. Even if a student earned a 100% on such a quiz, memorization of a diagram does not equate to the ability to apply concepts of author, audience, and purpose to an historical artifact, while also considering the issues of coding and decoding the message.

Because I take a seemingly casual approach to course structure, students do not always recognize that there is a strong pedagogical framework on which the course is built. Nor does their previous training prepare them to make the types of connections that are so important in academic discourse. I am not being critical of students who do not bring an introductory skill set to an introductory course. I know that I did not have the skill sets I am helping students develop when I entered my first introductory college courses. If we had those skills, we would not need introductory courses.

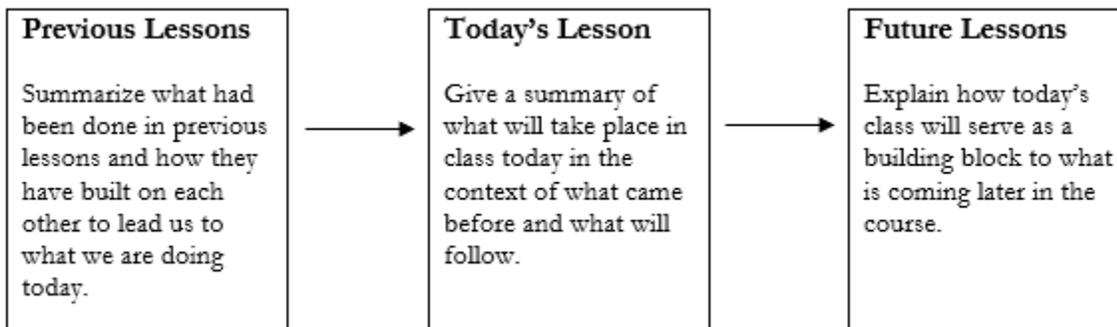
To assist students, I have developed strategies to help them make the connections between day-to-day class activities and long-term learning. I also try to prepare them to appreciate the types of groundwork we are laying for future learning.

As one of the first assignments in my history classes, I frequently ask students to complete a course competencies worksheet on which they record how the homework allowed them to begin meeting those competencies. Throughout the semester, we returned again and again to the course competencies and at the end of the semester, I asked students to submit a course competencies worksheet with their final reflections. By requiring students to keep a running tally of how they are meeting course competencies—as well as core abilities—throughout the semester, it is easier for them to understand how specific assignments relate to the overall goals of the course.

At the beginning of 2019, I began listing the specific Core Abilities and Course Competencies being covered on the bottom of all of my handouts. During the 2019 Spring semester, I added issues of Transferability to the handouts. I also began to list the abilities, competencies, and transferability in the class notes I send to students at the end of each class.

To further help students, I try to explicitly identify concepts as I introduce them. In the past, I would have introduced certain concepts but often would not highlight them if I knew that I would build on the material later. Now, I will explain why I have dropped some information into a presentation. For example, I might explain that I am mentioning such and such a concept that we become more important later. This helps students with continuity.

Periodically, I also begin class by setting the lesson in context of what we have done and where we are going. On these days, I sketch information on the blackboard and go into more detail than on days when I simply mention context.



Although I have taught material in the previous classes, I don't expect that the information will be truly learned until the conclusion of future lessons. Repetition of process helps students understand that learning is a process and that it takes time to learn complex material.



*The Lecture vs. Active Learning*

## **Fostering Mediocrity**

Responding to concerns expressed by my first-year composition students, I began giving more writing prompts than I have previously done. As a result, the overall quality of their writing dropped.

While reading a batch of essays, I realized that all of the students who ignored my prompt wrote interesting essays. Most of the students who followed my prompt did not. Their essays were not bad. They just weren't very interesting. These students forgot their own voices and lost their creativity. Instead of providing the support necessary for them to tackle tough topics brilliantly, by providing them with a safe prompt I helped foster mediocrity.

I stopped providing prompts.

Once, while discussing his difficulty developing a clear thesis, a student told me that he had trouble coming up with a thesis based on my prompts. When I suggested that he should ignore my suggestions and develop his own topics, he was surprised to find that he had this flexibility. During class, I had explicitly stated that my prompts were but suggestions and that students are not obligated to follow them. Students only needed to use my prompt if they cannot think of an essay topic on their own.

I was initially surprised at this student's surprise. Then I realized that he had grown up in an education system that reinforces and rewards the idea that students can only succeed by following the teacher's

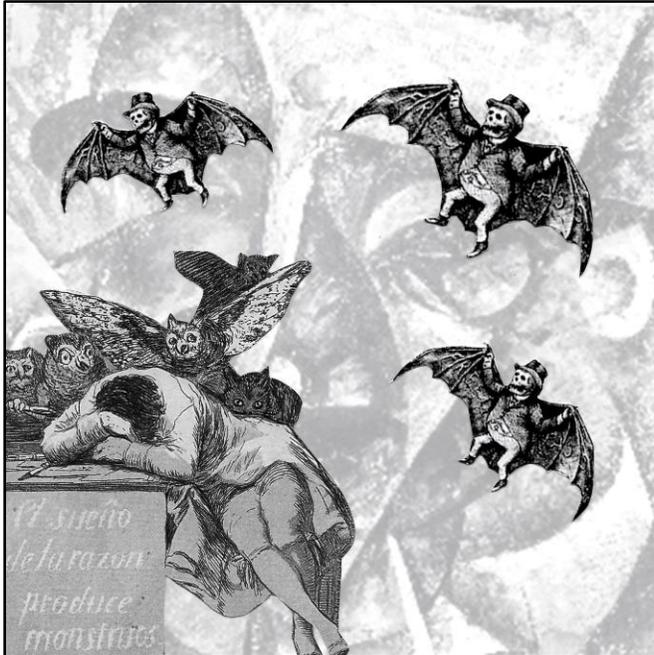
lead. These students are not taught how to advocate for themselves and have grown up being given rubrics that tell them how and what to think. My surprise was replaced by compassion.

Because I have seen the class worksheets on which students have written down ideas for papers and have listened to them discuss potential topics during class discussions, I know that they have more than a plethora of excellent ideas.

I had to admit that my attempt to make the class easier for students actually lowered their ability to be successful and that my well-intentioned change did not actually help students. At best, it only brought a false comfort to those who struggled to develop their topics, a false comfort that allowed them to rise to the level of the mundane.

Good teaching sometimes requires that we allow students to struggle with difficult tasks or concepts. Making it too easy for them to write their papers or to complete other projects actually limits their accomplishments.

Since returning to my old ways of simply directing students to write an “interesting essay,” the quality of their writing has again improved. There is no compassion in asking students to waste their time settling for the mundane and then complaining that they do not write more interesting papers.



*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*

## Twisting Truth into Lies

During 2015, I “learned” that Planned Parenthood was selling dead baby parts as a way to make more profit, that Pope Francis was a Black Sabbath fan, and that Fox News published a photograph of Sean Connery when they announced that Omar Sharif had died, and that a man was arrested for a hate crime simply because he burned a gay rights flag. None of what I learned was true.

The charges against Planned Parenthood were reputed to have come during an interview with Deborah Nucatola, the senior director of medical services at Planned Parenthood, which was secretly recorded by representatives of the Center for Medical Progress. Through creative editing, Nucatola’s remarks were

distorted.<sup>41</sup> Imagining the Pope—in his younger days—rocking out to Black Sabbath and the image of him wearing a Black Sabbath cassock is funny and easy to share. Fox News’ blunder of showing someone other than Omar Sharif fits in with the narrative that Fox News is really Faux News and was jumped on by liberals without investigation. Both of these stories are the result of fabricated images.

The fact that cassocks generally do not sport logos for rock bands should have been the first clue that the image of the future Pope might not be accurate. But why let logic stand in the way of a good story? The error made by Fox News might be more believable because there are documented cases where networks—not just Fox—have made similar errors. Yet a careful reader can see that the image of Connery overlaps the “Breaking News” banner and must have been added to a legitimate screen capture. But why be careful if the image supports a preconceived notion?

While it is true that Cameron Mayfield was arrested for a hate crime after burning a gay rights flag, what many conservative news reports such as America’s Freedom Fighters<sup>42</sup> left out is that Mayfield had stolen the flag from a couple’s home before standing in their front yard—late at night—waving the burning flag so that his act could be witnessed by the flag’s owners and their children. The article mentions that Mayfield was intoxicated but neglected to report that he was also charged with resisting arrest.

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<sup>41</sup> Levitan, Dave. “Unspinning the Planned Parenthood Video.” FactCheck.org. The Annenberg Public Policy Center. 21 July 2015. Accessed 1 December 2018.

<sup>42</sup> James, Dean. “URGENT: Man Charged With Hate Crime- Faces 5 Years In Prison For Burning Flag ... Guess Which Flag It Was.” *American Freedom Fighters*. [8 July 2015]. Accessed 1 December 2018. The publication date is taken from the original website before American Freedom Fighters reorganized their website.

Memes, too, would distort the truth through word play. An example of this was a meme created as early as 2008 comparing immigration to chattel slavery is still being shared in 2019.



When I teach early American or 19<sup>th</sup> century American history, I ask students to discuss why the logic is problematic. For example, African slaves were arguably documented workers who entered the country legally. But, more importantly, slaves brought into the United States were not really immigrants who chose to make the journey to America. The fact that a slave's personhood in the form of their names was not recorded complicates the argument that that they were "documented." Nonetheless, the meme is both dramatic and a red

herring tossed into an informed political discussion about 21<sup>st</sup> century immigration, racism, and related issues.

Incorporating biased materials into the classroom needs to be approached with sensitivity. Yet the discussions inspired by such materials is important in helping students develop vital critical thinking skills.

During the 2016 election, someone who should have known better posted a link to a misleading story. When I pointed out that the news report was distorted, the poster responded that the story exemplified a concern they had, but that they should have checked the information more carefully before posting the link. Three years later, when I point out that someone has posted something inaccurate, I tend to be met with the response that it doesn't matter. Recently, someone even deleted my comment and link to accurate information because it contradicted the inaccurate information they had posted. They explained that they just liked to stir things up and my comment didn't help.

In December 2018, an individual posted what was presented as a recent essay by Andy Rooney. Rooney died in 2001. I commented that "The roots of this are an essay that Nick Gholson wrote in September 1999." Someone that I don't know responded:

No matter when this was written or who wrote it, it is truth and we all need to be louder, not nasty or forceful on anyone. Let God shine through us and give Him all the glory and praise His name. I will not be silenced.

When I suggested that "To cite that something is inaccurate is not the same as trying to silence someone," my respondent informed me that "I have the right to post what I felt as well."

For this person, accuracy is not a virtue as long as the content agrees with the political ideology which they have intertwined with their faith.

Our students are living in a world where verifiable truth is denigrated at the highest levels of government. They live in a world where posting what I feel is more important than posting what is accurate. As part of our mission, we need to explicitly help students consider the question "accurate to and for whom?" To do this, we cannot simply say that "x" is or is not a credible source. We need to

teach them how to vet all sources, the necessity of broad based reading, and how to identify and correct for both author and reader bias.

As faculty members, we need to challenge students' thinking in ways to get them to realize that feelings are not facts. In a highly politicized climate, this is no easy feat. Yet it is a task that we cannot ignore.

## Quality Student Email

Over the years, I have read a number of articles—and the comments that followed them—bemoaning the poor quality of student emails. The complaints include lack of appropriate salutations, informality, poor grammar, arrogance, disrespect, meaningless or nonexistent subject lines, and so forth. Yet, as I read email from my students, I rarely encountered any of these problems.

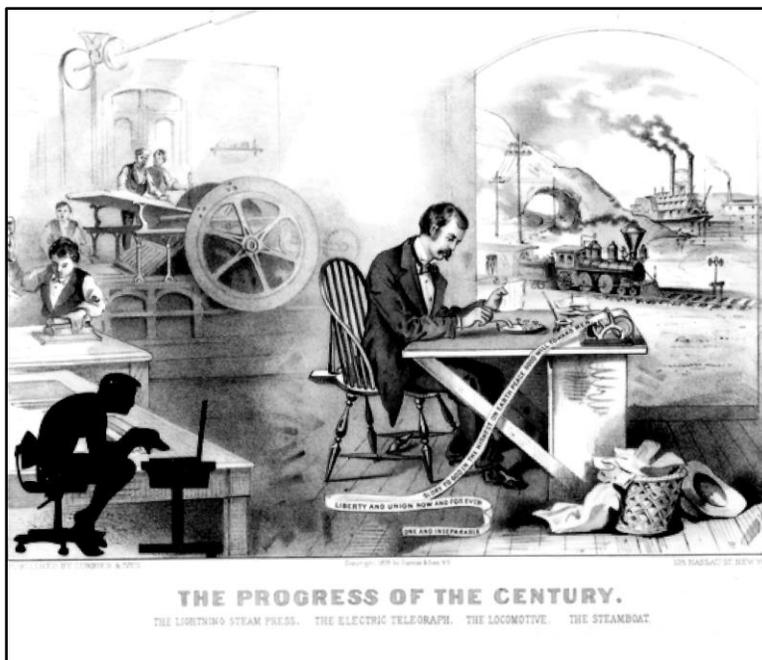
Each week, I receive hundreds of emails from students. The subject line for nearly 100% of the e-mails begin with the course number, the subject of the message, and the student's name. The body of most e-mails my students send to me begin with "Dear Dr. Berg," have a well written message that is direct and grammatically correct, and end with the student's name. The professionalism demonstrated by the email is typically excellent.

So why are my students' emails so markedly different than the emails that seem to be more typically received by my colleagues? The answer is simple. Instead of bemoaning my student's lack of skill, I teach them the skills they need for success.

I treat email the same way in which I treat other assignments. I do not assume that students are adept at the skills they need to succeed in the courses I teach prior to being taught those skills in the class. As a result, I have designed a series of assignments that allow them to practice, get feedback, learn from their mistakes, and improve.

I do include a section on e-mail guidelines in the syllabus, but I know that students do not learn a skill from simply reading about it. Therefore, an assignment I give on the first day of class asks students to write me an email in the specified format before the beginning of the second day of class. Although the directions are explicitly clear, some students still make errors. I provide feedback to those who make mistakes and allow them to re-submit the assignment.

As the semester continues, I incorporate other lessons about professionalism, email etiquette, and the reasons why the guidelines I require were not arbitrarily developed. I tell students that when they begin their subject line with the course number, it gives their email priority because I read student email before answering other email. Later, I explain how I sort email by subject line and that e-mail that does not begin with the course number can easily be missed.



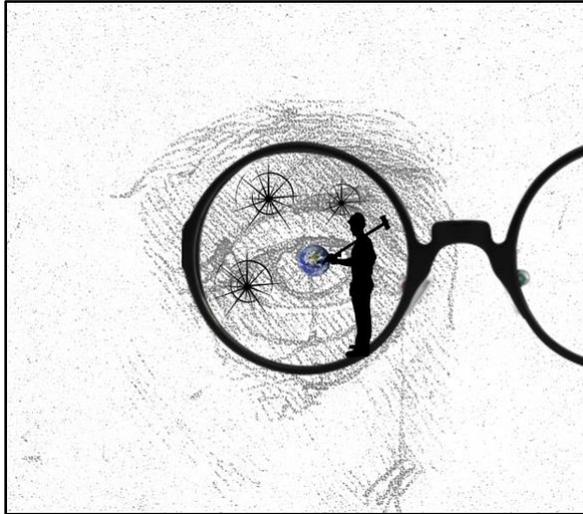
*Technological Progress*

I frequently print out emails I receive from non-students and share them with my students; both good and bad examples. Once, I showed students an email I had received from a publisher's representative; an email that began "Stephen." Because of previous course instruction, my students were surprised that someone I did not know would begin an email by addressing me by my first name. Then, students realized that the publisher's representative had spelled my name wrong. When one student asked how I was going to respond, I answered, "I have no obligation to him. I'm just going to delete it."

One year after I attended the Culinary Extravaganza at Schoolcraft College, I showed students a photograph of my father and Beth Kohler which had been taken at the event. My father is a donor to the college and Ms. Kohler was then the college's Director of Development. I told students about a conversation I had with Ms. Kohler about professionalism when applying for scholarships. In our conversation, Ms. Kohler had mentioned that students sometimes lose scholarships to other students because of poorly written applications that include poor grammar, spelling errors, and a lack of capital letters. After I reported this conversation to my students, I commented about professionalism in email.

I joke with students that I don't require professionalism only because I am an egomaniac who wants to be a jerk. I require professionalism so that they can learn from their mistakes in my class where the stakes are low. Generally, the most serious consequence for making a mistake in my class is that the student gets a second chance. Outside my classroom—such as when students apply for scholarships, jobs, and so forth—there are rarely second chances. Because the job or scholarship would have already been given to someone else, a potential employer or selection committee is not going to respond, "It's OK. Just re-submit your application."

It is easy to complain that students should know how to act professionally. It is also easy to teach them how to conduct themselves as professionals as we cover our academic content. Not only does such instruction benefit our students, it also benefits us. By having positive interactions with students, we all learn and unlearn together.



*Tips and Tricks #07*

## **Everyday Tips and Tricks for Learning and Unlearning**

I remember hearing a faculty member at one of the colleges at which I have taught bemoan that an administrator had criticized the handouts this person gave to their students. “I have been using these handouts for over 20 years,” they complained “and there has never been a problem.” I can claim that there was no problem with my handouts over 30 years ago and I can cite the Excellence in Teaching Citation I was awarded by Michigan State University to prove it. Yet, if I were still using the same quality of handouts which were produced on a mimeograph

machine, I am no longer an effective professor. In fact, I recently learned that there is a better typeface for students whom have certain types of disabilities than the one I had been using. Therefore, I have changed all of my handouts going into this semester. Because of rapid technological, social, and other changes, I am constantly learning and unlearning information so that I can be the best professor I can be for my students. The fact that I once won a prestigious award is irrelevant.

- Realize that the classroom can extend beyond the four walls of our assigned room.
- Help students make connections.
- Explicitly state course competencies covered in each lesson.
- Discuss transferability for each lesson.
- Highlight concepts that will be further developed later.
- Remember that it takes more than one day to learn course content.
- Repetition of content helps students understand that learning is a process and that it takes time to learn complex material.
- By requiring students to keep a running tally of how they are meeting course competencies—as well as core abilities—throughout the semester, it is easier for them to understand how specific assignments relate to the overall goals of the course.
- Remember that students have been raised in a system that rewards them for following the teacher’s lead. Asking them to bring their expertise to the classroom can be scary for them.
- Good pedagogy sometimes requires that we allow students to struggle.
- Writing prompts can hinder learning.
- Teach biased materials.
- Develop collaboration— even when students haven’t met each other.
  - Technology allows students in different sections to collaborate on projects
  - I once had students collaborate with students at another college
- Teach students how to write emails as well as other skills even if you think that they should already have the skills.

# Encouraging Different Modes of Learning

## Introduction

On 6 February 1989, I knew more about AA, *Spiritual Issues, and the Treatment of Lesbian and Gay Alcoholics* than anyone else in the world. This included the learned professors who sat on my graduate committee. However, the knowledge I gained while caught up in the excitement of transitioning from graduate student to “Dr. Berg” was not what led to enlightenment. Enlightenment came with the realization that the expertise I gained while writing my dissertation was insignificant in terms of what was available to know.



*St. Francis and the Animals*

Twenty years would pass before I would again have a similar feeling of exhilaration, followed by a similar enlightenment. It was 2009, and the local Kathina Ceremony, for which I was the sponsor, was about to begin. As I looked around the hall (I had rented) and saw the visiting monks (whose transportation I had paid) finding their place on stage, I realized that I was primarily responsible for paying for this important Buddhist ceremony to take place. I also realized that, if I had not sponsored the event, someone else would have stepped forward to be the sponsor. I was both necessary and unnecessary. As the sponsor of the 2009 Katina, I also realized that it would not have been successful were it not for the community of support I received from the Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara.

As someone who has earned a PhD and has been able to give back to my community in ways not available to most people, it would be too easy to focus on what I bring to the classroom. It would be too easy to forget that the enlightenment enjoyed by my students comes from a community in which I am only a part. It is also a community in which I am not always the most educated person in the room, concerning the subject under discussion.



9-11

### **Trimming the Yuzu Tree #3: Reflection on Not Being Too Rigid**

*After watching Dominic trim the Yuzu tree in my cousin's yard, I heard him express his concern that the tree will likely not bear much fruit because the area in which it was planted does not provide enough light. As Dominic explained, "It is not where you want it to be. It's where it wants to be."*

Dominic's words provide a cautionary warning to those of us who care about our student's success yet cannot

understand why our students will not respond to the opportunities we provide them.

If we are too rigid in our expectations and too narrow in our focus, we can actually close off the sunlight that would cause our students to flourish. In constructing our course plans, we can build a fence—as Cousin John has done around his cherished Yuzu tree—that becomes more restrictive than protective.

One of the most extreme cases of such rigidity that I have witnessed took place on 11 September 2001. As I was pulling out of the driveway, I heard that a plane had hit one of the Twin Towers in New York City. A few minutes later, a second plane hit the other tower. A third plane crashed into the Pentagon shortly after I arrived on campus. Later, a fourth plane which was headed to the White House crashed in Pennsylvania. And during all of this turmoil, some of my colleagues continued to teach as if nothing was happening in the world outside their classrooms. As one later explained, "I have so much material to cover during the semester, I didn't have any choice."

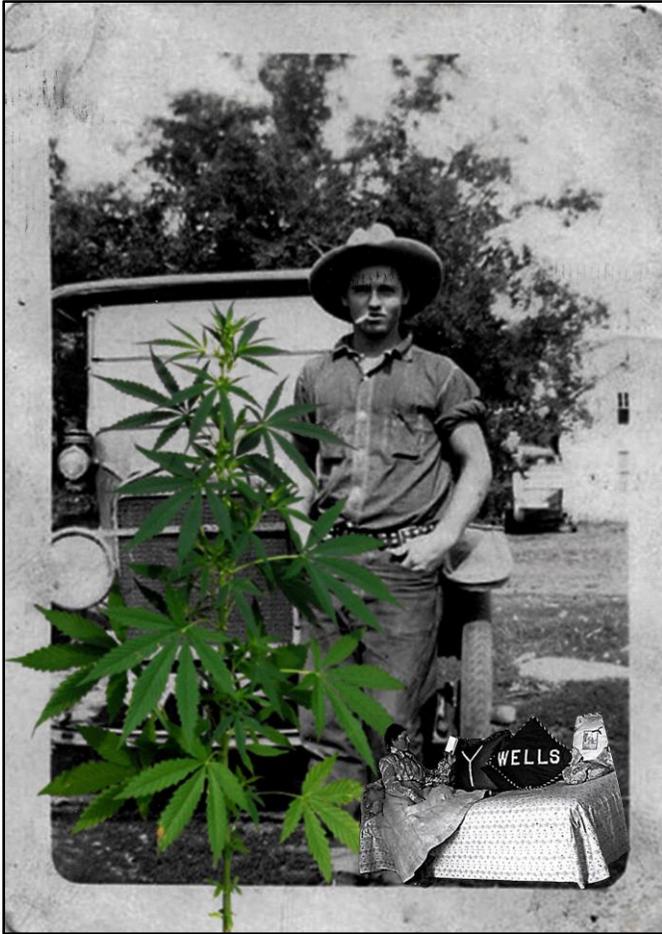
America was under attack. Large buildings around the country were being evacuated, including buildings in Detroit; buildings in which the parents of some of my students worked. We were being overwhelmed with confusion, fear, and sorrow. Students on 9-11 might have dutifully shown up for class, but they were not really present and attentive to their academic subjects. Like John's Yuzu tree, they were shaded by outside events over which none of us had any control.

Some colleagues can congratulate themselves on sticking to their syllabi. But the real question is: "What did their students actually learn that day?"

I know that on 9-11, my students and I watched television. Together, we saw the Twin Towers fall. Together, we watched the destruction of the Pentagon and learned the news of the fourth plane's unsuccessful attack on the White House. As a professor, I knew that it is not about where I wanted my students to be; it was about where they wanted to be. And they did not want to be learning about composition.

However, my students did learn composition from the events that took place on 9-11. Instead of being fenced in by my syllabus, I rearranged it so that we could use writing to react to the events of the world. From a pedagogical point of view, the class period we spent watching television became the prompt for learning the skills of effective writing. From an emotional point of view, I knew that my students wanted to deal with the events of 9-11, and therefore I did not try to force them to deal with the topics I had chosen for the class. As a result, they wrote more perceptive essays than they would have had they stuck to the well designed plan I conceived for the course.

John knows that he cannot force the Yuzu tree to reach its potential if he tries to impose his will onto it. Gardening, like education, requires us to do our best to adapt to the needs of each plant.



*Friday Night*

## **Not a Typical Friday Night**

In my husband's version of events, he recalls being impressed that I had waited to turn 60 before I stole my first car. It is undisputed that it was 11:30pm on a Friday night. It is undisputed that the car in question was located in someone else's driveway. It is true that I didn't have this person's permission to take it. My adrenaline was pumping. It felt as if I was stealing the car, but you cannot steal something that you already own.

The car had been on long-term loan to the person in whose driveway it was parked. But, because of changing circumstances, earlier in the week it had become necessary for me to ask that it be returned or purchased. The person who had borrowed and been driving the car (with my permission) was upset and posted some unflattering remarks on Facebook. He later claimed that his rant was not about me and that he was speaking about my husband.

I believe that he thought it would make him look better in my eyes to assure me that it

was my husband—not I—who was the subject of his wrath. He was wrong. I told him that the car was no longer for sale.

He-who-no-longer-had-permission-to-drive-my-car informed me that my position was unacceptable. He then dictated the terms under which I would sell him the car. My lawyer was not impressed.

My lawyer assured me that I could just pick up the car myself and that I didn't need to first go to the police. This is why my husband and I were out past our bedtime trying to locate my car.

We first checked the parking lot where he-who-was-now-guilty-of-grand-theft-auto worked. The car was not there. He had taken the night off.

On our way home, we drove past his house, and my car was parked in the driveway. My husband stopped. I got out of the passenger seat and, wearing my jeans and black hoodie, I walked up the driveway. Lights were on in the house, but the big dogs did not come barking to the window. They were locked in the basement because he-who-should-have-returned-the-car was entertaining a guest, whose freshly smoked cigarette still left a lingering aroma in my car.

While the occupant of the house was enjoying carnal bliss, I unlocked the car, entered it, and drove away. The darkness and stealth made it feel so wrong to take the car. I must admit that the circumstances also made me feel exhilarated.

Saturday morning, I disposed of the drug paraphernalia and mailed the other personal belongings to he-who-was-no-longer-on-the-wrong-side-of-the-law (at least, as far as my car was concerned). After receiving a text which, among other things, confirmed that there were drugs in the car, I blocked future contacts from he-who-has-gotten-what-he-asked-for-on-Facebook. My husband and I will no longer be a part of his life. The quality of our lives has not declined.

I quote Judge Marilyn Milian to my students: “Say it, forget it. Write it, regret it.” I try to make students understand that nothing posted online is private and that, once you post something online, you lose control of it.

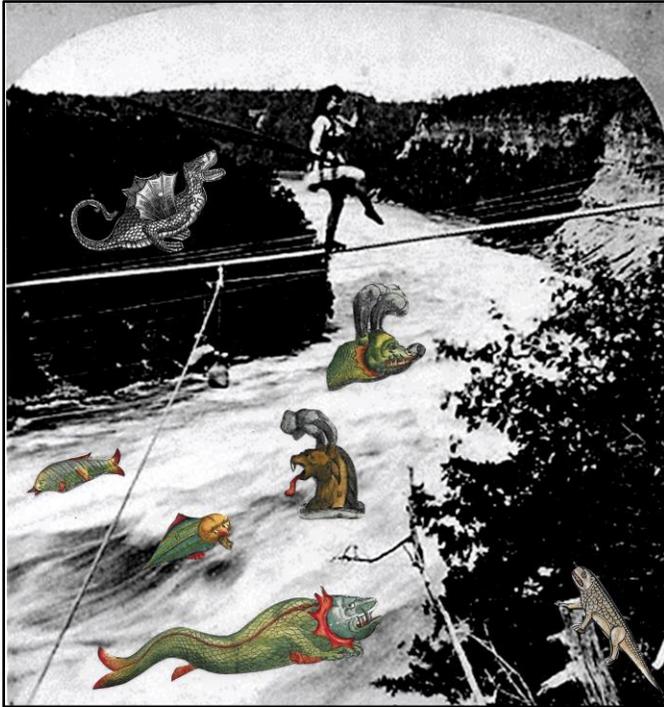
I am not Facebook friends with he-whose-sense-of-entitlement-contributed-to-his-no-longer-having-access-to-my-car. But that doesn’t make any difference. Someone who saw his post took a screen capture and sent it to us. Even if the misguided post has been deleted, there are at least three copies of it that still exist.

Judge Judy often advises people that, if they didn’t want her 10 million viewers to see a text, they shouldn’t have pushed the send button. In part, she is referring to texts that confirm current drug use. I advise students that writing about their mistakes 30 years from now—as I do when I admit why I almost failed out of graduate school—might not be problematic, but that writing about current mistakes or illegal activities is unwise.

I stress the need for students to do quality research. Even though I knew that I could legally take my car, it was worth the cost of the consultation with my attorney to confirm what I knew to be correct. Sometimes, when I have checked the veracity of information I know to be true, I discover that I am wrong. Fact-checking keeps me out of trouble.

Students do not always see the practical applications of what we are teaching them. Sometimes, we don’t even know the value of those skills in our own lives until we are confronted with a new situation. Who could have predicted that what I learned in college could prepare me to steal a car I already owned?

Taking risks and learning new skills is part of the transformative college experience. I would advocate that faculty members continuously learn new skills outside our areas of expertise, so that we can better understand what our students go through as they learn the new skills we teach them. For example, a colleague tells the story of how learning to square dance made her a better accounting professor. Does repossessing a car make me a better professor of history and English? I think it does.



*Facing Fears*

## Learning in a New and Unconventional Way Is Scary

When pressed by students to come up with a research topic for them because they cannot think of one on their own, I have been known to suggest that they consider the benefits of meditating in charnel grounds. I explain that they can begin their research by reading the Satipatthana Sutta. As I begin to point out that the various states of human decomposition are important to consider while they do their research, students suddenly become motivated to come up with a topic more in line with their own interests. However, I am aware why students distrust a professor who says that they can select their own research topics.

Reasons for this distrust are exemplified while reading Kevin Browne's "Distrust in Academics"<sup>43</sup> in which he cites a student who asked their professor, "How should I answer these questions—according to what you taught me, or how I usually think about these things?"

Tory Rogers gives us insight into why students appear reluctant to pursue their own interests: "Learning in a new and unconventional way is a scary idea to most students. It means straying away from the norm of the traditional college lecture; knowing more than just book material." In order to comfortably move to the new and unconventional, students must trust their professors.

Charlotte Clapham observes that "there is definitely a link between distrusting our professors and our ready access to global information" because we can now easily see corruption in all forms of authority. Jesse Peabody traces this distrust back to the American Revolution when "we didn't agree with the authority figure so we got that anti-authority attitude." Tanaja Campbell asks, "How can I trust a professor when he or she never even learns my name?" Campbell goes on to explain that, when a professor doesn't know her name, "it makes me feel as if I'm just another seat filler contributing to their paycheck, rather than their student."

Alene Archie articulates a common concern held by many students, "There's no sense of enlightenment or giving me experience outside of using a pen and paper [in the traditional classroom]. Physics, Trigonometry, and Chemistry are not used outside of the school building in my everyday life." Annastasia Guzik agrees "that students don't truly care about the topic that a teacher is talking about unless it 'deals' with what they think they're in school for."

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<sup>43</sup> Browne, Kevin, "Distrust in Academics." *HASTAC*. 1 February 2014.

Joking that even a minor comprehension of physics can keep people from making an appearance on World's Dumbest is not really a convincing argument for studying physics. So how do we help students appreciate the connections between academics and their lives?

The students of Team Slaughterhouse observe, "Let's be realistic, how many people in a physics class will have this information fully retained?" They add, "This is why student interaction is necessary," because "students can help others comprehend in a different light:" and student-to-student interaction can supplement the traditional lecture. They conclude their argument by observing that "collaborating with colleagues helps us individually become more creative."

Students can meaningfully collaborate and make real contributions within an individual classroom or online, in discussions that take place at HASTAC, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and other venues. Suzanne Hakim addresses the importance of public collaboration: "Never in my academic career have [I] been able to connect and share thoughts and opinions with my peers and multiple professors on an intellectual level. This is so refreshing ... knowing that we do matter, we aren't just a 'class or group' we are individuals with independent thoughts."

Collaboration in the real world can have its dark side—something Leslie Nirro learned when she was called an "idiot" by an individual who commented on "Breaking Down Barriers Between the Humanities and Sciences."<sup>44</sup> When one is engaged in public discourse, learning to deal with trolls, controversy, and criticism are educationally important. My students had a favorite troll, whom they referred to as "our friend [name redacted]" and from whom they have learned how to be better commentators and collaborators—even though our friend the troll has yet to learn those same skills.

For students to feel confident in expressing their thoughts and opinions, they need to trust that their professors truly want to hear their opinions. Being called an "idiot" by a troll is hurtful, but it does not impact a student's grade. Before encouraging students to express their opinions, we need to communicate to them that we are prepared to have our own thinking challenged.

In an assignment where I required students to analyze a short film, Zachary Marano submitted "*Nanook of the North: Inventions Toward Racism*." This 1:23:00 film is clearly not a short film; something Marano acknowledged. In his essay, he wrote that "I question the limitation of analyzing just short films." He then proceeds to develop a cogent argument as to why I gave a flawed assignment. I published Marano's essay with other student work and have continued to assign it in my film classes since he wrote it.

It might be easier for me to simply assign students to undertake research on the Satipatthana Sutta, Jimmy F. Bloink Furniture,<sup>45</sup> or other topics that interest me at any given moment. But more valuable learning comes from engaging students in discussion about subjects that are meaningful to them. A

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<sup>44</sup> Niirro, Leslie. "Breaking Down Barriers Between the Humanities and Sciences." *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 3 March 2014. Retrieved 2 December 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Berg, Steven L. "Tech Savvy Students vs. Jimmie F. Bloink Furniture." Etene Sacca-vajjina. 2 March 2014. Retrieved 2 December 2018.

student limited only to my interests cannot do their work. “The College Experience: A Modern Day Paddy West?”<sup>46</sup> is so successful because it is inspired by Andrew Shaw’s interests, not mine.

Some students will not take advantage of the opportunities we offer them to become more involved in their educations. Those students are no worse off than if we had never provided the opportunity. If we don’t provide opportunities, we do a disservice to the majority of our students who want to make meaningful connections between their academics and their personal lives.

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<sup>46</sup> Shaw, Andrew. “The College Experience: A Modern Day Paddy West?” HASTAC. 17 February 2014. Retrieved 2 December 2018.



*Climbing to the Heights*

## **Living Up to Our Expectations**

Because of Dr. Jesse Stommel and other individuals associated with *Hybrid Pedagogy*, a few years ago, I re-read the second chapter of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>47</sup> which I had not opened since graduate school. Even though I still find the text extremely demanding, I assigned the chapter to my introductory composition students on the first day of the semester. Because I had no doubt that my students could successfully tackle Freire, they never had the chance to realize that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is "too difficult" to assign to undergraduates in introductory courses.

I appreciate the view of critics who might argue that the vocabulary, concepts, and structure of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* makes the book too much of a challenge for undergraduate students. On the surface, these critics are not wrong in their assessment. But such criticism fails to take into consideration that I did not assign *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the same way that Dr. Glenn Wright assigned the book to me more than 30 years ago.

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<sup>47</sup> Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The Seabury Press, 1970; 1968.

Dr. Wright told me to read the entire book and expected me to be successful. This was an appropriate expectation for a graduate student, but his pedagogical approach would not have worked for my undergraduate students. When my students begin reading the second chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I initially assigned only the first six paragraphs, not the entire chapter.

The third of the six paragraphs begins, “The outstanding character of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power.” Sixteen pages of such text would have been too daunting for my students. It is pretty daunting for their professor. But regardless of the difficulty, students could get through six paragraphs. They might not have fully understand Freire’s argument, but they could successfully complete the six-paragraph reading assignment.

On the second day of class, I didn’t ask students to tell me what Freire meant when he talked about the student as container or the banking concept of education. Nor did I give them a reading quiz. Instead, they worked together utilizing the technology of crayons and large sheets of blank paper to show these concepts. Continuing to work as teams, they drew their own concepts of the teacher/student relationship.

Once the students finished their work, I told them the story of a group of educators who had completed a similar drawing. These educators concluded that students are like grass and it is the professor’s responsibility to fertilize them. Finally, I showed them a piece of artwork that gives my response to this misguided notion. My Response<sup>48</sup> shows a cow defecating on the grass.



By the end of the class period, students had a deeper understanding of Freire, developed skills for reading difficult texts, interacted with a difficult text, and experienced success with an assignment that they did not have the skills to complete 48 hours earlier. They were also ready to read the next section of Freire. The text in the next section was as difficult as the first, but the students had an easier time with it.

Dr. Wright did not need to take the time to have me sketch Freire’s concepts because, in my first semester of college, Dr. Fred Graham had challenged me with Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner’s *The Homeless Mind*.<sup>49</sup> This was a book I would not have been capable of tackling before entering his class. However, I lived up to Dr. Graham’s expectations and, under his tutelage, came to understand the arguments in *The Homeless Mind*. But, more importantly than understanding

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<sup>48</sup> While attending a conference, I was part of a team who was asked to draw a metaphor for the relationship between students and faculty. My team decided that students were like grass and that it was our role to fertilize them—an assessment with which I did not concur. As my teammates began to draw our metaphor, I became more and more concerned about their attitudes toward students; especially when they introduced a lawn mower into the drawing. Besides the disturbing image of cutting off the heads of our students, I pointed out that, if grass is regularly cut, it cannot bloom. My colleagues were not persuaded that our metaphor was problematic and I found myself distancing myself from them. When I returned home from the conference, I created *My Response To Those Who Insisted That Students are Like Grass and It Is the Professor’s Role to Fertilize Them* in response to the idea that professors are fertilizing machines. The piece shows a cow defecating on the grass. Or, in other words, my response was “Bullshit!”

<sup>49</sup>Berger, Peter, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner’s *The Homeless Mind*. Random House, 1973.

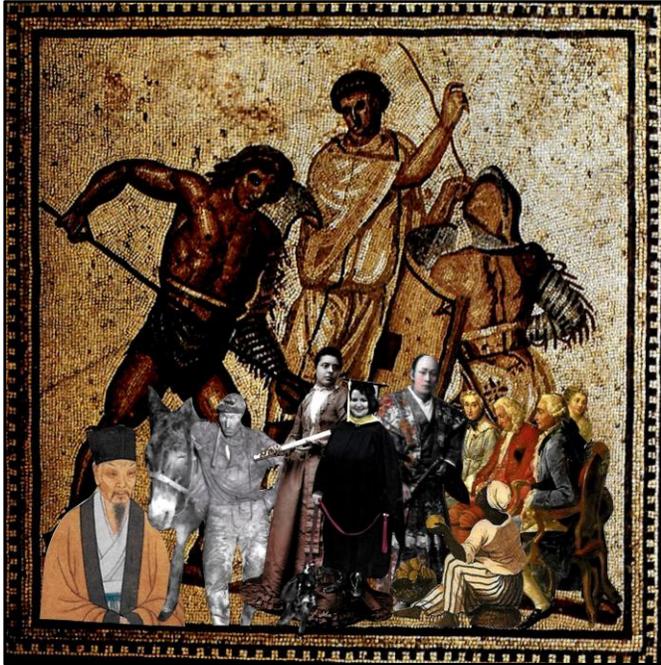
*The Homeless Mind*, I developed skills I could apply to other texts. Dr. Graham was not the only professor who expected me to work beyond my abilities and then provided the guidance needed for me to live up to such expectations. Because of such prior commitments of time and energy, by the time Dr. Wright assigned *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I had already developed the skills to tackle Freire on my own.<sup>50</sup>

If we prepare our classes with the expectation that students are incapable of producing meaningful work or tackling difficult assignments, they will not disappoint us. In Freire's words, "Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others [such as our students], a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as process of inquiry."

Fortunately, Dr. Graham realized that my lack of training was not a sign of inability. He knew he could expect more from me than I was capable of producing on the first day of class. Forty years later, I have the same expectation for my students.

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<sup>50</sup> In my argument, I do not want to imply that people in graduate school cannot use drawing as part of their study process. As I was putting the final touches on this essay, I was discussing mind mapping with a colleague who wrote to me that "I've used the mind map/ concept map stuff for years--a big part of how I got through grad school. Although I do not personally find mind mapping to be a useful tool for me, I know that I will create a piece of art when I am struggling to understand a difficult concept."



*Education and Social Mobility*

## **From Gladiators to the Twenty First Century: Higher Education, Technology, and Social Mobility**

I ask my students, “If you were a gladiator, which technology would you prefer: a trident, a net, or a wooden sword?” It is a question I would like you to consider, a question to which I will return.

Even before Verus and Priscus entered the Coliseum in C.E. 80, individuals realized that access to higher education, combined with appropriate technologies, was a pathway to social mobility. Although we often think of gladiators as slaves and criminals, many poor freemen chose to train and become gladiators. These men made the decision to enter a

gladiatorial school because they considered obtaining a higher education as their best opportunity for upward advancement.

Even though having the best technologies for fighting were important in the arena, an understanding of the liberal arts was equally important for success. For example, gladiators and those who trained them needed to understand theatre. Gladiatorial costumes were carefully chosen to represent the armor of Rome’s enemies and not Romans themselves. Furthermore, the emperor and other spectators wanted good entertainment. In addition to courage, good theatrics and a sense of how to please your audience could prevent your death, even if you were defeated by your opponent.

When the Chinese Imperial Exams were introduced in the 6th century C.E., their purpose was to establish a meritocracy for public service. By the end of the 14th century, the Chinese Imperial Exams included testing knowledge of the Confucian classics as well as calligraphy and the ability to compose poetry. Having a good brush was a required technology for passing these exams.

For Samurai warriors in feudal Japan, knowledge of the katana—or Samurai sword—might bring success on the battlefield, but it would not lead to social advancement without an understanding of social etiquette. Miyamoto Musashi’s circa-1645 classic, *The Book of Five Rings*, details the need for a liberal arts education among the Samurai. For a Samurai warrior to achieve social mobility, more than prowess, he required training in higher education.

The value placed on social etiquette, over and above military knowledge, can be discerned through a warrior’s courtly habit of leaving his katana outside before partaking in a tea ceremony. In fact, buildings housing the tea ceremony were constructed in such a way that it was not possible to enter in full military costume.

Social mobility through higher education was also important for African slaves in Barbados. On the island, the definition of skilled versus unskilled slave labor was a matter of social hierarchy and not simply a matter of learning or performing a craft. Gaining the higher education to learn carpentry or some other skilled trade did not guarantee social mobility if the individual could not navigate the social nuances of plantation life as well as the socio-political and cultural forces that governed life on the island. Social mobility required skills from anthropology, psychology, rhetoric, and other liberal arts disciplines.

Beginning in the 17th century, education systems in Western Europe and the Americas were greatly impacted by Enlightenment thinking. Eventually, education was not limited to the social elite, and higher education became available as a path for social mobility. However, industrialists like Henry Ford and others—including too many business and political leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—did not necessarily see a need for a liberal arts curriculum. Citizens educated in the liberal arts are more apt to demand better working conditions and champion other measures that threaten established social hierarchy. Why risk unions or reform movements if you can keep your workforce ignorant of the liberal arts and oblivious to the critical thinking skills that come with such an education?

When I was first approached about developing an online course at Kirtland Community College, I declared that students could not learn effectively in a virtual environment. In response, I was essentially told that I was being ignorant because I had not thoroughly investigated online technologies. After a little exploration in the cybersphere, I was one of the first three Kirtland professors to offer an online course.

In my initial response to online education, I made the same mistake that most of my students make when I ask them if they would prefer a trident, a net, or a wooden sword. I focused solely on the technology, without considering context.

Typically, when queried about their technology of choice, students immediately dismiss the value of the wooden sword and debate whether the trident or net would be preferable. Yet, the wooden sword is a far more valuable technology than either the trident or net.

The poet Marcus Valerius Martialis describes the dramatic confrontation between Verus and Priscus when both fought valiantly and both simultaneously raised their finger in defeat. Because he was so impressed with their skills, Martialis explains that the Emperor Titus, “*Misit utrique rudes et palmas Caesar utrique. Hoc pretium uirtus ingeniosa tulit.*” That is, the emperor “sent wooden swords to both and palms to both. Thus, skillful courage received its prize.” By sending them wooden swords, Titus gave Verus and Pricus their freedom.

Last week, when I posed the trident/net/sword question to one of my classes, the students surprised me by asking a series of questions: “What type of fight is taking place?” “What weapon does my opponent have?” “Am I fighting another gladiator or an animal?” Instead of instantly debating the technology, the students wanted to know the context in which the technology was being used.

Context is the key criteria when discussing MOOCs and other education technologies. For example, a brush does not appear to be an impressive technology. But given the choice between a brush and a computer, the best technology for taking your Chinese Imperial Exam is the brush because you cannot produce quality calligraphy with a computer.

Unless we learn to ask the right questions about context when we approach developing technologies, we could end up choosing a trident or a net over our freedom.



*Tips and Tricks #08*

## **Everyday Tips and Tricks for Encouraging Different Modes of Learning**

I am always amused at the look on my students' faces when I recommend a particular learning strategy and then add "I would never do it, but it might work for you." As the professor, shouldn't I be doing what I recommend? Actually I do--if we realize that what I am recommending is that we need to individually adopt the strategies that work for each of us. If I forced students to adopt my way, I would set most of them up for failure or, at best, a miserable classroom experience. By encouraging different modes of learning,

we can teach students how to play to their strengths while also encouraging them to stretch past their comfort zones.

- Outside events can overwhelm what we want to do in the classroom.
- Help students understand that simply learning skills is not enough.
- Help students understand that we cannot see how skills we develop in class will become transferable.
- A lack of training is not a lack of student ability.
- Teach students proper technologies that they need to know.
  - Help students understand the social/political aspects of various technologies.
- Student interaction is necessary for students to be vested in learning the material we want to teach.
- Challenge students with a variety of pedagogies
- Assign difficult material.
  - Teach/cite students who have disagreed with you.
- Bring crayons to class.
  - Instead of a reading quiz, have them draw a response to the reading.
  - Use crayons to sketch concepts and ideas.
- Students can meaningfully collaborate and make real contributions within an individual classroom
- Students can become involved in real world discussions via online communities such as HASTAC, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and other venues.

# Information About Artwork

I believe that art should stand on its own merits without explanation. However, because I use such wide ranging images in my photomontages, I am going to provide an artist's statement for each of them. The statement will include information about the images incorporated into the photomontage as well as some of my thoughts. The artwork is alphabetized by title.

## 9-11



On 11 September 2001, I arrived on campus after two planes hit the World Trade Center but before the Pentagon was hit and a fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania. My students and I watched the Twin Towers fall. One of the things that stay with me concerning this horrific day was colleagues who continued to teach their classes as if nothing was going on in the outside world. The background image was taken by FEMA photographer Michael Rieger one week after the attack. It shows the Woolworth Building behind the rubble of the World Trade Center. The peasant is from a fifteenth century Book of Hours, which is stamped with the arms of Anne of Austria (1601-1666).

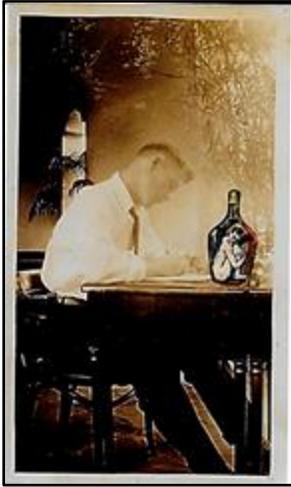
Hours, which is stamped with the arms of Anne of Austria (1601-1666).

## ***Accepting the Reality of Ignorance Leads to Wisdom***



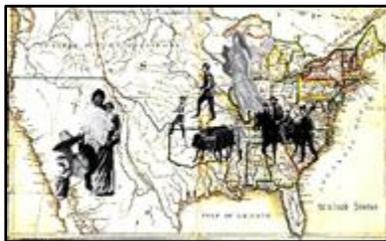
The background for this piece is Odilon Redon's *Strange Flower (Little Sister of the Poor)* (1880). I have replaced the face that Redon used on the flower with the *Bocca della Verità* [Mouth of Truth], a marble mask from antiquity. Quetzalcoatl is a Mesoamerican deity who is the god of learning as well as wind and air. This image is how he is depicted in the *Codex Borgia*. The scholar is Geoffrey of Monmouth who is the author of *Historia regum Britanniae* [The History of the Kings of Britain] (c. 1136).

### ***Almost Failing Out of Graduate School, 1983***



This piece is one of my “self-portraits” in which another figure stands in for me. In this case, it is a student at his desk, writing on a piece of paper. I know nothing else about the image. A bottle on the table holds Krampus, a demon/goat figure from Central European folklore. This image is from a postcard. In modern times, he accompanies Santa Clause to punish naughty children. However, his origins are pre-Christian. The traditional libation to offer Krampus was schnapps, the bottle on my desk was either Scotch or vodka. Because of my drinking, I came close to failing out of graduate school, but stopped drinking in 1983.

### ***The American Caravan***



The words we choose to define things impact how we interpret them. For example, in this piece, I am asking “What is the impact if we redefine “American Progress” as “The American Caravan;” especially while America was discussing the migrant caravan at the end of 2018. The background of this piece is a pre-1942 map of the United States and Mexico. The Americans moving toward Mexico are from John Gast’s “American Progress” (1872). I changed the original images to black and white to match the photograph of the Mexican woman and

her children. The woman is a photograph by S. J. Spooner that appeared in *National Geographic Magazine*, (Vol. 31. 1917. p. 559). The caption for the photograph was “A PATIENT MEXICAN MOTHER. When war for the peace of the world and ‘for the principles that gave her birth,’ is welding the great heart of America into high-purposed unity, she must needs feel a deep pity for the mothers and children of distracted Mexico, and a just indignation that their burden of poverty and distress has been increased by selfish Prussian intrigue.”

### ***And Yet She Persisted***



I am amazed at the difficult lives that many of my students live and how hard they have to persist to get their educations. Sometimes, it is as if the task is Sisyphean; that they will never be able to get the rock over the hill. Yet, they do. The background for this piece is view #36 from Katsushika Hokusai’s (1760–1849) *36 Views of Mt. Fuji*. It is also an homage to Cathy N. Davidson, my major professor in English, who wrote a book of the same title.<sup>51</sup> The “rock” that the woman is

<sup>51</sup> Davidson, Cathy N. *36 Views of Mt. Fuji*. Duke University Press, 2006.

pushing up Mt. Fuji is a Yuzu fruit and references a series of four reflections I wrote on a Yuzu tree. Revised versions of three appear in this book. The Yuzi is part of a pencil and watercolor drawing of a Yuzu done by Kawahara Keiga (1786 – c. 1860). The woman is from a pen drawing titled “Excelsior!” which was published in *Punch* (13 July 1910). The woman is a suffragette who is shown pushing a rock up a hill. As we know, the suffragette was successful. The professor is from a 1920 photograph. I know nothing else about him, but love the fact that it looks as if he is taking a selfie.

### ***Balancing Heart and Mind***



This image is not a photomontage. Instead, it is a computer generated image that has been hand colored. The main part of the image is Nicolaes de Bruyn’s *Justice* from his series of etchings on the Cardinal Infections (1648–1656). At Justice’s feet are nineteenth century drawings of the heart and the brain. When Justice weights the hearts and minds of academics, she is not looking at them to balance. As a Theravada Buddhist, I might want such balance or equanimity in my personal life. But as an academic, I strive to have my mind outweigh my heart. My feelings count, but what I feel is not evidence.

### ***Because I Can***



This piece is part of a series I completed concerning administrative foibles. It deals with the issue of ruling by administrative fiat. For example, I once asked an administrator<sup>52</sup> why she had overruled the failing grade I had given to a student who was guilty of academic dishonesty in a course I was teaching. Her response, “Because I can.” Although the series focused on administrators, faculty members--including myself--have been guilty of taking the same position. Using Florida convict laborers from the early twentieth century as the background is intended to reference the arrogance of a corrupt dominant culture that uses its power against less powerful members of society. In our classrooms, those individuals are our students. As faculty members, we must be careful that there are pedagogically strong reasons when we say “because I can” and are not replicating the worst of arrogant administrators about whom it is too easy to complain.

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<sup>52</sup> The administrator has been dead for more than a decade and could have worked at any of the five colleges/universities at which I have taught.

## ***Becoming Enlightened When Life is Busy***



The foreground for this image is one of my favorite photographs of me with my father. It was taken in 1958 when he graduated from Michigan State University. He would later earn his Masters in Library Science from Central Michigan University. I would grow up to earn three degrees from MSU. The photograph was taken in the living room of our first family home in Unionville, Michigan. Beaumont Tower is to commemorate Michigan State. The background is Vincent van Gogh's *Road with Cypress and Star* (1890). I selected this particular painting because the ancient Chinese character for "enlightenment" combined the characters for "sun" and "moon;" the two brightest objects in the sky.

## ***The Bird with the Human Head***



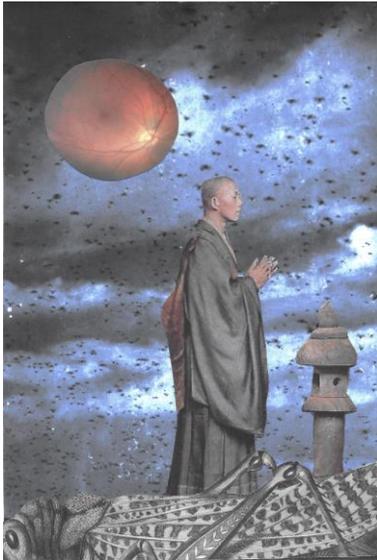
Since I first read it more 30 years ago, I have remembered the end of Anne Sexton's observation that "Abundance is scooped from abundance yet abundance remains" which concludes her poem "What the Bird with the Crooked Head Knew."<sup>53</sup> The background for this piece is Xia Chang's 夏昞 (1388 - 1470) *Xiao-Xiang River after Rain*. The swan's face is from a photograph of Harriet Tubman. The swan is from the Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 764, Folio 65v. There is a Buddhist story about a swan and a peacock.

The peacock is more beautiful than the swan, but because of its attachments, it is hindered in its movement. The swan is able to glide swiftly to its goal.

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<sup>53</sup> Sexton, Anne. "What the Bird With the Human Head Knew." *Complete Poems*. Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

## Cakkhupala



Instead of using a monk to represent Cakkhupala, I decided to use a Buddhist pilgrim by photographed by Felice Beato. The photograph was hand colored. The shrine was in the original photograph. I rotated the pilgrim so that he was facing in the opposite direction than in the original photograph.

The locust that serves as the ground was drawn by George Shaw in 1805.

The background image is from the Locust plague in the United States in 1915. I have no other information about the image. I changed the color of the original image from black and white.

The sun/moon—it could be either—is a photograph of my eye. The significance of the eye is that when he became an arahat, Cakkhupala became blind. This was the result of kamma. In a previous life, Cakkhupala was a doctor. One of his patients said she and her children would become his servant if he cured her. When she was almost cured, Cakkhupala discovered that the woman was not intending to fulfill her agreement. He then gave one last treatment which he knew would blind her.

## Climbing to the Heights



We can ask students to reach above their abilities if we give them proper guidance and support. This piece represents students climbing to the top of the mountain. At the height of the mountain is a Greek Tetradrachm Coin (5th century BCE) which features an owl to which I have added a graduation cap. The owl is a traditional symbol of wisdom and was a favorite animal of my grandmother Rachel Liberacki. The background is an anonymous author's *Valley of Chamonix. Crossing the Sea of Ice* (c. 1902-1904). I have been unable to determine the author of *Ascent of Mont Blanc* which is

incorporated into the image.

## Come on In, the Water's Fine



Sometimes it is hard for faculty members to take risks to change our pedagogies. Yet, there are times we must wade into the deep end. I say "wade" rather than "dive" because we are most successful taking small steps. The background for this piece is from Claude Monet's *Waterlilies: Green Reflections* (1914-18). The people are from Jan Van Beers' *A 19th-Century Bathing Machine* (1888).

## ***Dōmo-kōmo Taking a Class***



The Dōmo-kōmo is a two headed creature with gray skin. The one pictured here is from the Bakemono zukushi and is attending a class at the University of Alabama in 1890. We do not know the painter or date of the Bakemono zukushi, but it is likely from the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The Dōmo-kōmo seems to be a perfect image for the helicopter parent who is so merged with their child that they create a murderous giant. Each head controls its respective side of the body. However, the right side tends to dominate. This is the case with Dōmo-kōmo parents who are the dominant partner in the relationship. Too often, the child is regulated to irrelevancy. Even though the parent is not literally in the classroom, their presence can cast a pall over the relationship between professor and student.

## ***The Eagle Earned Demerits: An Educational Allegory***



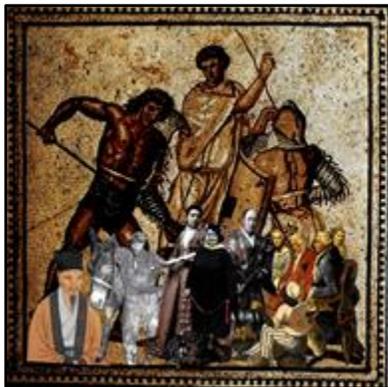
Amos E. Dolbear, writing under the pseudonym Aesop, Jr., published “An Educational Allegory” in *Journal of Education* (1898). In this allegory, the eagle earned demerits because he got to the top of the tree the wrong way. He flew instead of climbed. In this piece, the eagle is a Bella Coola Indian grave box which was photographed by Harlan Smith (c. 1909). The other animals in the piece are all doing things that they are not naturally included to do. The cat playing a bagpipe is from the marginalia in a *Book of Hours* (Paris, c. 1460). The dog is from *The Decretals of Gregory IX*, edited by Raymund of Penyafort (c. 1300-1340). The goat is an illustration in Oliver Herford’s *Artful Anticks* (1894). The rabbit riding the lion is from *Ms 107, Bréviaire de Renaud de Bar*, fol.-89r-89r, Bibliothèque de Verdun (1302-1304). The goldfish is from Scheveningen Adriaen Coenensz’s *The Fishbook* (1577-1580). The bird is from Franz Helm of Cologne’s *Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg*, Cod. Pal. germ. 128, f.74r (1535). The background is a baobab tree on the bank of the Chobe River. It was released by jeanvdmeulen on Pixabay.

## ***Educating the False Prophets***



The librarian (at least I see her as a librarian) in this piece is conducting a book drive during World War II. The image in the lower right is a detail from an illustration in the *Queen Mary Apocalypse* (14th century)<sup>54</sup> showing John watching frogs emerge from the mouths of mouths of the false prophets as well as a seven headed dragon and a seven headed beast. The Biblical passage is Revelation 16:13. I believe that education will win out over ignorance.

## ***Education and Social Mobility***

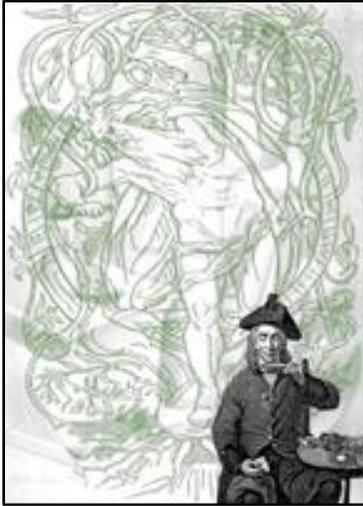


Throughout history education has been a path toward social mobility. The background for this photomontage is a floor mosaic of fighting gladiators from a Roman villa near Nennig on Mosel in Germany (c. 250 CE). The people in front includes Chinese scholar Su Shi (1037 – 1101), coal miner George Lawrence Berg (1899-1927), a woman from the nineteenth century holding her diploma, a slave from Barbados, a Japanese Samurai warrior, Alexa Azzopardi and her dog Cami on her graduation with a Masters of Library Science, and individuals attending a French salon. The slave is from Augustino Brunias' *The Barbadoes Mulatto Girl* (c. 1764). The people in the salon are from Château de Malmaison's *Reading of Voltaire's L'Orphelin de la Chine in the Salon of Madame Geoffrin* (1812). I am not sure of the photographer of the Samurai, but have a source that says it was taken on 1 June 1870.

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<sup>54</sup> The image can be found in the British Library, Royal MS 19 B XV fol. 30v.

## Enjoying a Hot Beverage



I now joke with students that I am content sitting in the back of the room drinking my tea while they teach the class. In this piece, I am represented by J.J. Jenkins' *The Chelsea Pensioner* (1826). Using the pensioner is a reference to how I joke with students about being an old man. The background of the image is an image of Odin, the Norse God who hung himself on a Yggdrasil tree in order to gain wisdom from the runes. If you believe what is in the Saxon Chronicles, an argument can be made that Odin was my 52nd great grandfather. I tell my students that their professor is descended from the gods. Although my main hot beverage of choice is herb tea, my passion for turkish coffee is reflected in the background. The image of Odin is a transparency on top of Juan Gris' *Still Life with Coffee Mill* (1916). I did change the color of Gris' sketch.

## Equanimity Surrounded By Detractors



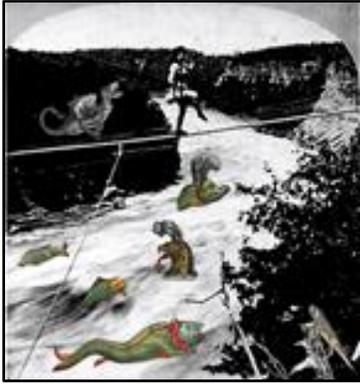
As professors, we are often under attack. Sometimes it is difficult to keep our equanimity while our detractors surround us. Yet, it is important to work oward equanimity; such as that which has been found by St. Thomas Aquinas from Gentile da Fabriano's *Marienkronung, Giebelgemälde* [The Coronation of the Virgin] (c. 1400). The background is a detail from Coppo di Marcovaldo's *The Hell* (c. 1301). The bottom panel is from Bakemono Zukushi's "Monster" Scroll (18th–19th century).

## Expanding Classroom Geography



The idea of illustrating an expanded classroom with school being taught on the moon came to me rather quickly, but how to show it took some thought; especially because my original decision to use a moonscape from Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) as the background proved to be unworkable for me. Selecting a screen capture from *The Sky: A Film Lesson in "Nature Study"* was not, however, a consolation. It is actually a better background that what I imaged. I was able to pay homage to Méliès by using his planets and stars in the sky. The mushrooms are also inspired by the mushrooms that the scientists found on Méliès' moon. The mushrooms in this piece are from Giacomo Bresadola's *I funghi mangerecci e velenosi dell'Europa media con speciale riguardo a quelli che crescono nel Trentino - II edizione riveduta ed aumentata* 1906. The lecture is from Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* (early fifteenth century).

## Facing Fears



I remember attending a seminar in which an accounting professor explained how her teaching improved after taking a dancing course. It made her a better professor because she was able to reconnect with memories of how scary it is to learn new things. The background for the piece is Maria Spelterini crossing the Niagara River gorge in July 1876. This is just one of several trips she made over a several day period. To make the scene even more scary, I added a dragon Edward Topsell's *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607). The creatures in the water are from Sebastian Münster's chart of sea monsters which is from Olaus Magnus' *Carta Marina* (1539). The crocodile in the is from a medieval manuscript (c. 1230-14th century).<sup>55</sup>

## First Birthday



This piece celebrates the cycle of life: birth, life, death, and rebirth. The main photograph was taken on my first birthday: 17 January 1958. It was also the day that my new baby brother Christopher came home from the hospital. He had been born five days earlier. The background is the obituary for my my grandfather Ferdinand Berg (1896-1942). The lotus flower is an important symbol in Buddhism. For the purposes of *Promoting Student Success at the Community College*, it represents all of those things--both positive

and negative--that get in the way of our academic lives. Those of us who are full time faculty members have personal business days and sick days and bereavement days and days that we are not teaching on which we can schedule appointments. Our students and adjunct colleagues do not enjoy those benefits. But there is nothing to stop faculty to work with students when life gets in the way. And full time faculty can make ourselves available to assist adjunct faculty members by covering classes and so forth when they need assistance.

## Food Distribution



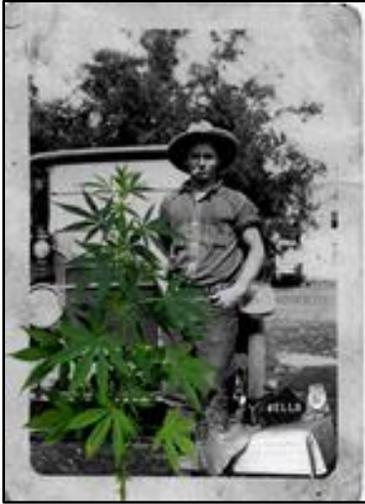
When my brother became a vegetarian more than 30 years ago for political reasons, he began to educate me on food distribution issues.<sup>56</sup> It is not that we do not have enough food to feed people, the problem is priorities and food distribution systems. During the past few years, I have become especially concerned about food insecurity; especially as it relates to my students. The background for this piece is Severin Roesen's *Still Life with Fruit* 1865. Many of

<sup>55</sup> Royal MS 12 F XIII, f. 24v., accessible through the British Library.

<sup>56</sup> Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* which was first published in 1971 is a classic that goes into detail about socio-political reasons for not eating meat.

Roesen's paintings were purchased by newly wealthy merchants in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The image in the foreground was taken by W. W. Hooper during the Orissa famine (1866–1867) in India. The 20 year old man is 5' tall and weighs only 62 pounds.

### ***Friday Night***



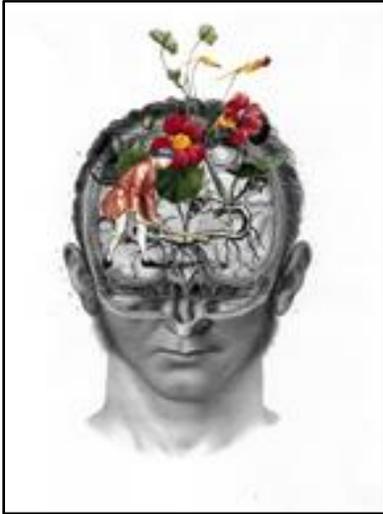
What does one do on Friday night? Party? Study? For my students, the answer is often “work.” I know nothing about the young man in this piece, but he impresses me as someone who knows work and does hard work. The woman is a student at Pomona College around the turn of the twentieth century. The marijuana plant is for partying.

### ***Gesture of Teaching : Karuṇā Radiates From Metta***



The Gautama Buddha is holding his hands in a gesture of teaching [Vitarkamudra]. It is from the Angkor period which was during the late 12th-early 13th century in Thailand. Several of the Buddhas in my private collection are from Thailand which is also a country I have visited. I know nothing about the Japanese student who is looking at him. The background is Charles Hippolyte Aubry's Study of Leaves on a Background of Floral Lace (1864). I like the organic nature of the leaves which also suggest a link to Thai Forest Buddhism.

## Growing Dendrites



Helping students grow their brains is at the heart of our teaching. The background for this piece is Nicolas Henri Jacob's illustration in the third volume of Jean Babtiset Marc Bourger's *Traité complet de l'anatomie de l'homme, comprenant la médecine opératoire* (1844). The plant is *Asarum canadense* [Canadian Wild Ginger] that was done by an anonymous artist after the work of Jacques-Philippe Cornut, 1685. It was published in *Popular Science Monthly* (Volume 70, 1907). The farmer is an illustration from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis*, a late 1400 text based on the eleventh century Arabic manuscript *Taqwīm as-sihḥah* تقويم الصحة. Even though I have the farmer growing dendrites, in the manuscript he was growing carrots. Good health and good pedagogy go well together.

## Horticulture and Horses



This piece is inspired by Dorothy Parker who, when asked to use "horticulture" in a sentence, replied "You can lead a horticulture, but you can't make her think." Although Parker's clever response makes some assumptions about prostitutes, she does not imply that they can't think when given the opportunity. Although I use Parker's statement as a cautionary tale in "Of Horticulture and Horses," this piece of art celebrates learning. The background is Gustav Klimt's *Farm Garden with Sunflowers* (c.1912). The river and lower land is from an unknown Flemish artist's *The Angel of Paradise with a Sword* (c. 1475). The horse was likely drawn in in central Rajasthan during the middle of the nineteenth-century. The original was not in black and white. The woman is Belle Brezing (1860-1940), a Lexington madam.

## Horror Narrative: A Student Faculty Collaboration

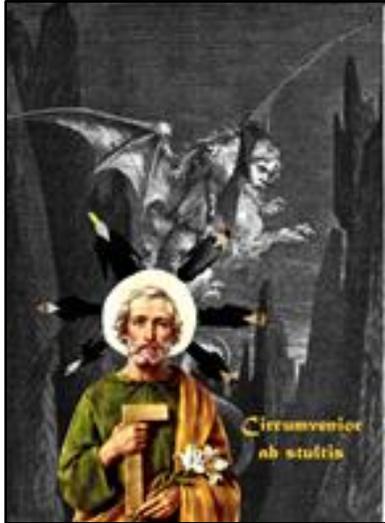


During a presentation, a student led us in a drawing activity. I used my drawing as a draft for a photomontage. I now keep the original in my office and discuss the collaborative nature of the work when students comment on it. The background of the photograph is of Harlech Castle drawn by W.H. Bartlett.<sup>57</sup> The man is a flayed man drawn by Juan Valverde de Amusco and published in *Anatomia del*

<sup>57</sup> Beattie, William, William Finden, and William Henry Bartlett. *Finden's views of the Ports, Harbour, Watering Places & Coastal scenery of Great Britain*. George Virtue: London, 1842.

*corpo humano* (1559). The trees were copyright free.

### ***I am Surrounded by Idiots***



A couple of years ago, I did a series of pieces concerning administrative foibles from a faculty point of view. Most of these pieces were for my amusement, but two are published in *If Everything Happens That Can't Be Done*. St. Joseph is the patron saint of educators and is *circumvenior ab stultis*; surrounded by idiots. Four of the five administrators are wearing crowns of European royalty. The crown of the fifth is a beer bottle. The background is a Gustave Doré illustration for Dante's *Inferno* depicting King Geryon. Geryon would use flattering words to bring people close to him. He would then kill them. Dante makes him, like unethical administrators, the demon of deceit. It should be noted that also administrators are cast as evil characters, not all administrators fall into this category. And as I mentioned in the introduction to chapter 01, sometimes the idiot is ourselves.

### ***If You Are Going To Speak...***



The main feature of this page is Salvator Rosa's Self Portrait (c. 1645). In it, Rosa is holding a sign that reads "Aut tace aut loquere meliora silentio" which translates "If you're going to speak, it ought to be better than silence." Rosa's ideal is set against John Martin's *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1826) to illustrate an edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (originally published in 1667).

### ***If You Are Without Warmth***



The background for this piece is Walter Dendy Sadler's *The End of the Skein* (1896). I was debating between a couple of other backgrounds that just had furniture in them. But when I came across Sandler's painting, I knew I had been moving in the wrong direction. People are needed for warmth and I find a special warmth between the elderly couple in this painting. The dog is our Abuela who was almost dead when we rescued her. We expected that we would hospice her for no more than six months. Yet she lived and brought joy to the household for three years. Each year at Christmas time, Abuela

would have her own little Christmas tree next to her *casa*. The woman in the Christmas tree is from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. I think she adds a cheerful, whimsical element to the scene.

### ***The Lecture vs. Active Learning***



In the mid-fourteenth century, when the background image of a lecture from University of Bologna in Italy was created, lecturing made a certain degree of success. Books were rare and to have the lecturing reading a book to a group of students was a practical way to spread information. However, more than 700 years later, such a strategy is no longer efficient. Nor is it an effective pedagogy in many situations. Instead, we should promote active learning. The idea of students doing their own research was symbolized by the man reading an oversized book. In this case, the book is the *The Codex Gigas* which was part of a stereoscopic image taken in 1906. The

Chinese girl holding what appears to be a stack of books is actually holding pillows. I like the fact that it is likely that viewers will--like I did--see books. I didn't realize what she was really holding until I did research on the photograph. However, the pillows could be for the sleeping scholars.

### ***Little Dogs Riding Fish***



This image is a detail from a larger piece I designed for my husband. The background is a pond in our backyard. The dogs from left to right are Snooki, Pichi, and Lil' Mama. The turtles lived in a different pond. The little boy fishing is a statue that my husband has had for 38 years. It was a gift from a friend of his. There is no deep meaning in this piece. It was designed as a fun piece to celebrate my husband's love for his pets as well as other interests he has. It reminds us to take joy

in life.

## Metamorphosis



At the heart of the transformative educational experience is metamorphosis. The background is Maria Sibylla Merian's *Branch of Duroia eriopila with Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly* (1702-1703). The stages of the butterfly from egg to larva to pupa to butterfly. As professors, we take students from where they are at to the next step. The man is Dr. George Washington Carver who transformed peanuts and the peanut industry as well as the lives of African Americans. Although the piece shows a linear progression, in reality there are steps backward as well as forward. There is also the need to unlearn what we already know when new knowledge becomes available.

## Of Caffeinated Goats and Students



A friend and colleague would always try to get me to overload on coffee before meetings because when I was highly caffeinated, "Meetings were more interesting." Sometimes, our students seem highly caffeinated; not unlike Kaldi and his goats. The background for this image is the goat herder Kaldi who is reputed to have discovered coffee when he saw how animated his goats became when he saw them eating coffee berries. This image of Kaldi and his goats is from William H. Ukers' *All About Coffee* (1922). The colored plants are

images of coffee plants. The scholar overlooking the scene is a picture of a bishop from William Alexander's *Picturesque Representations of the Dress and Manners of the English* (1814).

## Offering Dhamma



I describe my religious views as one who does his best to follow the Buddha Dhamma [teachings of the Buddha] in the Theravada tradition. In 2009, I had the honor and privilege to sponsor the Katina ceremony<sup>58</sup> at my viharra. A viharra is the place where the monks live as in the center of the Theravada Buddhist community. The photograph was taken of me carrying the Katina robe during the ceremony. The Buddha was cut from a magazine. Although the robe is offered to the community of monks, in this photomontage, I am

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<sup>58</sup> For the purposes of this book an understanding of why I choose this piece of art as an illustration, an understanding of the significance of the Katina ceremony is unnecessary.

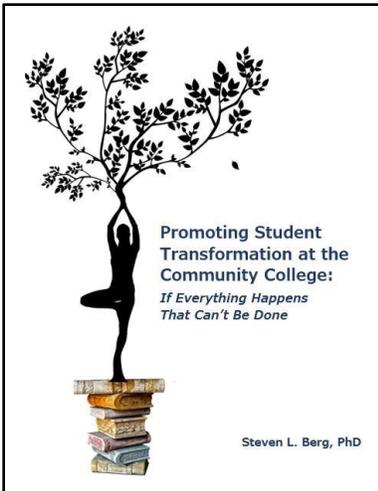
offering it to Mara. Depending on the tradition of Buddhism being followed, Mara is either a demon or a personification of evil. In front of Mara there is an ostrich from Conrad Gessner's *Conradi Gesneri Medici Tigurini Historiae animalium* (1551) and represents those who put their heads in the sand. When I was sharing a draft of this book with my composition students, they asked why I would offer kindness to an evil being? My response is that we cannot make distinctions as to which students deserve our kindness. Or, in the words of Christ, "Whatsoever you do to even the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto me."<sup>59</sup>

### **Overcoming the Fear of Failure**



The background is a posed photograph by Charles Francis Himes which was taken outside Tome Scientific Building at Dickinson College (c. 1890). I would be interested to know more about the woman in the dunce cap, the professor pointing her away from the building, and the intention of the photographer. I believe that the intent was comic although I am taking it more seriously in this piece. I added images of cacti to indicate the desert created by a fear of failure and, in this case, the public humiliation that goes with it. The violets are behind Emily Dickson who graduated from London's Royal College of Physicians in 1891.

### **Promoting Student Success at the Community College**



The individual in the yoga position with branches coming out of their hands was designed by mohamed-hassan. The books were designed by anaterate. Both were released on Pixabay.

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<sup>59</sup> Matthew 25:40.

## **Providing a Transformative Learning Experience**



The background for this piece is Jacob Riis' *Children's Playground in Poverty Cap, New York* (c. 1890s). The photograph of Susie King Taylor was taken in 1902. King was born into slavery. She was educated in an illegal school and by a free African American woman. Several years later, King would be the first African American woman to openly teach in a school for former slaves. I added fresh vegetables to the wheelbarrows because nutrition is such an important component of education and issues of food insecurity are currently rising.

## **The Scholar Athlete as Artist**



Tanner Brose is a fine scholar and soccer player who is pursuing an interest in art. He is a budding polymath (from the Greek πολυμαθής), someone who has learned much. While working with Brose, I enjoyed watching him devour and integrate texts as he studied child soldiers for an exhibit on "Physical and Mental Health in a Global Environment." Brose's sport is soccer so I chose Umberto Boccioni's *Dynamism of a Soccer Player* (1913) as the background. The light is made up of a soccer ball and circle of colored pencils which I obtained from copyright free websites. Brose's photograph was chosen by him when he was selected to give a presentation with Jessica Worden-Jones and me at the 2018 Michigan Developmental

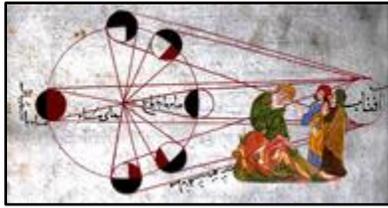
Education Consortium Conference.

## **The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters**



Because this piece was completed in December 2018, there is no way to divorce this photomontage from contemporary American politics. Nor do I intend to do so. In fact, I included the bats from Thomas Nast's "The Political Vampire" which was published in *Harper's Weekly* (April 1885). The man with his head on table is from Francisco Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* which is image No. 43 from his *Los Caprichos* (1799). The background is *Dynamism of a Man's Head* by Umberto Boccioni, (1913).

## ***Socrates in the Islamic Golden Age***



While doing research on Islamic education, I came across an image of Socrates teaching his pupils. It is from the thirteenth century *Sughrat* [Socrates] by a Seljuk illustrator. The background is Al-Biruni's (973-1048) illustration of the phases of the moon from *Kitab al-Tafhim*.

## ***St. Francis and the Animals***



I have always admired St. Francis and, at one time in my life, even considered becoming a Third Order Franciscan. The background for this photomontage is a photograph I took in my backyard. The animals come from various Medieval beatiarties and from the marginalia of religious manuscripts. St. Francis is a transformational figure. He started a life of luxury enjoying his fine clothes and extravagant spending. After an illness, he reevaluated his life and made his changes. Transformation is at the heart of the community college experience.

## ***Standing With Power and Compassion***



I first met Sonyanga Ole Ngais when I requested permission to reprint some photographs of the Maasai Cricket Ladies for an exhibit on "Physical and Mental Health in a Global Environment."<sup>60</sup> Through him, I met Richard Turere who is also known as "Lion Boy" as well as other members of the Maasai community. The Maasai Warriors are using their status as cricketers and warriors to advocate against Female Genital Mutilation as well as to work for other improvements

in the Maasai Community. In this piece, Ngais is shown in his cricket kit. Turere developed a way to scare lions away from the cattle which means that the Maasai Warriors do not need to kill them to protect their livestock. Turere is shown with one of his herd. The lions next to Turere were photographed next to him. The background is a still from *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) which was directed by Thorold Dickinson. The Maasai women from Njeri, Kenya standing with Ngais are from an 1885 print. The sun combines beading worn by a Maasai Cricket Lady and a cricket ball.

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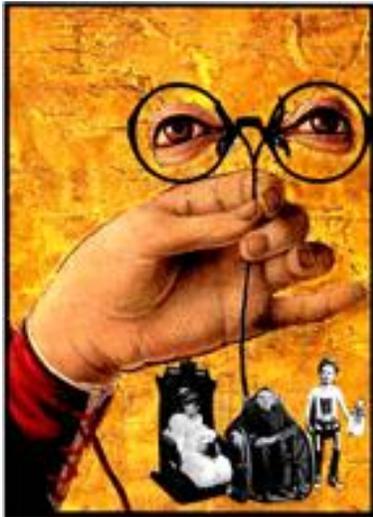
<sup>60</sup> I co-curated the "Physical and Mental Health in a Global Environment Exhibit" with Jessica Worden-Jones. The online version of the exhibit can be found at <http://scholarlyvoices.org/health01/>.

## ***Tea Under the Yuzu Tree***



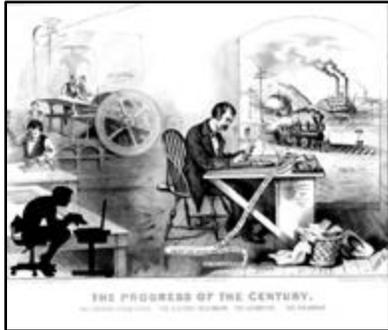
After visiting my cousin Ursula Berg Anderson and her husband John Anderson in California, I wrote four essays inspired by watching Dominic trim their Yuzu tree. Three updated versions from that series are in this book. I like to teach these essays in my first semester composition classes because they begin with the first two sentences but have different themes. I use them to show my students that a single incident can inspire different types of learning. The background for this image is from an 1892 Japanese painting by an unknown artist. I embossed the painting for artistic reasons. The women under the branch are from Toshikata Mizuno's *The Ceremony* (1896). The woman walking away from the ceremony is from a photograph taken during the nineteenth century by Kusakabe\_Kimbei. 茶道 are the Kanji characters for "tea ceremony." For me, the tea ceremony represents a gift of respect and harmony which serve as the basis for a life lived with equanimity. It is a gift we offer all of our students; even those who turn their backs on us and walk away from our offer.

## ***Teaching While Underimpaired***



The idea that too often we don't care about issues because they do not impact us is a concept that interests me and one we must work to counter. The background for this piece is a detail from Francesco del Cossa's *St. Lucy* (1473). St. Lucy (283–304) was a Christian martyr. During her life she had her eyes gouged out; either by herself or as punishment for seeing the future. The stories vary. But it is also reported that, when her family was preparing her body for burial, they discovered that her eyes had been restored. To Cossa's painting, I added the eyeglasses. The three individuals at the bottom of the piece are Helen Keller with her dog (1887), a New York man in a wheelchair (c. 1885), and a girl with prosthetic legs (c. 1900).

## **Technological Progress**



This is a simple piece that uses Currier & Ives' "The Progress of the Century – The Lightning Steam Press. The Electric Telegraph. The Locomotive. The Steamboat" (1876) as the background. I have added Vexels' silhouette of a student working on a computer in the corner. Technology is going to progress and faculty members need to adopt of pedagogical approaches with it.

## **There is More to Life Than Surgeons Can Remove**



Although I am a first believer in science, I also know that there are some things to which science itself cannot give meaning. Or, in the words from "On a Clear Day You Can See Forever" from the 1966 Broadway musical of the same title: "There is more to life than surgeons can remove." The image is intended to remind us that while data is important, we cannot forget the human and spiritual element that is part of education. To capture this idea, I set Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1631) against a backdrop of a photograph I took in my front yard. I purchased the metallic butterfly stickers were purchased at a dollar store.

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## **Those Who Benefit from Universal Design**



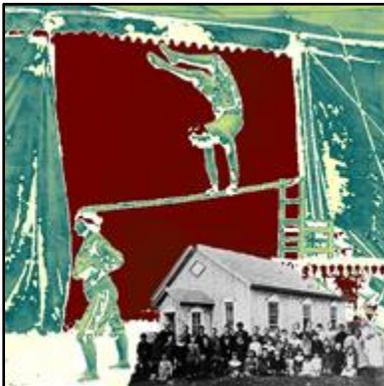
Universal design benefits everyone; not just people who have a disability. This point is made with two images of George Spinning (1895-1978) who was a World War I veteran who developed polio and spent most of his life in a wheelchair. The background is Frederick H Evans' photograph of steps leading to the Chapter House in Wells Cathedral in Somerset, England. At the top of the stairs is William Hogarth's *Scholars at a Lecture* (1736).

### ***Tips and Tricks #01***



I was greatly intrigued by Lucky2013's image of a clown watering a sunflower that is growing from the parched earth. As professors, we take what we are given and do our best to make it work. I added the rain which was designed by OpenClipart-Vectors and the large sunflower and fall fruits and vegetables to the forefront because it is the bounty of our work. All of the images used were released on Pixabay.

### ***Tips and Tricks #02***



The background for this piece is a photograph of two nineteenth century circus performers which I manipulated to give it the color and design it now has. The over which they are performing was Edmonton's first school which was built in 1881. I am not sure of the exact date of the photograph.

### ***Tips and Tricks #03***



Harlequins were a servant who worked against the interests of their masters. They were tricksters who might not be the type of student a professor would welcome into their classroom. Yet, as a professor, I often collaborate with my students to destroy my plans and rebuild the classroom in a way that better suits them. The books were designed by Momentma and anaterate and were released on Pixabay. The two harlequins in the lower right were designed by OpenClipart-Vectors who released them on Pixabay. The other harlequins are from earlier sources.

### **Tips and Tricks #04**



I admire Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* because he looks at the same thing from various perspectives; a strategy that we need to adopt if we want to be our best. Furthermore, there are actually 46 views of Mt. Fuji because Hokusai created 10 drawings after the book was published. His work--and ours--is never complete. Annie Edson Taylor was a schoolteacher who, on 24 October 1901, was the first person to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel and survive. I feel a connection to Taylor because, for a period of time, she lived in Bay

City, Michigan. I lived in Essexville, which is Bay City's only suburb, while in Junior and Senior high school and later lived in Bay City for a period of time after I finished graduate school. The sun is a photograph taken by NASA. The Arabic text can be translated, "Kindness is a mark of faith, and whoever has not kindness has not faith."

### **Tips and Tricks #05**



This piece was originally named Matthew 7:20 #2, Faculty (2019) and is part of a three part series interpreting this Biblical passage looking at how it applies to Christians, faculty, and Donald Trump. The background is a nineteenth century photograph of a one room school in Eatonville, Washington. Professor Clark Iverson's face is on the body of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's body is a detail from "Madonna and Child with St. Dominic and St. Thomas Aquinas" by Fra Angelico (1445). The seeds are from a free graphics website. The owl was released by Gellinger on Pixabay. Owls are frequently

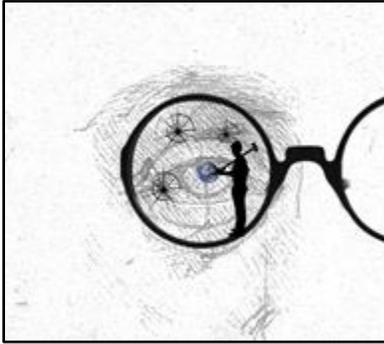
associated with education. This owl also pays homage to my teacher, grandmother who collected owls.

### **Tips and Tricks #06**



A student juggling apples in from a schoolhouse is one that brings comfort and satisfaction. The background is a photograph by moise\_theodor which I manipulated by changing the color and by embossing. The apples being juggled by the student were created by Capri23auto. The schoolhouse was created by SilviaP\_Design. The images were all released on Pixabay.

### **Tips and Tricks #07**



The background is a detail from Leonardo da Vinci's Study of Proportions. The breaks in the glasses were designed by OpenClipart-Vectors and released on Pixabay. The world is from NASA. The glasses and man with sledgehammer are from free websites.

### **Tips and Tricks #08**



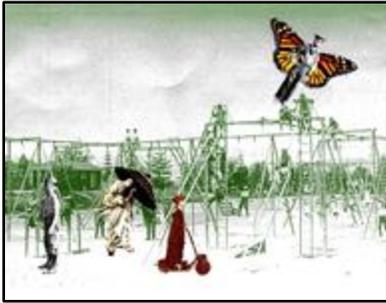
The circus tent is really the tip of a fountain pen and a line of ink. It was created by Clker-Free-Vector-Images and released on Pixabay. The magician and his assistant are my grandfather Alexander Liberacki and my grandmother Rachael Wilcox Liberacki. My grandfather was a well known magician in Michigan. I am a third generation magician.

### **The Transformed Classroom**



Unfortunately, I have been unable to learn anything about the background image, but I did find the flying car to be absolutely delightful. The education related images I added include Mykola Yaroshenko's Курсистка [Girl Student] (1880 or 1883) which is found in the upper left. I do not have additional information on the book mobile, but the individual standing in front of it is Jessie Webb (1880-1944) who was an historian who was one of the first female professors at the University of Melbourne. The other two students in the piece are from a postcard published in Heidelberg (1903).

**Underprepared → Prepared → Advanced → Excel**



The motto of the National Association of Developmental Education is “Helping underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, advanced students excel.” The background for the piece is a 1912 photograph of Hiawatha Playfield in Seattle, Washington. The underprepared student is the Factory Rob Kidd who worked in an Alexander, Virginia factory at the turn of the 20th century. The prepared student is a nineteenth century photograph of a Geisha holding an umbrella. The advanced student is Lady Florence Norman who is riding her motor-scooter to work (1916). The student who is

excelling is an African American sailor (c. 1861-1865) who is flying with Monarch wings.

**United We Stand**



I so much enjoy the powerful message in *United We Stand. Divided We Fall*, a portrait of American Civil War veterans Frank M. Howe and Velorus W. Bruce. For these two men standing as they are, the message is both literally and figuratively true. This is a message that we must take into our classrooms where cooperation between faculty and students is vital to success as is the cooperation of others such as administrators, parents, the community, politicians, and many others. The background is James McNeill Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875) with the sparks from a sparkler dancing in the foreground.

**When a Grandmother Dies**



Knabe auf einem Grab schlafend [Boy Sleeping on a Grave] (1803) was designed by Caspar David Friedrich. The wood block was cut by Christian Friedrich. I had initially planned on having a professor looking at him, but decided to use the image of Bella Guerin instead. Guerin was the first woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne in 1883. She earned her Master of Arts in 1885. She would work as a suffragist, anti-conscriptionist, and political activist, Guerin worked as a teacher.

## ***You Forgot I Was a Seed***



This is one of my “self portraits.” Generally, when I do a self portrait, I use an image appropriate to the photomontage instead of an image of myself. In doing so, I am not equating myself with the image. For example, I do not equate myself with Christ even though I use the image of Jesus from Sasha Schneider's *Triumph of Darkness* (1896). The photomontage also incorporates a botanical illustration of a navy bean from Curtis’s *Botanical Magazine* (1902), a nineteenth century medical illustration of a human heart, and some more modern photographs of beans. I choose navy beans because land purchased by my grandparents which is now owned by my father and aunt is being used to raise navy beans. The Greek on the bottom is a quote from Dinos Christianopoulos: "You did anything to bury me, but you forgot that I was a seed." Versions of this quotation have been misattributed to a variety of other sources, but the theme is

consistent. The fact that Christianopoulos is gay is an added personal connection. Without knowing that I consider this to be a self portrait, the image does carry a powerful Christian message of hope. During life, we may be put down, attacked, or disregarded. There may even be times when others are actively trying to undermine us or worse. But these people forget that we are seeds that can germinate. I was drafting this short artist’s statement a few days after the Central Intelligence Agency concluded that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had given the instruction to "silence [journalist] Jamal Khashoggi as soon as possible."<sup>61</sup> We are also a week away from celebrating the Feast of Thomas a Becket who was assassinated after Henry II asked “Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest? ?” Who is remembered more? The turbulent priest who was a seed? The man who ordered his murder?

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<sup>61</sup> Ensour, Josie. “CIA has recording of bin Salman giving instructions to 'silence Jamal Khashoggi', Turkish media reports.” *The Telegraph*. 22 November 2018. Retrieved. 23 November 2018.