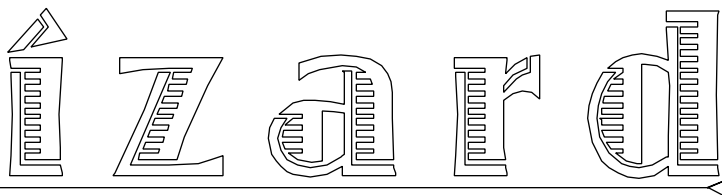


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laser insights, zany alternatives and riveting dialogue on teaching and learning

I Wish Someone Had Told Me...

Welcome to what we hope is a very successful year of teaching and learning. We're opening our fall issue of the Lizard with a look at the past and some things GTFs told us this spring drawn from the wisdom of hindsight gained during their first year of teaching. We encourage both faculty, GTFs and particularly our new group of instructional graduate students to take these lessons learned to heart.

We asked GTFs to tell us what they wish they had been told before they started teaching. We also asked them to pass on any advice they thought might be helpful. Their responses are categorized. The comments in italics come from TEP.

Lack of guidance:

When I started my GTF, I was given no direction at all. Feeling as if this were my fault, I said nothing to my supervisor. She e-mailed me in the middle of the summer and asked if I could put together a course packet for the class. I struggled with this, but still didn't ask for help. So instructional GTFs could use some training on developing course packets/curricula and delivering a course.

(I think there's a lesson here about new GTFs being willing to ask for help right away and for supervising instructors to offer assistance and not assume comfort and ability levels with new instructors. Sometimes this pertains to GTFs with some teaching under their belt as well.)

Dealing with difficult students:

-I had no idea what the boundaries were with regard to grading or "dealing" with students. I had a hostile student argue with me about his grade; I also dealt with several academic dishonesty cases and students not showing up to class. My supervisor never stepped in until I specifically

asked for her help. Often her response would be, "I'll leave the final decision up to you." For a graduate student, this is a huge responsibility. My anxiety came from feeling as if I were all alone to handle situations for which I had no training or preparation.

-Fear of students. I actually think it is increasingly important for GTFs to know how to handle anti-social behavior. I've actually been afraid to NO PASS some of my students for fear of retaliation.

-Plagiarism, students stalking students, crisis in the office hour— how to deal with racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes in papers that I am grading. These are all topics I wish had been covered.

-In one class we were the ones who had to turn the exams back during the discussion sections. The students were really mad at us because they had done so poorly. I did not exactly know (1) how to calm them (2) how to express my sympathy without putting down the professor (3) whether I had to spend a decent amount of time talking about the exam or (4) continue with the class as if nothing had happened.

- Another GTF and I had to grade 5 exams that formed 80% of the final grade. I had a couple of students who did not like their grades. Although I explained all of the reasons why he got that grade, he still did not like it and was really mad at me. I don't think that he had any respect for me and the fact that I am a woman and foreign did not help either. He was aggressive and I did not know exactly what to do.

(It is possible to head off some of the dissatisfaction students have with their grades by doing the following:

*1. If there are several sections in a course, **take the time to calibrate a set of grading criteria** with everyone responsible*



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for grading. The more consistent the grading is between sections, the fewer problems you will have. Make sure that you have given your GTFs all the information and assistance they need to make clear decisions on grading. Be willing to be the final judge on any tests, papers or projects which present grading problems.

2. **Give students a chance** to become familiar with the format of the exam through a less threatening opportunity like a quiz. They have enough test anxiety anyway and should not be thrown in addition by the exam format.

3. Before exams are returned **summarize the results for the class** and explain how you did the grading. Point out problems that many students seemed to have and make suggestions for ways in which people could improve in the future. Talk about what pleased you about the exams. Have a conversation with GTFs about how to handle students who are upset about their grades.

-I wish that I would have known that some students start the term by testing you. They'll push and try to be know-it-all's in order to show you up. Just act smooth and confident, and it can turn a potentially bad situation into a great experience. The biggest lesson I've learned is that CONFIDENCE, even FAKING CONFIDENCE, is vital to maintaining control in the classroom and gaining respect. I've seen some instructors get angry that certain students are acting like know-it-alls.

- Deal with students who challenge your authority in a non-confrontational manner, and try to debrief this incident with them afterwards. E-mail can be a good communication channel for follow-up.

(Most students begin classes hoping for a successful learning experience. Much of what happens on the first day affects how they feel about the course and the instructor, so careful planning is very important. Make an appointment with TEP if you need assistance with lesson planning.

Acknowledging student contributions without judgment and showing respect help to head off later conflicts. Getting to know your students as well as you can, using their names in class on a regular basis establishes the trust and rapport that helps you get through the more difficult situations which may arise.)

- The policy on student cheating is really important and I wish I had known the specific procedures this university requires.

(Policies and Guidelines for Faculty, Instructors and Students <http://oregon.uoregon.edu/~conduct/SAI.html>)

International GTF concerns:

-As an international student, I wish I could learn more about cultural shock. I sometimes did not know how to deal with american students. For example, I did not know how to get their attention or respect.

- I think that it would be great if non-English speaking GTFs could get extra encouragement and advice. You cannot make a foreign accent disappear, but there may be something that foreigners can do to make cross-cultural communication with students easier. I still feel so self-conscious of my accent that I am in constant fear that the students have no idea of what I'm talking about.

(Seek help. Ask your supervising instructor. He/she may be assuming that you feel fully confident about your classroom responsibilities. Make an appointment to meet with the TEP staff and let them know your concerns. They are very willing to help you.)

Reassurance:

-I needed to hear that I was going to be fine. Also, I wanted to hear mistakes others had made and learn from them. I would even be willing to share some of mine!

-Anxiety is normal, everyone feels it.

-I found that I learned so much about going with the flow. It really is a matter of experience. The first few weeks are tough, but, amazingly, it does get easier.

- I think confidence is so important (trusting oneself), and it develops as the term unfolds.

- "They give you three class lists about two days before the term starts and tell you to go for it. No one goes with you, no one helps you figure it out, and no one checks out your teaching. After it is all said and done, you live through it. Then after awhile you start to think— wow, this is great!"

-Remember GTFing is a temporary job and your real job is to become a professor. In that light, you can learn just as much from a bad professor as from a good professor.

-GTFs should realize that if they have a bad teaching day, or even a bad teaching term, that they're not alone. After my AWFUL first teaching experience, I thought that I was alone and a failure. However, I've talked with many well-known and respectable professors, who have very amusing first-time teaching stories.

- Even if other GTF's act as if everything is fine, realize that we all have bad teaching days and even bad teaching terms.

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With practice, you can make the experience very enjoyable. Also, remember, REALLY remember, that no matter how good you are, you are always going to have people who don't like you and no matter what you do, they still won't be satisfied.

Setting priorities:

-Remember, you are first and foremost a student here.

-I think teacher training should be mandatory for all incoming GTFs.

- Do not take too much on to overcompensate for being rookie.

-Become more computer literate. More and more professors seek such "extra" skills in their GTF's.

-Focus on your studies and GTF obligations and stay away from extra curricular activities. You need to establish yourself for future GTF and research project considerations.

GTF/Professor relationships and communication:

- One thing that I ran into was a misunderstanding between myself and the professor about the grading scale. I assumed a straight scale (90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, etc.), but the professor curved the grades, despite the small class size. This led to problems after the final grades were given.

-It's important to have a discussion of what your role is as a GTF.

-Relations with professors are very important. The politics of this relationship are very important, too.

- TEP does a good job of training GTFs to work with teachers, but no one shows the teachers how to work with GTFs. As a result, many are unprepared to tell us what they expect and how to help them. I think the GTF must take the initiative and have her or his own

class plan ready.

- Expand your professor contacts outside of your department. This will allow you to seek advice from external sources, if you feel uncomfortable within your own department.

-Talk to the other GTF's about the professor. What is the teaching and communication style of the person? What are the unwritten expectations of the professors.

-Try and learn why you got the GTF. What were the internal departmental politics that enabled you to be awarded the GTF.

- Also, establish connections with other GTFs as soon as possible. Calibrate your grading, with the professors help, if possible.

Useful Teaching Techniques:

-The best way to get through those first few classes is small groups. Not only does it take the spotlight and some of the pressure off the teacher, it also facilitates participation and learning on the part of the students.

They love the relaxed feel of the small groups; and because they are at ease, they perform so much better in class. In fact, one of my students last term evaluated my class as the best discussion section she has ever taken at the U of O.

Seeking help:

-Talk to people in other departments to get ideas and don't be shy about asking to see/talk about what their syllabi are like. I've found other teachers to be helpful.

Connecting with students:

-I've found encouraging/requiring students to come to office hours helpful. It's another way of gauging

how the class is going.

-Later in the second quarter, I did have the class do some self-evaluations of their own performance and I also asked for general class suggestions. I try to gauge how the class is going and often ask more specific questions about how they feel about a certain assignment. I make it clear that they can talk to me one-on-one if they are not comfortable mentioning something in class.

Rethinking and improving:

-I went through lots of my own experimenting this year. I think it's important to keep trying and adjusting the class so that it works. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. They happen. Just be sure to change it for the next time around. I've found that students need structure. But it's how you structure something that is important. I've found that I'm more strict when students slack. I'm strict about attendance and late attendance. I'm clear about the format of their work (i.e. double spaced, typed). I find that I have to check up on them. I can accomplish that by giving smaller assignments to make sure they are doing the readings.

-Discussion is extremely important for class. But all students have different ways of participating. I try to put discussion in the context of how it's an important skill to have especially later in the work world and how this is a good time to practice. I give them ideas and techniques of how they might prepare for discussion if they are nervous. I address basic feelings and make it a safe environment for them to share their views. I find giving context to whatever I'm talking about helps them see why something is important and it allows them to participate more responsibly in their own education and interactions. I feel like teachers

sometimes don't share their view of why something is important in the class. Students just focus on having to do it, rather than why they are doing it and what they can learn from it. Helping students see a teacher's plan and scope and goals for the class, even particular exercises and readings helps.

-Teaching is a learning process as well.

- Being an effective listener as opposed to an active talker is generally more beneficial in the short and long term.

Longing for a Laptop?

Kathy Heerema, Library

Ever wanted a laptop computer to help you take notes while searching the stacks or using other library resources? Now you can borrow one from the Information Technology Center (ITC) on the second floor of the Knight Library. The Knight ITC has two laptops to loan to UO students, faculty, and staff for use within the building. For up to two hours, users can borrow a Gateway 2000 Solo Notebook (Windows 95) or Macintosh PowerBook 5300c, each with a full range of software installed, including Microsoft Office and Internet applications. Each laptop also comes with a battery, a power adapter, an Ethernet card and cables, and both a 3.5" disk drive and a CD-ROM drive.

Ethernet connections are available throughout the library. Look for open wall connections marked with a white "UOnet Ethernet" sticker. In addition, the ITC has set aside a table providing Ethernet connections for patrons using personally-owned or ITC loaner laptops. These connections may be used for both network and printing services.

How to Check Out a Laptop

To borrow a laptop from the ITC, you'll have to complete a loan agreement and leave a current UO I.D. with the staff member at the ITC service desk. No advance reservations are taken for laptop loans. Users are responsible for returning the machines on time and in working order.

Web Plagiarism

Jennifer Freyd

One strategy to determine if a paper exists on the web already is to take a unique phrase from the paper and enter that phrase in quotation marks into a powerful search engine like Alta Vista and/or Excite. You will then get the results of the search and you can open the links to see if it is the very same paper. However, if the paper was written for hire then it might not exist on the web, and thus may not be something you can find through a search engine. If a web search results in no indication of plagiarism and you are still wondering, you might want to ask the student some questions about the research presented in the paper to determine if the student has knowledge of the presented material.

If you continue to suspect plagiarism, and/or you discover strong evidence of plagiarism, and/or the student confesses, then you should pursue the matter by following the University Policy on Academic Dishonesty (see the Policies and Guidelines for Faculty, Instructors and Students <http://oregon.uoregon.edu/~conduct/SAI.html>)

Another resource contributed by Tom Rocklin, Iowa University

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~centeach/newsletter/online-exclusives/term-paper-download>

None of us is surprised that some students present other peoples' work as their own. And, since we live in a market economy, we aren't surprised that some people have found ways to make money off the phenomenon.

People have been selling term papers for years. The nature of the market has evolved as technologies have come along to facilitate it. The advent of 800-number marketing techniques and the widespread use of credit cards has allowed for national markets in term papers.

Enter the internet. . .



Claiming Your Education

An Interview with
Leon Johnson

Last spring Leon Johnson, assistant professor in Fine Arts, won the Ersted Award. This award acknowledges faculty members who have “taught comparatively short periods and have demonstrated exceptional abilities to induce students to reason and not merely memorize.”

During the time when I had planned to interview Leon, I noticed that he was teaching a zero week course on Book Structures. I decided that one of the best ways to learn about award-winning teaching was to experience it as a student.

It was my intention to enroll as an observer, but the first question Leon asked was—“Are you going to participate?” I said, “yes,” without much thought. Leon’s class was intriguing, stimulating, challenging and replete with resources for whatever direction students might want to take the art of bookmaking. It was full of surprises. Bookmaking was so much more than I had imagined. I discovered that it could be performance art, sculpture, an innovative and interactive play experience for a child or a metaphor for a relationship between a mother and father.

While the centerpiece for the class was

learning the fine art of creating soft and hard cover books using traditional methods, the purpose of the course was to introduce us to the possibilities of what a book could be. We had practical tasks to accomplish—learning how to select paper and tools, making size, color and texture decisions and learning how to sew and glue our signatures together, put the cover on and work the spine until it was secured for a lifetime. We were also challenged to give visual form to a book concept, which we presented on the last day of the class.

I met with Leon this summer and asked him to talk about what he was trying to accomplish in his classes.

How do you get your students to think critically in your courses?

The challenge comes relatively late in the term. It’s a sort of set up job. In the first two weeks I attempt for us to collectively come to a realization of what’s at stake. We’re here for six hours a day for ten weeks. We have lives, issues, complexities, and pressures. This ten weeks can range from being a necessary prerequisite grade to what the class has become—a very exciting laboratory where people end up empowered and arrogant in the best way and proud of the work.

The first two weeks I spend working on a theme as a template. Through a variety of strategies, I attempt to identify what’s at stake for people participating in their lives. I make this idea very clear and then do not insist at all that this goal might be something they want to achieve.

I choose not to validate a work by a grade. I use the grades insofar as anyone shows extreme disrespect for the group, or the classroom, or me or the work. One of the things I help

people to think about is the hierarchy of that which is important—1) the object is an element, 2) a fabulously prepared fifteen minute one-on-one conversation in my office is an element, 3) a wonderfully witty, insightful e-mail is an element, 4) a coffee conversation in the hearth...

I make it clear that there are a lot of ways students can participate— as a group in spirited debate, or one-on-one. By the end of the ten week session it’s clear to everybody what they have accomplished and *what they have missed* in terms of potential by not participating more comprehensively. For those that have, it’s the most gratifying part of the work I do. Students are truly walking around like English pop stars, empowered that they have produced something for which they can claim ownership.

How do you succeed in getting students to that place?

In the first three weeks of the term I have three comprehensive reading packets which are very carefully selected. Inevitably there’s a page or two with excerpts from other writers and artists. These packets are expected to be annotated (questioned and analyzed) and brought to the following class. My job is to construct a packet which allows multiple avenues of access where someone can say — “This pisses me off” or “This woman is saying just what I’ve always thought.” The packets provide a lot of opportunities to kick against questions, subvert, celebrate. Students have to turn in annotated packets after group discussions. Then, based on those packets, I schedule one-on-one meetings and say —

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“Look, I think these two questions you’re asking are right on. What were you trying to”

There was one quote by Elaine Secksu, a French theorist, which said “What have I done with all my unnamable others? I have exhorted them to silence.” This was for a project I introduced called *To the Surface*—bringing to the surface that which has been relegated or hidden or in the closet. How does it manifest? How might we design it around the body, this concept of naming these unnamable others?

The first three packets tend to be provocative hooks. Then there’s also very specific material to that week’s project. The third part is nutrition—stuff we can consume— articles about artistic license, responsibility, how work can elicit the most unexpected kind of responses. Within the packets I have an avalanche of visuals in the first three weeks—lots of slides, videos. There are ways for people to identify how people talk about work, how they think about work. By the end of the three weeks students are clear on what I mean when I say *creative graphics*— how inclusive that might be.

I talk about establishing a contract with the class, with their colleagues and with their creative practice. What is it you aspire for—with me, with the class, with the ten weeks and ultimately with your own creative practice? And the final challenge is— Does your vision of your creative practice have any overt sympathies with how you want to live your life? Is it everything? Is it the first thing you think about? That’s not necessarily better than someone who says— I want a much more manageable and efficient relationship with my creative practice. With those sorts of options I want them to be able to clarify with everybody so that we have a common language for what we’re talking about. Then anywhere along the trajectory, in terms of the contract, in terms of the creative practice, I can define aspirations. Where do you want to posit yourself? And where you posit yourself for this class is not gospel. You can rethink it, you can rewrite it, you can reject the contract afterward. But we need a system for every minute of the time we’re together that allows us to be aware of the degree to which we are participating or not participating, we’re contributing or not, consciously or unconsciously. It’s the life force of the laboratory.

Students start presenting in the first week. They present their first project. There’s an incredible amount of emphasis in my visual continuity class on presentation strategies. I expect people to be presenting from conviction— honestly,

truthfully. I expect them to find a way to have as much personalized power in their presentations (not give it away to anxiety) and to understand that the process is incremental. The story needs to be as interesting as the object. If there is some baggage about this, then they need to talk that through, not relegate it to a position below the object, the print, the photograph, the painting. I don’t expect the story to be conversational and anecdotal. I expect it to be a prepared text with some criticality of language.

By the first presentation the anxiety is as palpable as cream cheese. People give it a shot and try to be present. And even if they only have a toehold on confidence and conviction, they begin to identify early on how possibly destructive anxiety is and that it’s manifested for a particular reason. It is not balanced with enough preparation so that you can identify a place for yourself where you can say a few simple, honest things that are supported.

If you start with an apology, you have instantly ruined any opportunities for the work to live and have any resonance. Nine out of ten people find a way to apologize for their work in the first weeks. I ask them to think about why they are apologizing. Where does the apology fit into a scheme of creative practice?

So within the first week or two we get good feedback about how the materials are being used and applied. I end every class at least a half an hour early to allow for one-on-one meetings after every session. Nobody’s thrown in the deep end. There is always an opportunity to meet with me in a space that is purely about furthering clarity.

I did eighteen years of theater in San Francisco and New York and it’s been enormously useful to me in terms of helping students work through their anxieties about presenting. So often it starts with, “Who gives a damn what I say about this dinky little abomination of a project?” There are ways to identify the problems and to find ways for people to be present in class. I’ve had people present on videos they produced, for example.

I think one of the reasons why I’ve had some effect in the classroom is I’m up to my ears in my own work—failures galore and successes galore. I have an active studio practice that is physically in a studio and it’s at Kinko’s at eleven o’clock, it’s in dialogues. In the space of one term I did a performance in Portland, an installation in Seattle, an exhibition of photographs in New York; I participated in a

storytelling marathon at the WOW hall; I was engaged in printing two offset publications; I was preparing paintings; I was making handmade papers, I was binding books. I practice what I preach. I demand for myself a comprehensive set of avenues to make solutions and then ally solutions and synchronize solutions.

Without my own practice, it would be a sham. In terms of understanding the complexities of process, in terms of understanding the trajectory from concept to product issues of dissemination, distribution, interactivity, inclusivity—all those things I am constantly seeking out, failing at miserably in my own practice.

If there's one thing I've learned as an educator it is that I am thoroughly prepared for my classes. Thoroughly. There is never a doubt that I come prepared—visuals, my own script for the class. Students have to rise to some level beyond mediocrity. I don't come to my class and find students sitting around reading the Emerald. They are ready to start. The preparation is nothing more than a template for ravenous inquiry that I'm equally after. The ten weeks we have is in no way like the ten weeks they might have heard about last term.

There is the template—I'm prepared, I'm focused and ready to honor the ten weeks, but what we can manifest together is not yet written. We can't script the dialogues, we can't script the stories, we can't script the despair. It's coming, and I want a part of it.

People have responded to my hunger for discovery. One of my curses and one of my strengths is that I am constantly scanning everybody in the class. I know the degree to which people are present. I know when

somebody checks out. I refuse to lose a grip on orchestrating a place where people want to be present.

The Turning Point

Lynne Isaacson, GTF, Sociology

Last spring, after a two-year hiatus from teaching to complete my dissertation, I was assigned to teach an upper-division sociology class of about 40 students. Although I had taught large introductory classes three and four years previously, I experienced extreme stage fright. During class discussions I found it extremely difficult to focus and "think on my feet," which contributed to disorganized and dissatisfying discussions.

Halfway through the term, I enlisted the help of the Teaching Effectiveness Program and its director, Georgeanne Cooper, to conduct confidential focus group discussions with students. Although most students appreciated my efforts during the remaining weeks to change classroom processes, their term-end evaluations pointed to my overall lack of confidence and leadership. I was scheduled to teach another upper-division class in the fall and I didn't want to repeat the experience.

Feeling disillusioned and incompetent, I also questioned whether I should remain in teaching. Over the summer, Georgeanne and I worked intensively on designing the course syllabus and developing a repertoire of strategies to

meet course objectives. Georgeanne was most effective in identifying my strengths and the areas that needed improvement. She perceived that I needed structure and a feeling of control to feel comfortable and suggested a range of student-centered activities that both incorporated structure into the class setting and allowed flexibility.

We also worked on changing my expectations for the course. Instead of feeling as though my entire life and career were riding on the outcome of the class, I redefined the coming term as an information-gathering experiment. This approach relieved the pressure I had created for myself and helped me to relax. Georgeanne and I met weekly during the first half of fall term to plan the "nuts-and-bolts" of class activities and to review outcomes. After the first week I realized that I was looking forward to the class and that I was actually having fun.

At midterm TEP administered a MAT questionnaire to students, videotaped a classroom session, and provided me with feedback. Knowing that I carried in my invisible teaching "toolbox" a variety of strategies to create structure in the classroom relieved much of my anxiety about leading discussions. The less energy I spent on being fearful, the more I was able to focus on the "here and now" of classroom processes and to take risks. The students' course evaluations reflected my positive perceptions about the term. In contrast to spring term evaluations' "lack of confidence" theme, most students mentioned the instructor's enthusiasm and caring. My quantitative scores exceeded my expectations; they were above the department mean in every category.

When I e-mailed students in February to tell them of my new position at the University of Missouri-Columbia, several wrote to say good-bye and to tell me how much they had enjoyed the course. I still consider myself a novice, but am very much encouraged about working with students I've yet to meet. I credit TEP and the students in Gender and Deviance with helping me to transform my thinking about teaching.

I highly recommend TEP's services to all instructors, whether experienced or novice, as a way to rewarding professional and personal development. Key to the process was the one-on-one collaboration and attention to individual style. The staff at TEP are especially skilled in assessing individual teaching styles and making effective use of personal strengths. I've heard from colleagues at other universities who lament that their institutions do not offer this vital resource. I urge not to take this valuable service for granted. And it's free—the only investments are time and commitment.

What is your definition of teaching?

Answers from some of this fall's GTFs:

- To import/empassion/enthuse/explore/question/examine/ponder/search and research/orchestrate/advise a focused subject with students.
- Guiding students, introducing the possibilities and encouraging development
- The ability and desire to learn; and help others learn and grow
- Presenting pertinent information to students in an interesting, efficient and down-to-earth manner
- Teaching is an art. It involves conveying information in a creative, thoughtful and provocative manner.
- Cultivating excitement about ideas and building intellectual capacity among people

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