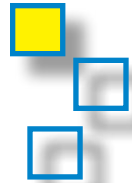


Volume 2
Issue 2
February
2010

Lander University's

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White Board



Become An Effective Teacher & Save Your Valuable Teaching Time and Energy

Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

America's "Top" College Professor (In the Classroom)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL published an interesting story [<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704402404574524402818418042.html>, November 13, 2009] about the Cherry Teaching Award, an honor bestowed annually on America's "top" college professor. Sponsored by Baylor University, the award comes with a nice chunk of change (\$200,000), and is somewhat unusual because it measures not scholarly research and publications but rather classroom performance. As the Journal explains, "The Cherry award seeks out college teachers who, according to both students and fellow teachers, are especially good at making clear, forceful, inspiring, knowledge-rich classroom presentations that actually help students to learn."

The award's three finalists this year are Elliott West, an American history professor at the University of Arkansas; Roger Rosenblatt, an English professor at Stony Brook University; and Edward Burger, a mathematics professor at Williams College.

"All three finalists emphasize that teaching is something you have to work at," writes the Journal's Naomi Schaefer Riley. "It takes time to prepare. It takes time to practice. It takes time to process the feedback from students. Maybe that sounds obvious. But the truth is that many professors don't bother. It's an old observation but a true one. At most colleges, promotion and tenure decisions are made based on a record of publication. Even at liberal-arts colleges, studies have shown that a financial premium is placed on publication."

This article got me to thinking about my introduction to another great college teacher

from one of Kaplan's campuses, Bauder College in Atlanta.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Sheryl McCollum, a Criminal Justice instructor and Director of the Cold Case Investigative Research Institute at Bauder College. I met Sheryl at a Kaplan conference - she was there to receive the Innovator Award for finding "new ways to engage and inspire our students, making their experience second to none."

Sheryl and her Cold Case Institute students have received a lot of media attention (such as this Associated Press story) for their sleuthing in real-life, high-profile cases like the killing of Washington intern Chandra Levy and the disappearance of teenager Natalee Holloway in Aruba.

But even if I hadn't previously seen Sheryl and her students on CNN, I would have sensed her passion for teaching within moments of meeting her. She just bubbles over with enthusiasm, and it is immediately obvious how much she wants her students to learn and succeed.

"My teaching philosophy is the only way to truly learn anything is to do it!" Sheryl told me. "Textbooks for me are filler, not the only game in town. The text or handout or movie should support what I have shown them - and what they have participated in with hands-on."

Beth Berselli, Education and the Individual, WWW. Rethinking Higher Education.com, November 16, 2009
[<http://www.rethinkinghighereducation.com/2009/11/america%2%80%99s-%e2%80%9ctop%e2%80%9d-college-professor-in-the-classroom/#more->]
December 16, 2009

CALENDAR

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME

NATIONAL SURVEY OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

(COURSE ID: 201010CE1)

Wednesday, February 3, 2010
12:40 - 1:40 p.m. Dawson Room

Tom Nelson
Director of Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) obtains information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college.

Participants will have an opportunity to look at the data available in the most recent administration of this Survey (spring 2007; spring 2010 data will be available in fall 2010) to determine if there is data that can be used by individual units for their assessment and accountability activities.

FACULTY MEETING
Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2010
12:40-1:40pm, LC200

Spring Break March 1-5, 2010

WHITE BOARD

2009-10 Publication Dates

First Monday of the Month

September 7	March 1
October 5	April 5
November 2	May 3
December 7	June 7
January 4	July 5
February 1	August 2

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THE MEDIOCRE TEACHER TELLS. THE GOOD TEACHER EXPLAINS.
THE SUPERIOR TEACHER DEMONSTRATES. THE GREAT TEACHER INSPIRES.

- William Arthur Ward

Short Paper Assignments are Valuable for Students and Faculty

By Dr. Lucas McMillan
Assistant Professor of Political Science, Lander University

STUDENTS ARE FAMILIAR with brief methods of exchanging ideas, whether through text messaging or Twitter. Although papers of ten pages or more are needed in some courses, faculty should consider shorter writing assignments especially in an age of fast-paced communication. College students have been required to write ten page research papers for too long. For example, Bob (2001) notes that the standard method of choice for many instructors is a term paper.¹ Shorter assignments of three to six pages can have similar purposes of encouraging critical thinking skills and requiring research to bolster arguments. Brevity is a useful skill for students with future careers in government, non-profits, journalism, sales, electoral politics, or even academia. The primary benefits of shorter writing assignments are reviewed below.

Benefit #1: Emphasizing Theory

Teaching students to think theoretically is challenging, whether in introducing theories or requiring students to identify competing theoretical explanations. In short papers, students do not need to describe theories at length (an aim for other assessments), but can move into higher levels of learning with the application of theories. By having students apply theoretical frameworks—perhaps in a memo of recommendations—students replicate how analysts and policymakers employ theories.

Benefit #2: Teaching Role-Playing

Writing assignments can require role-playing, whether as a certain type of author or in compelling students to write to a specific audience such as a Congressional committee or a board of directors. Role-playing forces students to think in new ways and with a distinctive approach. These activities may require students to put away their own bias, another way to enhance critical thinking. Examples include having history students write a letter from Napoleon, asking biology students to write a report as EPA administrator, or asking education students to draft a speech for an elementary school principal.

Benefit #3: Better Writing

Critical thinking involves analyzing situations, evaluating arguments and counterarguments, and synthesis (Meyers 1986). Any assignment that requires students to analyze information and roles, assess various approaches, and synthesize research can help students write persuasively and jump into higher-levels of thinking. Perhaps students should be taught that every word is critical. One example of a very short paper is asking students to write an op-ed essay for a newspaper.

Benefit #4: More Career-Oriented

Students' interest in the "real world" can be sparked by assignments that are relevant and structured to mirror what happens in many employment fields. Writing assignments should always ask students to write to a "real audience that has a genuine need for information" (Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University 2009). Thus, instructors need to create assignments that put students in touch with real or hypothetical dilemmas. Few careers require long papers and reports of ten pages or more. Short memos, letters, and reports are more likely, thus shorter assignments may more accurately portray the writing required of new employees. Another benefit is that applications for many internships and competitive scholarships request a short writing sample, not a term paper.

Conclusions

Encouraging brevity in writing assignments has many advantages, particularly for courses in the social sciences and humanities. Benefits include the ability to emphasize theory, enhance critical thinking and role-playing skills, promote good writing, and supply writing samples for career-oriented activities. Faculty may use a short writing assignment in place of a term paper or require several short papers during a semester as Zeiser (1999) recommends. In all cases, Bob (2001) reminds instructors that we must provide "explicit, written instructions with examples" (653). Although many assignments produce argumentative

essays, Josefson (2005) contends that reflective papers result in a more evaluative exploration. Short papers can serve either purpose well.

Writing assignments must aim to heighten student learning, but they can also have practical benefits. In my Introduction to World Politics class, students pick a humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO), research it, and then write letters to the Ford Foundation requesting financial assistance to expand a project in the developing world. This serves to teach about NGOs, building arguments, and grant writing—a useful tool for majors and non-majors. I have used other short paper assignments in lower- and upper-level classes and am willing to share ideas and brainstorm with interested colleagues.

Although benefits for students should remain the primary motivation for utilizing short writing assignments, faculty may also be excited about the possibility of reading more interesting papers and/or having a smaller stack of papers to grade!

¹ Bob (2001) says his instructions are appropriate "for a 10-15 page research paper" (653), and Josefson (2005) discusses his own ten page essay assignment used in introductory classes for eight years.

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