Understanding Social Class and Student Success

By Karol Dehr, Continuing Lecturer/Associate Director of Writing for Outreach, English and Linguistics

On Thursday, January 8, 2015, the 5th Annual COAS Symposium on Teaching and Learning featured Dr. Sherry Lee Linkon, Professor of English and Director of Georgetown University’s Writing Program. Linkon has a great deal of teaching experience in the classroom as well as having served for many years as codirector of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University. Her scholarly research and interdisciplinary focus of working-class studies has significantly informed her work on social class in higher education. Her presentation included multiple strategies for supporting working-class students.

The symposium theme, “Class Matters: The Role of Faculty in Working-Class Student Success,” began with the audience discussing what “class” they come from and why they felt that distinction. She followed with a discussion of what defines class and some of the characteristics of students who may be working-class students. Key points included these students were less likely to persist in college, complete degrees at a lower rate than non-working class, have lower grades, possess lower expectations of themselves, and feel isolated from the greater university community. Many students from working-class families, according to Linkon, feel their academic success is focused within the classroom itself.

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Does Anyone Know the Answer?

Anyone? Anyone?

By Michelle Drouin, Associate Professor, Psychology

The last time I watched Ferris Bueller’s Day Off was in 1987, and yet, I still remember the scene with the boring Economics teacher, trying to engage his students with the course information and failing miserably. Thanks to YouTube, I was able to relive this moment today, cringing as the instructor asked “Anyone, anyone???” to his class of disinterested students. In 1987, I laughed at this scene. Today… not so much. My overwhelming feeling today is empathy.

It’s fitting that I’m writing this piece at the beginning of a new semester, when fresh faces have filled the seats of my large introductory class. It is at this time of year when I have the most awkward moments. My students, still a bit timid, are just beginning to raise their hands in response to my many queries. However, it’s the end of Week Two, and not a single student has asked a question during class about the content. I know they have questions, as their mean score on this first exam will, inevitably, be around a 70%. So—how do I know what they are or aren’t learning? And

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rather than through engaging with faculty, the institution, and other social activities.

She referenced and provided several resources and scholarly research throughout her keynote and reminded us that research indicates traditional lecturing is largely unsuccessful for these students and we should emphasize more discussion, critical literacy, and inquiry-based learning. “Learning matters more than deadlines,” she noted, along with building solidarity in the classroom and working on multiple levels.

Linkon completed her address by accepting questions from the audience, which included how we can balance being approachable and welcoming without lessening the rigor of the course curriculum, using student portfolios to encourage student success, and incorporating storytelling or class stories to help students relate their personal lives to their academic lives.

The afternoon session involved table discussions on the following issues: Thinking Locally, Class at the Intersections, Working-Class Academics, Teaching about Class, Supporting Working-Class Students, and Institutional Support. Participants moved to the table of their choice and were given prompting questions to lead the discussions. After several minutes, each table reported out on what they discussed and was given the opportunity to switch tables. Participants were then asked to consider what they would do next, in response to the ideas and strategies offered up during the day’s events. Each table reported out one, specific, and tangible idea to address the unique needs of working-class students.

The keynote address was sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences, the Richard T. Doermer School of Business, the College of Education and Public Policy, the College of Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science, and the College of Health and Human Services.

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how do I help those not bold enough to ask questions in front of 85 strangers? And how do I get this information without being the boring teacher from Ferris Bueller?

“So—how do I know what they are or aren’t learning? And how do I help those not bold enough to ask questions in front of 85 strangers? And how do I get this information without being the boring teacher from Ferris Bueller?”

Over the past decade, I have developed several techniques to help me address these questions:

1. I have stricken “Does anyone have any questions?” from my vocabulary. Instead, I ask, “how many people could explain this to me?” This flips the tables, so that those who understand the material (those with less to lose from a social standpoint) are raising their hands. However, it still allows me to see who does not understand the material so that I can explain the material again or in a different way. It also teaches a valuable skill—that students should be able to explain class concepts to show that they really understand the material.

2. I engage the students in low-stakes hand-raising. For example, I frequently ask students questions that anyone could answer like “How many of you are right-handed?” or “Who knows anything about Sigmund Freud?” I do this several times a class, so that students get comfortable with the action of raising their hand—hoping that muscle memory and disinhibition will increase their participation with the higher-stakes questions.

3. I invite my students to come see me after class, especially after I have explained particularly difficult concepts (and checked their understanding with my “explain this to me” questioning), I will say, “If you didn’t understand this, I want you to come and see me after class, and I will explain it to you personally.” This technique works, and I often have students who come to me with their notes after class to clarify concepts.

Despite these techniques, I still have my awkward moments. Not nearly as many as in the one painful Ferris Bueller teacher scene, but enough to keep me humble and motivated to become the best teacher I can be.
Assessing as if Learning Really Matters: Reconceptualizing the “Culture of Assessment” as the “Culture of Learning”

By Kent Johnson, Director, Office of Assessment

A quick informal survey of faculty reactions to the term “assessment” on many campuses likely yields responses such as:

“Why do we have to do this – I assess – after all, what are grades for?”

“This assessment stuff is just part of that (insert favorite expletive here) accountability movement and completion agenda.”

“I wish that (again the expletive insert) Assessment Director would just leave me alone.”

Fulcher, Good, Coleman and Smith (2014) argued that too often the focus of assessment is on mechanics rather than effective pedagogy and curricula (p. 4). While an emphasis on mechanics might produce “snapshots” of student performance at a particular point in time, assessment, in and of itself, does not necessarily result in increases in student performance. A slight shift in paradigm or repositioning assessment as an integral part of the teaching and learning exchange better supports assessment that is meaningful and useful. The paradigm shift supports a process-oriented definition of assessment that maintains the integrity of the teaching learning exchange and satisfies external demands of both accreditors and legislators.

This perspective of assessment grounds the work that we do and suggests a specific definition of assessment as a component of teaching and learning. The definition might be stated:

Assessment is a component of teaching and learning that provides information needed to improve the likelihood that the planned curriculum within a particular course or across a group of courses in an academic program contributes to student achievement of expected levels of learning as defined by IPFW Faculty Members.

“IPFW’s “Culture of Learning” develops as faculty members and academic units integrate “meaningful and useful” assessment with the science and art of teaching and learning to demonstrate and continuously improve the quality of student learning, and supports an idea of assessing as if learning really matters. Such an approach satisfies external demands for assessment while maintaining the integrity of the teaching and learning exchange. The Office of Assessment supports this idea through collaborating with faculty, academic departments, and CELT to support improved learning opportunities for IPFW students.


FACET Corner

By Elliott Blumenthal, Associate Chair, Biology; Associate Professor, Immunology; and Faculty Athletics Representative

FACET has planned lunch meetings for Second and Third Year Faculty and FACET members on the topic of “Managing your work life.”

“Managing projects” will cover ways to organize those large projects like class preparation, research/writing projects, and, of course, tenure and promotion cases. This session will take place from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm, on Friday, February 20th, in LA 328.

“Managing physical and digital environments” is the topic of the second lunch meeting. Whether it’s office/work space, filing cabinets, or computer files, if we cannot easily find what we need, we lose time and energy. This session will take place from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm, on Friday, April 10th, in Walb G21-21A.

These events are open to all second and third year faculty as well as FACET members. If you plan on attending please RSVP to Marcia Dixson (dixson@ipfw.edu) or Yvonne Zubovic (zubovic@ipfw.edu).

Looking for a past edition of the CELT News? You can find it on our website! www.ipfw.edu/celt
Upcoming Events

February

Re-visioning Course Design Seminar (CE)
Friday, February 20, from 12:00 pm-3:30 pm, in LA 35C
Facilitated by Ludy Goodson and Gail Rathbun, CELT; and Linda Lolkus, CFS

Teaching Working Class Discussion Groups (CE)
Sessions facilitated by Noor Borbieva, ANTH, will be held on Tuesday, February 24, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in KT 128
Sessions facilitated by Jordan Marshall, BIOL, will be held on Wednesday, February 25, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in LA 14

Teaching Working Class Discussion Groups (CE)
Sessions facilitated by Jordan Marshall, BIOL, will be held on Tuesday, March 24, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in KT 128
Sessions facilitated by Jordan Marshall, BIOL, will be held on Wednesday, March 25, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in LA 14

Online Teaching Seminar (CE)
Tuesday, February 24, from 1:30 pm-4:45 pm in KT G83
Facilitated by award-winning members of the IPFW Online Course Design Review team: Ramesh Narang, IET; Ben Gates, HIST; and Adam Dircksen, COM; with Ludy Goodson from CELT.

March

Featured Faculty Presentations
Monday, March 2, from 12:00 pm-1:00 pm in Helmke Library
Presidents: Michelle Drouin, PSY and Adam Dircksen, COM

The Writing and Research Process
Thursday, March 5, from 2:00 pm-3:00 pm in LB 440A
Facilitators: Shannon Johnson, LIB and Ludy Goodson, CELT

CETL Certificate Showcase
Thursday, March 19, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in KT 128
Presenters: Kerrie Fineran, EDUC; Craig Ortese, POLS; Kim O’Connor, OLS; Gordon Schmidt, OLS; and Heather Kruell, NURS

Camtasia 2.0
Friday, March 20, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in KT 205B
Facilitators: Ron Lewis and Samantha Birk, CELT

Teaching Working Class Discussion Groups (CE)
Sessions facilitated by Noor Borbieva, ANTH, will be held on Tuesday, March 24, from 12:00 pm-1:15 pm in KT 128
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May

2015 Summer Writing and Project Development Institute
Tuesday, May 12 and Wednesday, May 13, from 9:00 am-4:00 pm on the 4th floor of Helmke Library
Proposal deadline is Friday, March 20, 2015. Proposals may be submitted using the link under “What’s New” on the CELT web page. For more details, please view the flyer via the link in “What’s New.”

Visit http://ipfw.edu/celt to register or view the most up-to-date list of events. Registration is required for all CELT events.

A workshop denoted as “Certificate Eligible” (CE) means that a participant may apply to receive a certificate in recognition of the time spent attending the event and the effort expended toward applying the content to enhance the participant’s teaching.

Save the date!

The 2015 Fall Teaching Conference
Thursday, August 20
Watch your mailbox and our website for more information.