

THE MANTLE

Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Flexibility, Involvement, and Caring: Keys to Teaching

by Johnny W. Lott, Director

Dr. Ethel Young-Minor is a rare professor at the University of Mississippi. As Associate Professor of English and African American Studies, she researches Harlem Renaissance dramatists, was nominated for a Grammy (2001), and was presented with the 2003 Liberal Arts Outstanding Teacher of the Year award at the University.

With an infectious laugh, Dr. Young-Minor insists that effective instruction means teaching the students who actually enroll for a course, rather than trying to teach an idealized notion of the student. Much of this ethos is informed by her experiences with the Memphis City School System. Both of her parents were Memphis educators who cared about their students beyond the classroom. Her mother, Harriett Young, got involved in the lives of her students.



Dr. Ethel Young-Minor

Another teaching influence came from Ms. Freddie Ushrea, a former kindergarten teacher and role model who taught the whole student, engaging what we may now formally identify as a social pedagogy. Ushrea made sure that every child left kindergarten reading, helped individual children in tangible ways, and placed clear disciplinary boundaries

on children. Like Ms. Ushrea, Ethel cares about her students. She expresses her care and concern in UM classrooms by challenging students to achieve and meeting with them beyond class. She also emphasizes the importance of avoiding cryptic assignments by providing students with clear writing guidelines and a grading rubric.

“Dr. Minor is great. She is accessible, friendly, and knows her subject matter inside and out. What more can you ask for? It is the rare professor that can keep me awake and make me laugh at 8:00 in the morning, but she does. Fake? No way.”

—STUDENT IN ENGL 323 FROM RATEMYPROFESSORS, 2009

Dr. Young-Minor does not accept poorly written papers but she tries to not permanently punish students because of what they do not know. She increases student skills by allowing revisions on papers. Instead of assigning “F” grades that often paralyze students, she writes them a note saying that the paper cannot pass in its current condition and offers guidelines for revisions. She also assigns points for the paper so that students are encouraged, rather than forced, to revise those papers. She adapts the tool of “getting into student writing” and allows them the opportunity to advance from several models. Dr. Dolan Hubbard, now of Morgan State, served as her professor at the University of Tennessee and continues to remind her

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Quaker Principles Can Aid Instruction

by Johnny W. Lott, Director

In his article “Using Quaker Principles to Budget in Tough Times,” Dr. Kent Chabotar, President of Guilford College, has suggested Quaker ways can be helpful in stressful budgeting times. These Quaker ways or principles can also give guidance to teachers in classes and students working in groups. The Quaker principles are similar to principles behind the Quality Enhancement Plan of the University of Mississippi. Consider the following Quaker principles.

Sense of the meeting: When faculty members work together or have students work in groups, using the “sense of the meeting” provides a method for reaching a decision. This principle is based on the belief that a “best solution” exists and may be found by entering a discussion with an open mind and a willingness to be led by others. To reach a sense of the meeting, participants share views, do not criticize or critique the ideas of others, and allow all to talk. In some situations, a person may talk only once for a very brief time until all others have had an opportunity to talk. To reach a sense of the meeting or group, official voting is not used because “voting negates the power of the whole group and may lessen the sense of responsibility of the minority.”

Decisions by consensus: In a “decision by consensus,” those participating may agree that there is “substantial unity” even when they do not totally agree. Individuals step aside and allow consensus to be reached. If dissent continues, then the “truth” at the heart of the issue has not been reached and more discussion should occur. With this principle, there is respect for all minority positions. In a discussion adhering to this principle, each individual becomes an integral part of any ultimate decision of the group.

Moment of silence: Using a “moment of silence” at the beginning and end of sessions allows participants to make the transition from whatever they had been working on when they entered a group discussion and centers them on the discussion at hand. A moment of silence closing a session also allows a brief reflection on the discussion completed and gives participants a few seconds to prepare for their next activities.

Queries: “Queries are questions with no simple or standard answers and promote self and group examination through inward reflection.” As this principle is used, participants are asked to consider whether actions have been done with thought and conscientiousness. For example, a group member should consider if he or she has assumed a fair share of the work and discussion asking: Was I prepared for the meeting? How have my contributions helped? What could I have done differently and better?

Influence of testimonies: Quaker testimonies, or values, of simplicity, peace, integrity, community and equality provide guidance for behavior and decision-making. For examples,

- “Simplicity” leads to plain speech during discussions.
- “Peace” may refer to a resolution of conflict in discussion and seeing good in all people through an understanding of their contexts and actions in work.
- “Integrity” means that a discussion and any resolutions are clear, factual, and that the process is obvious to everyone with no hidden agendas.
- “Community,” as a core value in the University of Mississippi’s Quality Enhancement Plan, strongly suggests participative decision-making and involvement of all concerned in issues being considered.
- “Equality” recognizes differences in responsibility but treats participants fairly for the expertise and experience they bring to a discussion.

Eldering: “Eldering” involves using a chosen subgroup to counsel those who are disruptive, absent too much, unprepared, or exhibit other unproductive behavior. Eldering may occur in discussions through queries when members are asked to explain why they are opposed to a proposed resolution that appears desired by most of the group. To allow for effective elderring, the group may need to recess for more reflection before continuing. In a class setting, a faculty member may be a part of the elderring process.

Friend speaks my mind: When you agree with someone in a discussion, you simply say, “Friend speaks my mind” without more discussion. Such an action can save time, allow for discussions to move more freely, and to help the group reach a sense of the meeting without each and every individual repeating or re-iterating what has been said.

Chabotar does not say that the use of these principles guarantees a resolution of issues, but allows users to listen to each other, be open to new ideas, and allow people to do what they feel is right.

References

Chabotar, K. J. “Using Quaker Principles to Budget in Tough Times.” Retrieved March 3, 2009 from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/02/10/chabotar>.

Best Practices: Contractual Readmission Program

by Susan Mossing, Assistant Director

Students get into academic difficulty for a number of reasons such as the death of a parent or loved one, physical health problems, mental health problems, lack of motivation or direction, and insufficient preparation. A program designed to help students move into academic good standing must be flexible enough to address this myriad of causes. It must also require little funding, especially in these financially troubled times.

While Director of the Academic Support Center, Charlie Gates was successful having the Contractual Readmission Program approved by the Undergraduate Council and the Council of Academic Administrators in 2005. It was implemented in spring 2006 and has evolved into a collaborative effort between the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education. In February 2009, it won an IHL Best Practices Award in Academic Affairs (http://www.mississippi.edu/bestpractices/downloads/best_practices_090219.pdf).

Each semester that undergraduate students return from academic suspension or dismissal, they are required to participate in the contractual readmission program vis-à-vis EDLD 202, Fundamentals of Active Learning. EDLD 202 is a pass/fail class, but should be considered a program and not a class. The contractual readmission program is pragmatic rather than scholarly; the focus is on learning habits rather than theories and philosophies of learning. Students are required to satisfy weekly requirements of (1) meeting with program counselors, (2) logging at least 5 hours in the library, and (3) completing weekly planner checks on Blackboard, and (4) participating in six study skills workshops over the course of the semester. Each component has a point value associated with it and students must earn 68% of total possible

points to pass. Points are posted on Blackboard and updated weekly. Students are encouraged to stay abreast of their progress in EDLD 202 as well as all of their other courses.

The success of the program relies heavily on the close working relationship between staff at the Center and faculty in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education. Masters level counseling students provide most of the direct interaction with contractually readmitted undergraduates. In return, these counselors-in-training are provided with site training and supervision they need for practicum and internship requirements of their degree. Doctoral students in Counselor Education are also involved in the program, as they provide supervision to the counselors-in-training and assist with the administration of the program. In addition to monetary compensation via graduate assistantships funded by the Center, this supervisory and administrative experience contributes to both training and vita.

Since the program's inception, the graduation rate of students returning from academic suspension and dismissal has been rising. Using students returning in fall 2005 as a benchmark, graduation rates for subsequent cohorts are nearly 10% higher thus far. Semester GPAs of program participants have also improved. The average GPA for contractual readmits in their first semester at Ole Miss is 1.39; their average GPA in the semester that caused their most recent academic suspension or dismissal is 1.23; their average GPA during the semester in which they participate in the readmission program is 1.72; their average GPA in the semester after they complete EDLD 202 is 2.06. Additionally, the program has helped train over 30 masters students and three doctoral students, all at minimal university cost.

Resources for Teaching

- **Sharing services** can be most useful in higher education. See <http://universitybusiness.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=1224> .
- **Teaching evaluations** are more than a number. Multiple forms of evaluation are needed to properly evaluate teaching: observing lectures and examining course material by **trained** peers or teaching experts, using teaching portfolios, conducting exit interviews for graduates, "requesting letters from former students, having student discussion facilitated by trained faculty or staff, obtaining feedback from teaching assistants, and comparing the performance of students on common, jointly-graded exams in multi-section courses taught by different professors." See <http://www.cra.org/CRN/articles/may03/fich.html> .

Teaching Tips

- **Cheating:** Youtube provides many ways that students can learn to cheat on a test. This was exhibited in a workshop led on campus on February 19 at the Depot. One site recommended is the following: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91IQK5SCzIQ> .

Grants

From the announcement for CETL mini-grant proposals published in the November issue of *The Mantle*, 19 proposals were submitted; eight were funded. The winning proposals are described below:

LEGO Mindstorms NXT Education Sets and Sensors for CSCI 581 Special Topics: Yixin Chen, Computer and Information Sciences, \$1000.

The spring semester Robotics class has limited capacity because of lack of equipment. To increase the enrollment, funds will purchase four Lego sets and equipment: NXT Compass, Color, and Tilt Sensors; Bluetooth Dongle, and cameras.

Development of a Template to Teach an Online Clinical/Laboratory Course: Carolyn Higdon, Communication Sciences and Disorders, \$1000.

Application of web-based technology to enhance online clinical CSD classes uses existing models with virtual patients, problem-based simulations, and knowledge-tracking systems as in other clinical training programs. Requested monies will fund travel and meeting expenses with professionals in the physician, nursing, occupational or physical therapy training programs at the UM Medical Center and the April 2009 national meeting of the Council on Academic Programs in CSD.

Mini-Retreat for Faculty in Theatre Art and Art Departments: Rhona Justice-Malloy, Theatre Arts, \$300.

Evaluation of teaching in the arts is the focus of a luncheon retreat for the faculty and instructors in the Departments of Art and Theatre. Strategies and rubrics will be developed to increase the effectiveness of teaching evaluations and to allow for interdisciplinary peer teaching evaluations to be conducted beginning fall 2009.

Apple Logic Studio Software: Rory Ledbetter, Theatre Arts, \$499.

Funds will purchase the latest software used by professionals in the field of voice-production. The software will enable students to create higher quality voice-over reels and provide a more professional quality to works produced such as departmental radio ads.

Training in Business Management Information Systems Software: Frank Mathew, Computer and Information Sciences, \$1600.

Teacher training is funded to utilize a simulator developed by the SAP University the Alliance to give students hands-on experience running a live enterprise system for a fictitious company. Requested monies will be used to fund Mr. Mathew's training in June and will result in his being certified to incorporate the simulator into the course.

Sunoikisis Seminar: Molly Pasco-Pranger, Classics, \$500.

Sunoikisis, a consortium of classics departments, extends resources and opportunities for teaching and learning. Requested funds will help defray costs to attend the Sunoikisis faculty development seminar in Washington, D.C. in June. Dr. Pasco-Pranger will then teach an advanced Latin course utilizing the inter-institutional collaboration resources.

Minimalism Performance Project: Michael Rowlett, Music, \$1100.

Requested monies will fund Dr. Rowlett's recording of Reich's "New York Counterpoint." The piece will exemplify minimalism through a solo clarinetist accompanied by a recording of 11 clarinets. The recording will then be used in performance recitals, demonstrating minimalist music to Music 103 students and high school music students and band directors on recruiting trips beginning in the fall 2009 semester.

Study on Characteristics of Women's Choirs: Debra Spurgeon, Music, \$833.

Dr. Spurgeon will interview successful conductors of women's choirs and observe their programs in an attempt to quantify the characteristics of successful choirs. This information will be disseminated to music education students at Ole Miss and to the choral profession in the form of scholarly publication(s). Requested monies will fund travel to Luther College to interview the select women's choir conductor and to observe.

Announcements

Ms. Laura A. Williams, doctoral student in the Department of Management was named as the winner of the Graduate Instructor Teaching Excellence Award for 2008-9. Ms. Williams will be the recipient of a check for \$1000, a golden apple trophy, and her name will be engraved on the plaque in the J. D. Williams Library.

Dr. Andrew Odlyzko, University of Minnesota, is engaged in projects involving mathematics, security, and Internet traffic monitoring. He will deliver the Dalrymple Lecture, "Cybersecurity, Mathematics, and Limits on Technology" on Thursday, April 2, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. in Butler Auditorium, Alumni Center.

Promoting Learning via Academic Success Training (AST) Workshops

by Nancy Wiggers, Learning Specialist

Promoting effective learning is a primary goal for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. To support this goal, Academic Success Training (AST) Workshops are organized for all students enrolled in the University of Mississippi and interested in improving academic practices. Research indicates that academic achievement is highly correlated to the following broad areas: time management, learning and testing strategies, reading skills, and motivation. All of the following workshops offered address specific aspects of these broad areas:

Time Management: analyzing, evaluating, and organizing an individual's time in order to facilitate goal achievement

Setting Goals/Prioritizing: creating long-term goals and planning to achieve them

Avoiding Procrastination/Choices: identifying strategies to manage issues traditionally associated with procrastination

Problem Solving: identifying problems, creating strategies, and evaluating solutions

Effective Study Habits: identifying habits and developing strategies to foster academic achievement

Active/Effective Learning: developing strategies for better learning

Reading Strategies: developing strategies to improve reading comprehension

Critical thinking/Levels of Comprehension: creating relationships involved in learning, understanding, and thinking

Learning Styles: identifying and studying learning style preferences

Staying Motivated: monitoring and maintaining motivation toward goal achievement

Writing Effective Papers/Research: identifying the research process and developing ideas for writing a paper

Avoiding Plagiarism: identifying and avoiding plagiarism in research projects

Developing Presentations: developing quality presentations

Taking Tests/Test Preparation: preparing for various kinds of evaluation.

For the Spring 2009 Semester, each workshop is offered five times each week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, a workshop is offered at 10:00 am and 4:00 pm; on Wednesdays, the same workshop is offered at 3:00 pm. At present, all meetings take place in the Conference Room in Somerville, Room 110.

If you would like additional information regarding these workshops offered by CETL, please refer to the following website: <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl/AST.html>.

References

Proctor, Briley E "Study Skills Profiles of Normal-Achieving and Academically-Struggling College Students." *Journal of College Student Development*. Retrieved February 23, 2009 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3752/is_200601/ai_n17180384.





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Young-Minor continued from Front Cover

that, “writing is fighting.” Dr. Vivian Patraha at Bowling Green State University asked hard questions about her writing decisions and offered clear guidelines for advancement. As Young-Minor passes these strategies to students at UM, they continue to grow. RateMyProfessor warns students to prepare for hard grading on papers, but to also expect a lot of intellectual growth and an exciting atmosphere in Young-Minor’s classes.

One of Dr. Young-Minor’s most successful teaching strategies is not formalizing a lecture before meeting class. She works to master the material so that she can integrate student concerns and questions. The actual classroom approach depends on the students in class on a given day. For example, in one class discussion a PowerPoint presentation may be used to help students with visuals that layer their understanding of the text they are reading. Another class may include short group discussions where students report back to the larger group. Dr. Young-Minor makes every effort to make sure her students do not waste the 15 weeks in her classes listening to lecture as non-participants. Her goal is to make students more intellectually competent and confident by the end of the course.

As one who worked on the University Quality Enhancement Plan, Dr. Young-Minor is committed to improving writing beyond the parameters of her own class. She believes that the

implementation of that plan will enhance the work of all professors at UM. It does not remove the individual responsibility for teaching writing. Instead, it enhances the work of professors by allowing them to build on a stable foundation of skills garnered in the freshman writing curriculum. Professors and students will be able to move beyond basic writing skills and concentrate on the use of styles and sources in their own disciplines.

Dr. Young-Minor thinks we could enhance teaching on campus by improving modern technology available in all classrooms, implementing a speaker series with culturally-diverse and student-friendly speakers, and having flexible classroom furniture that can be moved for differing teaching configurations.

With the above improvements, Dr. Young-Minor also offers advice to students: Be very active in reading; be willing to change and flex your intellectual muscles; and express opinions from an informed position. “Walk around ideas, respond to them from your viewpoint, and be willing to grow and change as you learn.” Clearly Dr. Young-Minor models her own advice.

References

Retrieved February 18, 2009 from
<http://www.ratemyprofessors.com/ShowRatings.jsp?tid=56138>