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An Interview with a 2015 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award Recipient

By **Zina T. McGee, Ph.D.**

Each year, Hampton University honors and recognizes outstanding faculty who serve as models of excellence for their profession and as exemplary mentors for their students. This month, I had the pleasure of interviewing one of the 2015 recipients of the Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award, Dr. Joyce M. Jarrett, Old Dominion Distinguished Professor, Department of English and Modern Foreign Languages.



Dr. Joyce M. Jarrett

Briefly describe your teaching philosophy. What strategies do you use to create a student-focused learning environment?

My philosophy of teaching is that the teacher and students must share the responsibility for learning. A professor insisting on controlling the scope of the content and wanting students to understand and appreciate the subject as the teacher does, limits students' ability to learn by doing and to bring fresh perspectives to the material. I encourage *collaborative learning*. A particular strategy I use to create a student-focused learning environment is by giving high stakes group activities or what my students call "*group quizzes*." Each group is given a different analytical question based on a common literary selection. They are given half of the class period to develop a short written

response from which they must make an oral presentation. The process is closely monitored as I briefly join each group, sitting as a silent observer. Submissions must include an accounting of each student's role in completing the assignment, i.e., researcher, writer, editor, presenter, etc. Needless to say, most students play multiple roles. A single grade is assigned for each group. Members of high performing groups must become effective communicators, active listeners, and learn to filter and challenge information so as to yield the strongest possible collective response. Though the composition of the group is modified with each assignment, the overall quality of the work improves as students hone their collaborative learning skills.

How do you recognize creativity and innovation both within and outside of the classroom setting?

I spend a good bit of time structuring a classroom setting that stimulates creativity and innovation. Nothing delights me more than having students who seek different means of approaching material, and I invite them to do that. In my literary studies course, I disabuse students of the notion that they must interpret a selection in the same way. I dare them to present counter views, supporting their premises with textual evidence from the story. I also challenge my graduate students completing their final research projects to spend sufficient time focusing on the significance of their study not only to their disciplines, but also to the broader community. I reject responses that subjects are too complex to be sufficiently explained to those outside of a discipline. Requiring students to articulate the relevance of their research to an interdisciplinary group improves their communication skills while deepening their understanding of the subject matter.

In what ways do you stimulate self-growth and professional development among your students?

I keep students abreast of professional opportunities and work with them so that they are prepared to take advantage of such options, i.e., call for papers for student conferences, summer internships, research fellowships, and study abroad options. In my upper level writing classes, students were required to identify and follow the manuscript guidelines of a publication source where their final paper could be submitted if approved by the professor. As a culminating activity, I schedule a graduate research forum where my ENG 503 students present their research findings to their peers and select guests. I also promote student professional development through my role as a faculty mentor for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program. My mentee, completing her second year in the program, has presented conference papers, participated in two summer research programs at comprehensive research institutions, and also has an article under review for publication.

What strategies do you use to facilitate reflection, professional learning and enhanced student accomplishment?

Taking time for reflection and cultivating my own professional development are essential to my personal rejuvenation. I take time to read for enjoyment, to attend faculty development seminars, and to conduct research. Doing so, I retain my enthusiasm for learning. My recent research that involves using writing as a form of empowerment for abused women has opened a path for me to work with learners in the community as well.

I also reflect on my effectiveness in the classroom and the extent to which students begin to see the “bigger picture.” I begin every class period by saying, “By the end of this class, you will be able to....” That’s important to me because I want students to leave each class with something tangible. It is essential that students leave with something that they can link to information discussed in previous classes, thus allowing them to connect all of the dots. Periodically, I pause and invite students to reflect on what we have been discussing in class and solicit questions from them about anything that we have covered. At these strategic points, students begin to think about the relevance of information in ways that they may not have otherwise considered.

Nine Ways to Improve Class Discussions

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD

From FacultyFocus.Com

I once heard class discussions described as “transient instructional events.” They pass through the class, the course, and the educational experiences of students with few lingering effects. Ideas are batted around, often with forced participation; students don’t take notes; and then the discussion ends—it runs out of steam or the class runs out of time. If asked a few days later about the exchange, most students would be hard-pressed to remember anything beyond what they themselves might have said, if that. So this post offers some simple suggestions for increasing the impact of the discussions that occur in our courses.

1. Be more focused and for less time – It’s easy to forget that students are newcomers to academic discourse. Academics can go on about a topic of interest for days; hours, if it’s a department meeting. Students aren’t used to exchanges that include points, counterpoints, and connections to previous points with references to research, related resources, and previous experience. Early on, students do better with short discussions—focused and specific. Think 10 minutes, maybe 15.

2. Use better hooks to launch the discussion – Usually discussion starts with a question. That works if it’s a powerful question—one immediately recognized as a “good question.” Prompts of that caliber require thoughtful preparation; they don’t usually pop into our minds the moment we need them. But questions aren’t the only option. A pithy quotation, a short scenario that requires content application, a hypothetical case or situation, a synopsis of a relevant current event—all of these can jump-start a discussion.

3. Pause – Stop the discussion and ask students to think about what’s been said so far, or ask them to write down what struck them as a key idea, a new insight, a question still unanswered, or maybe where they think the discussion should go next. Think short pauses, 30 seconds, maybe a minute.

4. Have note takers – Ask whether there are two or three students who’d be willing to take notes during the discussion. Then post their notes on the course website or otherwise distribute them. This should count as class participation! It gives introverts a way to contribute comfortably. You might encourage some extrovert who has tendency to over-participate to make your day by volunteering to quietly take copious notes, which he or she could use to summarize the discussion when it ends.

5. Talk less or not at all – Too many classroom discussions are still dominated by teacher talk. You will talk less if you assign yourself a recorder role. You’ll key in on the essence of comments, record the examples, and list the questions. You’ll be

listening closely and will probably hear more than you usually do because you aren't thinking about what to say next. Or you can function as the discussion facilitator. Recognize those who are volunteering. Encourage others to speak. Point out good comments that merit response. Ask what questions the conversation is raising. Challenge those with different views to share them. Do everything you can to make it a good student discussion.

6. End with something definitive – Return to the hook that launched the discussion. Ask some students to write a one-sentence summary of the discussion. Ask other students to list the questions the discussion has answered. And ask a third group to identify unanswered questions that emerged during the discussion. Finally, use what students have written to help them bring closure to the discussion.

7. Use the discussion – Keep referring to it! “Remember that discussion we had about X? What did we conclude?” Refer to individual comments made during the discussion. “Paula had an interesting insight about Y. Who remembers what she said? Does it relate to this topic?” And if you really want students to listen up and take discussions seriously, use a comment made in the discussion as the frame for a short essay question on the next exam or quiz.

8. Invite students to suggest discussion topics – If the suggestion is good, reward the student with a few bonus points and ask him or her to launch the discussion by explaining why it's a topic that merits discussion.

9. Discuss discussions – Briefly is fine. “Why do teachers use them? What keeps everyone listening? How do they help us learn?” Or do a debriefing of a discussion that just occurred. “So, the discussion we just had, say we'd like to improve it. What would you recommend?”

UDL: A Systematic Approach to Supporting Diverse Learners

By Mark Hofer, PhD
From FacultyFocus.Com

Advances in neuroscience and digital imaging give us an unprecedented understanding of how individuals access, process, and respond to information. Previously we may have had an intuitive understanding that our students learned differently. Now functional MRI scans demonstrate this in living color. However, simply recognizing learner diversity is one thing; navigating this challenge in the classroom is quite another. How can we possibly hope to present content, structure learning experiences, and devise assessments that will be appropriate and effective for students with different learning strengths and challenges? Fortunately, researchers have developed a framework based in neuroscience that can help.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers a functional framework to understand and address this variability in our courses. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) outlines three principles that when systematically applied in the classroom help support diverse learners.

First, faculty can provide students with **multiple means of representing content**. Too often we rely on a narrow range of course materials that may present unnecessary barriers for some students. In addition to textbooks and lectures, we can provide students with a range of additional ways to represent important concepts and ideas in

our courses. Both proprietary and open educational resources (OER) like videos, animations, simulations, and learning objects can provide helpful complementary entry points to concepts. Even using a variety of visuals, including concept maps and graphic organizers, in a lecture can assist students who have barriers related to auditory processing.

The second principle encourages faculty to provide students with **multiple means of action and expression**. In addition to class readings, lectures, and discussions, students can also engage in simulations, role-play, service learning, and case studies to build their knowledge. In terms of expressing knowledge, many of us rely on papers, exams, and different forms of written work to gauge our students' learning. While written work is clearly important in virtually any academic discipline, students can also demonstrate knowledge by creating a film, designing an exhibit or model, directing a skit or play, or engaging in service learning. In some cases, these nontraditional opportunities for action and expression can help you better assess what students understand from your course.

The third principle often works in concert with the other two—faculty should provide **multiple means of engagement** in learning. In order to engage students intellectually in the course content, we can identify ways to stimulate interest in the content and devise ways to support students' metacognitive processes. We can stimulate interest by designing learning experiences that are authentic, challenging, and novel. By beginning with a surprising fact, quote, or discrepant event, we can ignite curiosity. We can also inject humor and stories in our lectures and discussion. We can provide students with modeling and supports for challenging analytical work in the form of guided inquiry and problem-based learning.

Implementing UDL – A Practical Approach

In theory, one could strive to address all three UDL principles in each class session. This seems daunting and may not be sustainable long term. Rather, we can take a longer view. We can map out a range of strategies to represent the content over the course of the semester. If, for example, introducing a topic requires a heavy dose of lecture, we may want to consider an alternative learning activity—perhaps using a case study—in the next class. In terms of offering multiple means of expression, we can consider providing three different types of major assignments in the course (e.g., a paper, a model, and a film) that would appeal to different learners.

Alternatively, we can provide students with multiple options for a final project from which they can choose. In any of these ways, we can vary our activities and materials for teaching and learning over time. Consequently, we are more likely to reach and appeal to a broad range of learners.

Fortunately, CAST provides higher education faculty with a range of resources to support integrating UDL in our practice. They have developed a portal called UDL on Campus (<http://udloncampus.cast.org>), where they provide resources on assessment options, policies and legal information, strategies for selecting media and technology, advice on course planning, and descriptions and examples of teaching strategies.

Implementing UDL strategies may seem like significant extra work in terms of both planning and implementation. To some extent this is true. Why then might we consider this extra commitment? First, UDL-based approaches to teaching and learning have been shown to benefit students with different learning styles and preferences. Second, it challenges us to rethink some of our assumptions and typical approaches to teaching our courses. I have found the creative challenge in this process to be rejuvenating and exciting. I hope you will too.

Mark Hofer is professor of educational technology and the associate dean for teacher education and professional services at the College of William & Mary. You can follow him on Twitter @markhofer and at www.luminaris.link.

Announcements

Grants Training in Lynchburg, VA - November 19-20, 2015

Miller-Motte Technical College and Grant Writing USA will present a two-day grants workshop in Lynchburg, November 19-20, 2015. This training is applicable to grant seekers across all disciplines. Attend this class and you'll learn how to find grants and write winning grant proposals.

Beginning and experienced grant writers from city, county and state agencies as well as nonprofits, K-12, colleges and universities are encouraged to attend. Multi-enrollment discounts and discounts for Grant Writing USA returning alumni are available. Tuition payment is not required at the time of enrollment.

Educators can earn one semester unit of post-baccalaureate-level professional development credit from FPU for participation in a Grant Writing USA Workshop. Tuition is \$455 and includes all materials: workbook and accompanying 420MB resource CD that's packed full of tools and more than 200 sample grant proposals. Seating is limited, online reservations are necessary.

More information including learning objectives, class location, graduate testimonials and online registration is available. If you prefer friendly, personal service, please call or write:

Janet Darling
at Grant Writing USA
888.290.6237 888.290.6237 FREE
janet@grantwritingusa.com

More than 10,000 agencies across North America have turned to Grant Writing USA for grant writing and grant management training.

Crossing Boundaries: Transforming STEM Education

2015 Network for Academic Renewal STEM Conference

November 12, 2015 - November 14, 2015
Westin Seattle
1900 5th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

The AAC&U STEM Conference addresses the national imperative to produce more competitively trained and liberally educated STEM graduates. It is designed to assist colleges and universities as they work to make inclusive excellence the foundation for institutional purpose and educational practice in higher education. With attention to the complexity and criticality of these issues, the AAC&U Network for Academic Renewal STEM Conference will focus on the inextricable link between increasing STEM baccalaureate degree earners and ensuring a scientifically literate citizenry. Issues the

conference will address include integrative, cross-disciplinary STEM teaching and learning; inclusive excellence and broadening participation in STEM; STEM faculty support and reward systems; and institutional transformation to advance hands-on learning and to increase all students' achievement of key learning outcomes.

AAC&U intends to leverage the interests it shares with the national undergraduate STEM reform community to diversify the undergraduate STEM disciplines and to support a national community of STEM faculty and administrators who are developing learning environments that support and empower all students.

Ensuring that STEM higher education reform remains at the center of our nation's discourse, particularly as the challenge to meet demands for the STEM workforce grows, will require radically different approaches, deeper levels of intentionality, and a stronger willingness to embrace *all* disciplines, include *all* students, and engage *all* perspectives. Conference sessions will explore the latest research findings on how students learn; bridge theory with practice; and examine the many ways that communities of practice, both institutional and national, can strategically and synergistically contribute to undergraduate STEM education reform.

Visit www.aacu.org for more details.

Bringing Quality and Equity Together

Mapping Guided Pathways for First Generation Student Success

November 17, 2015
Wyndham New Yorker Hotel
481 8th Avenue
New York, NY 10001

“Students of color and students from low-income families will soon form the majority of the nation’s college-eligible learners. Their fortunes will shape—for better or worse—America’s economic and global future. These students are democracy’s hope and America’s future. They need and deserve the advantages of a horizon-expanding higher education. They need and deserve a twenty-first-century liberal education.”

Carol Geary Schneider, President of AAC&U

This forum is the fourth in a series of events that AAC&U is sponsoring as part of its Centennial Year. Discussions will be informed by new findings from a national survey—to be released in November—on AAC&U members' priorities for supporting equity and quality learning in college.

Highlighting quality learning as the next frontier for equity and expanded opportunity, the forum will bring together educational, policy, and foundation leaders to examine the learning all college students need to thrive in a knowledge economy and to participate actively and responsibly in a diverse and global society. Participants also will examine the sobering evidence that both completion levels and access to quality learning remain highly stratified across income and race/ethnicity.

The forum will explore emerging evidence on “what works” in supporting higher levels of underserved student success, and especially the evidence that quality learning pathways that are rich in relevant, inquiry-based, engaged practices are themselves a catalyst to increased completion for underserved students.

With new research on the student success value of “guided learning pathways” now in hand, the forum will feature ways—in both broad access and selective institutions—that well-designed guided pathways can ensure the hallmark outcomes of a strong liberal—and liberating—education. The Forum will propose necessary components of high impact and equity-minded guided learning pathways.

Participants are encouraged to attend in teams, and to explore, across a host of institutional examples, how they can ensure that their own quality and equity initiatives work together to provide maximum benefit to underserved students. All participants will have an opportunity to try out AAC&U’s new campus guide for self-study and planning titled *Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence*.

The events of AAC&U's Centennial Year are supported by gifts from the following foundations: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Endeavor Foundation, the Charles Engelhard Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, Lumina Foundation, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, The Teagle Foundation, and USA Funds.

Visit www.aacu.org for more details.