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Reigniting our Passion for Teaching

A message from CTL's Assistant Director Jennifer McKanry

Do you feel you just came back from break and you're already ready for another one? Me too. How do we get back that passion and energy we need? When you are ready to start spring semester planning, let this article, inspired by our recent FTTC keynoter [Bonni Stachowiak](#), help you reignite those passions. In the meantime, keep breathing, take breaks, and make time for yourself.

Stachowiak's keynote [Igniting Our Collective Imagination](#) challenges us to ask ourselves what ignites our imagination to create possibilities. She emphasizes this in her quoting of Ross Gay, "We are good at fighting. But imagining and holding in one's imagination what is wonderful to be adored and preserved and exalted is harder for us than it seems." She challenges us to "never give up being astonished at what students are capable of."

How do we create space in our work to find capacity to reflect and act in accordance with that passion that brought us to teaching in the first place? Stachowiak (2020) suggests we start by rethinking what we mean by productivity. Productivity should be about clearing our plate to focus on "our abilities to be present in our teaching and other aspects of our lives" (p. 14). However, she cautions to "avoid the temptation to be perfectionistic about your productivity practices" (p. 17). Sometimes done is better than perfect. Do not fall into the trap of defining yourself by how much you checked off your to do list. "All of this is about translating our intentions into the actions that we can take to reach our goals and live out our values" (p. 27). In the three teaching intentions shared below find some ideas to help you find that capacity to

translate your passion into action this Spring.

Three Teaching Intentions to help you translate your reignited passion into action -
A message from CTL Assistant Director Jennifer McKanry

Below are several ideas coming from Stachowiak's book The Productive Online and Offline Professor: A Practical Guide to help you create space for your passion and imagination in your teaching. Feel free to try as few or as many of these as meet your needs.

Focusing on your Passion

- Reflect for a moment on what brought you to teaching or to your discipline. What originally ignited your passion? How might that influence your goals for the next semester or year?

- Consider identifying One Word that you want to have to define your teaching this year. Pin it up somewhere visible to remind you of your focus.

Reframing Productivity

- Differentiate the urgent from the important. Understanding this difference can help us prioritize our actions. Are there things you can do ahead of time or in batches to avoid the unimportant becoming urgent? What else can you clear from your platter to make room for what is important to you? Here are some great tips for deciding what to do and not to do.

- Utilize checklists to help with repeated tasks such as launching your course each semester. Stachowiak provides several example checklists for faculty.

- Consider how much is reasonable to ask students to do. Are you overloading them (and you) with work to try to accomplish "rigor"? Use these workload estimators to help differentiate volume versus rigor in your class.

    - Wake Forest University [Workload estimator 2.0](#)

    - Rice University [Course workload estimator](#)

Leveraging Technology

- Consider automating as much as possible using Canvas and other technologies. Check out this [VoiceThread with simple ideas to help save time](#).

- Utilize forms to expedite common requests such as reference letters. You can set up tools such as Google Forms and Teams Surveys to email you whenever a form is submitted. See Bonni's [example for students requesting reference letters](#).

- Want more ideas? Check out this [list of technologies](#) compiled by Stachowiak.

Interested in more ideas specific to your course or work? We would love to chat with you. Reach out to Jen McKanry mckanryj@umsl.edu or Erin Whitteck erin.l.whitteck@umsl.edu, and let's strategize how we can make your ideas come to life without falling into the traps that so often derail our efforts.

References

Stachowiak, B. (2021, September 30). Igniting Our Collective Imagination. Retrieved from https://umsystem.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=ca58647b-dcbd-4c1a-a9cd-adb3012b789a

Stachowiak, B., Talbert, R., & Linder, K. E. (2020). The productive online and offline professor: A practical guide. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Degree Program Assessment: Empowering Departments, Empowering Students

Degree program assessment is part of the Curriculum Alignment Process (CAP); this work is already underway across our campus. Over the last two years, nearly all departments have engaged in the CAP phases 1, 2, and 3. Departments developed learning outcomes for their programs and [mapped their curriculum onto those learning outcomes](). Degree program assessment is the next phase of CAP.

"Assessment" is a term that can often feel heavy, intimidating, or fuzzy. Similarly, "assessment" can mean a variety of different things to different people. So, in this month's CTL newsletter, we want to demystify "assessment," briefly introducing how we are using the term when we offer support and resources about "assessment plans" and "degree program assessment." We aim to give "assessment," as a term and process, some local, contextual nuance. And, in offering this introductory information, we hope to make assessment increasingly inviting, collaborative, and meaningful.

When our team talks about assessment, amongst ourselves and in consultations with departments, we are referring to degree program assessment. Degree program assessment focuses on coming to a deeper understanding of the curriculum of an entire program. A driving question at the core of degree program assessment is: how are students meeting the program's designated learning outcomes? Degree program assessment is part of the Curriculum Alignment Process (CAP); this work is already underway across our campus. Over the last two years, all departments have engaged in the CAP phases 1, 2, and 3. Departments developed learning outcomes for their programs and [mapped their curriculum onto those learning outcomes](). Degree program assessment is the next phase of CAP.

Assessment of degree programs is broad and ongoing; it is a process committed to improving student learning. While other important findings might arise that are helpful to departments, the central goal is to continually enhance students' experiences in the degree program and to support their learning. Faculty design their own assessment plans, study evidence from their own programs, analyze that evidence, and make decisions about how to take action based on what they learn. In this way, degree program assessment empowers

departments which, in turn, empowers students.

Want to continue the conversation or learn more about how our team can support your assessment planning? We would love to hear from you.

- Lauren Obermark, Associate Professor of English and CTL Faculty Fellow for Assessment; obermarkl@umsl.edu

The CTL Assessment Team:

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Course Evaluation System

Course evaluations are now managed in the CTL. The Faculty Senate sets dates for opening and closing of course evaluation surveys, as well as when faculty can access their results.

The course evaluation schedule for the 2021-2022 academic year as decided by the Faculty Senate is now updated on the CoursEval Resources Guide webpage and the CoursEval for Students webpage. On these webpages, faculty and students can find information on when surveys will be open, report release dates, and information on the CoursEval system.

Last year, CoursEval and course evaluation services were added to the CTL portfolio of services. Starting in the Fall, course evaluation surveys are set up through the CTL in collaboration with department chairs and college deans. Faculty, business support personnel, college deans, and department chairs will be able to access reports through coursEval.umsl.edu.

If you have any questions about course evaluations, please contact CTL's Learning Analytics Coordinator, Mary Painter at mapxvc@umsystem.edu.

UMSL'S Teaching Effectiveness Taskforce

In this month's update, I would like to share the ongoing efforts of the taskforce and thank UMSL faculty and academic leaders for the constructive feedback they have provided on our work.

A taskforce working group focused on student feedback has continued its efforts to develop a new common set of questions for student end-of-course evaluation surveys. In November, members of the working group led 8 faculty and academic leader focus group sessions to gather insights about these

proposed questions. That feedback has been discussed by the working group and shared with the whole taskforce; the comments will be used to refine and develop questions for an updated version of the common question set. In addition, this working group examined the responses to a survey sent in September to over 250 students; that survey gathered feedback on how students understand what these questions are asking. The proposed set of student questions have also been presented at a meeting of the Senate Academic Advisory and Assessment Committee and at the Provost's Council. Drawing upon the insights gained from these sessions, the working group will continue its efforts to strengthen this set of questions as the taskforce seeks approval and prepares recommendations to develop a pilot of a revised common instrument in 2022.

In addition to this work on student feedback, the taskforce has been developing other components of a holistic system to support and evaluate teaching effectiveness. A second taskforce working group has focused on proposing an approach based on the Teaching Squares model of peer observation which centers on self-reflection. This model, developed first in St. Louis and now in use in institutions of higher education across the country, has been lauded for opening lines of communication about teaching and helping to support a positive culture of teaching. Guiding principles that have led the working group to select this approach to peer observation and self-reflection include an emphasis on appreciative inquiry, the development of a culture of empathy and respect among faculty, and the creation of collaborative partnerships. This fall, this working group has started adapting the Teaching Squares model for use at UMSL and is preparing recommendations to create a process that will support and enhance effective teaching. In the spring semester, this group will share these proposals with faculty, chairs, administrators and Senate committees to gather insights about this approach.

- Kim Baldus, Teaching Effectiveness Taskforce Chair, 2021-2022 and Associate Dean, Pierre Laclede Honors College

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The Gift All Professors Can Give Their

Students -
A Message from Active Learning Assistant Sydney Drennen

Every two months we will be incorporating student voices into the newsletter. The Center for Teaching and Learning greatly values student voices in all aspects of teaching from design to delivery. Students chosen are current [Active Learning Assistants or Supplemental Instructors](). Sydney Drennen is a Social Work major with a minor in psychology and will enter the MSW program in Spring 2022. Sydney is an Active Learning Assistant for Child Advocacy Studies 4498: Forensic Investigations of Child Abuse with Professor Dana Klar and Psychology 4392: Special Topics in Psychology with Professor Jerry Dunn.

Professors can be a source of support or anxiety for college students, and this largely depends on the mindset of the professor and actions they take as a result. According to Carol Dweck, two notable mindsets that can be observed in people are fixed mindsets and growth mindsets. She notes that, "In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment" (Dweck, 2015). Throughout my years of education, I have experienced professors with a growth mindset, but I have also experienced professors with fixed mindsets. These fixed-minded professors allowed no room for mistakes. Late work was not acceptable under any circumstances, and attendance was mandatory, regardless of personal issues. In these situations, my anxiety would increase immensely, as if I had to perform perfectly to be seen as adequate in the professors' eyes. The expectations the professors had of their students affected the expectations I had for myself. I was no longer striving to be the best version of me. I was striving to be, what I thought was, a perfect student, an achievement that is nonexistent. I drove my mental health into the ground and fell even deeper into my anxiety and depression.

Conversely, one of the most heartwarming experiences I had with a growth mindset professor happened when I was a freshman at a large state school. I had been pulled from my family, put into a dorm room with a stranger, and left to my own devices to figure out how to be independent. The stress piled on me, and the third month into the semester, it started to overflow. Walking to class one day, I became very anxious, feeling my throat close and feeling like I was the only person in the world feeling like this. I entered the

course that all freshmen are required to take. I approached this professor minutes before class started, and all I could do was look at her and choke on my words as I tried to explain what I needed. She pulled me into the hall with the most compassionate eyes and words. Not only did she listen to me, but she left her entire class to support one student who needed help. She informed me of the counseling services that the university had to offer, and she walked me all the way across campus to the counseling services office. She spoke with the person at the front desk for me, explained why I was there, and sat with me as I waited to be seen. Before she left, she told me to not come back to class for the day, but to go back to my dorm, call my mom, and take a nap. In doing this, she recognized that I was capable of doing the work necessary to achieve a good grade in her class while also recognizing that I was not in the best mindset to do so that day. Ultimately, she helped me recognize that if I needed to take a step back and work through my emotions, then I should take those steps and not feel bad for doing so. To this day, that professor is the reason I am still here.

The way this professor handled the situation gave me a healthy basis for how I might handle a similar situation in the future. She taught me how to be kind to myself and how to process my emotions in healthy ways. She created a safe space in her classroom for freshmen to share their vulnerabilities, whether school-related or otherwise. This professor fostered a community that promoted authenticity, transparency, empathy, and compassion between students and professors. She met me where I was that day and sat with me in my vulnerability, letting me know that she, along with many other students, had experienced those feelings before. This professor normalized conversations about mental health - a topic I once thought of as taboo - and that alone eased some of my concerns. This professor, through her compassion and empathy, made me feel comfortable enough to be transparent with her and, really, myself. She helped me see that there is always room to experience life, learn from these experiences, and grow as a result; in other words, she had a growth mindset about her students. Instead of acting as if I was an anomaly in experiencing these emotions, she allowed me to show up as my true self. She gave me the space to navigate my emotions and provided me the resources for support, showing me that those emotions were not all of me, and that I can use those emotions to connect with others, learn about myself, and grow into a healthier and stronger person as a result. And I believe that all professors can give this gift to their students.

Additional Resources:

- [“Developing a Growth Mindset” by Carol Dweck](#)

- [Carol Dweck Revisits the “Growth Mindset”](#)

- [“The Impact of Faculty Attitudes about Intelligence” by Scott Jaschik](#)

ACUE Lunch and Learn Series: Open to All Members of our Teaching Community

Faculty who participated in ACUE's "Effective Online Teaching Practices" will host monthly Lunch and Learn meetings in 2021-2022 to share what they found to be successful in their courses. These monthly meetings are open to all UMSL faculty, staff, and graduate students to learn more about the innovative work of our colleagues.

The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) "Effective Online Teaching Practices" program provided faculty with an opportunity to learn evidenced-based teaching strategies, apply, and reflect on what they have learned. We have been featuring faculty from the program who employ practices from the [program in our CTL newsletters](#) over this past year. Please check out past issues to learn from the creativity of your colleagues.

You will have the opportunity to continue to learn from and with your colleagues through a virtual Lunch and Learn Series where ACUE credentialed faculty will share strategies that have been successful in their courses and then host discussions about how you can employ those strategies in your own context. All members of the UMSL community (faculty, staff, graduate students) are welcome to attend.

Last month we heard from Ho Kim (College of Business Administration) and Paula Prouhet (College of Nursing) about Delta/Plus Feedback and the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework.

Event Details:

- **Date of the next Lunch and Learn:** February 18th 2022 from 12:00 - 12:50 PM
- **Presenters:** Lynda McDowell (Department of Chemistry) and Diane O'Brien (School of Social Work)
- **Topics:** Tips and Tricks to save you time in Canvas and TBD
- **Location:** Virtual (see Registration below)

If you have any questions please reach out to CTL Assistant Director Erin Whitteck (elwbcf@umsl.edu). If you have already registered for the event you do not need to register again. A Zoom link and Outlook invite will be sent through email.

Register for the ACUE Lunch and Learn Event February 18th

About the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), a division of the Office of Academic Affairs, supports the professional development of those who teach and learn at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Our goals - to promote engagement in courses, on campus, and in the community - enhance the University as we align our activities, services, and consultations with the campus goals to promote excellence in teaching, research, and service.

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