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Making Teaching and Learning Visible

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Information for DBER Group Discussion on 2012-04-03

Presenter, Department(s):

Paul Savory

Department of Management

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Title:

Making Teaching and Learning Visible

Information:

Are our students learning? Are they developing? Are we, as teachers, having an impact? These are important questions about student learning that many postsecondary institutions are increasingly calling upon faculty to answer. Yet, even faculty who value and support excellence in teaching often find it difficult to capture the intellectual work of teaching in a form that can be conveyed easily to others. This presentation speaks to these issues by examining the following challenges:

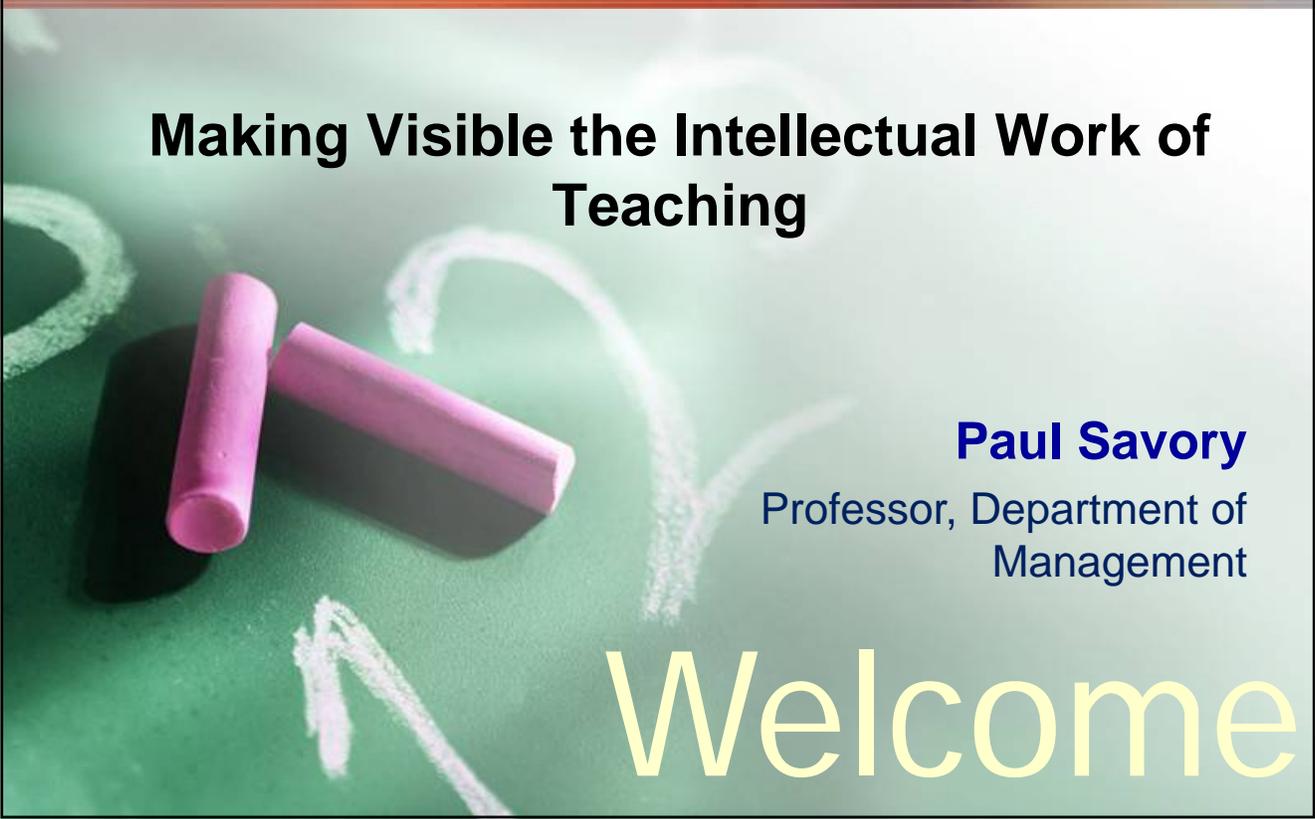
- How to document, make visible, and assess the careful, difficult, and intentional scholarly work entailed in planning and teaching a course;
- How to show the intellectual work of teaching that takes place inside and outside of the classroom;
- How to systematically investigate, analyze, and document students' learning in relation to teaching;
- How to communicate this analysis and documentation of teaching to campus or disciplinary audiences.

This presentation explores how course portfolios enable faculty to make visible the intellectual work of teaching for sharing, use, and review by others.



Peer Review of Teaching Project

Making Visible the Intellectual Work of Teaching



Making Visible the Intellectual Work of Teaching

Paul Savory

Professor, Department of
Management

Welcome

Approaches for Evaluating Teaching: **Student Evaluations**

Student evaluations are useful for inquiring about what occurred during a course, but students are not in a position to effectively evaluate the **intellectual work of teaching**:

- Is the course academically rigorous?
- **Are objectives and topics appropriate to the course?**
- Are evaluation methods fair?
- **Does the course prepare students for advanced work?**
- Does the course teach needed workplace skills?
- **Is the course comparable to those at peer institutions?**
- Is the instructor current in his/her field?



Approaches for Evaluating Teaching: Peer Observations



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Challenges with Peer Observation

- Often focuses on time & classroom management
- Hard to tell if students are learning apart from their class participation
- One-time visits can't show students' growth
- Can't see impact of outside learning (projects, group work, etc.)
- Rarely cycles back into curricular discussions

A Role for Faculty

Faculty are equipped to perform disciplinary work, but often do not consider their classrooms as sites for systematic investigation of their teaching practices and their resulting students' learning



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Challenge

Randy Bass: “In scholarship and research, having a “**problem**” is at the heart of the investigative process; it is the compound of the generative questions around which all creative and productive activity revolves.

But in one’s teaching, a **problem** is something you don’t want to have, and if you have one, you probably want to fix it.”

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Highlighting Teaching

- If we want to make the intellectual work of teaching visible for others' use and review, we need alternative forms of evidence about our teaching.
- Portfolios can help teachers document, analyze, and showcase students' learning by using the same skills they would use as disciplinary researchers within their own classrooms.
- **Common teaching attitude: "Teach me all you know in 60 minutes. Worse case, I will go to a workshop."**

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Project History

- Peer Review of Teaching Project was started in 1995
- A faculty-led program – my 12th year as leaders
- Over the past 12 years, faculty from 53 different departments/programs and 8 colleges have participated

Participants' efforts (4 years ago):

1 book chapter

10 journal articles

40 conference presentations, workshops, or poster sessions

\$1,950,00 in funding (\$1,800,000 in *external* funding and
\$150,000 in *internal* UNL funding)

60+ teaching awards/recognitions participants have received

What is a Course Portfolio?

- A brief, reflective document that summarizes a target course and its impact on student learning.
- Incorporates student work to illustrate and examine understanding and/or performance
- Includes faculty reflection on future goals for revising/teaching the course and or curriculum

Basic Elements of a Course Portfolio

Articulation of course goals and objectives

Discussion of teaching techniques & methods

Evaluation of student learning or performance

Reflection on future teaching goals & practices

A written document that can be shared,
used, and reviewed by peers

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Portfolio Outcomes

Formative Uses

- Develop a new course/curriculum
- Analyze or reflect on student performance
- Analyze or reflect on some aspect of your work as a teacher
- Develop shared/programmatic learning outcomes

Summative Uses

- Merit reviews
- Teaching award applications
- Assessing curricular reform
- Promotion/tenure files
- Job applications
- Department/program accreditation
- Assessing university-wide faculty development

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The following is an
example of documenting
the effectiveness of
teaching



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Self portrait
using chalk
as first
assignment
in a 6-week
module



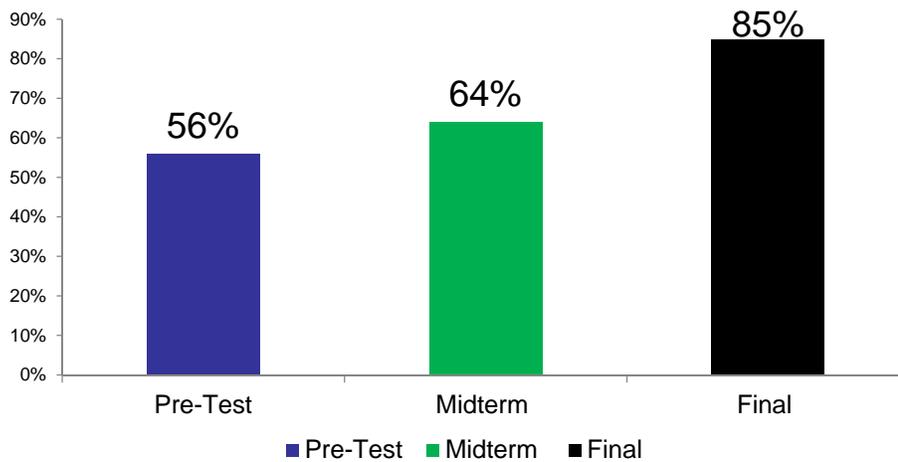
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Is there any doubt about the learning that occurred in this course?

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Example – Quantitative (Air Force History)



Instructor reflection: “I’m satisfied that some learning did take place over the semester. I’m not sure if I would categorize the change as better or worse than expected or as good as I or the students are capable of, but I know that their indicated knowledge level of the tested items increased.”

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Three Memos

The process of creating a course portfolio involves writing **THREE** different memos intended for a peer

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Memo 1: Course Goals

Describe the course syllabus and discuss the intellectual rationale for your course goals.

Two key questions:

- What do you want students to know?
- What do you want them to be able to do?

Defining goals is not easy

- university course catalog
- department expectations
- colleagues in follow-on courses
- accrediting organization
- colleges & departments which require the course
- A required textbook
- future employers or professional schools
- comparable courses taught at peer institutions

...lots more questions in defining your goals

What is your course?

What is your course about? Who are your students? What backgrounds do they bring? How does the course fit into departmental curriculum? In other departments? How do your goals fit with the goals of other courses in your department or discipline? Does the course lay the foundation for courses that follow it or build on what students have learned in other courses? How is the course connected to general goals of your major or your institution's general studies guidelines?

What are your goals for the course?

What do you want students to know? What do you want them to be able to do? What do you want them to understand? What do you want them to retain? What perspectives or attitudes do you want them to have? What is important for them to learn about your field? What should they learn about themselves as students or as contributors to society? How are these goals structured into your course? Why is it necessary for your students to achieve these goals? What do you know about your students that makes these goals appropriate? How are these goals reflected in the daily course structure and routines?

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Reflecting on Course Goals: Professor & former Chair of Political Science

“..most often, I would ask *what books do I want to use?* and then build my course design around those books. Often times my book selection would reflect my own interest in what I wanted to read that semester. Now, when I sit down and think about my course, I begin with two questions: *what do I want to accomplish, and what is it I want my students to know about polls, politics, and public opinions?*”

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Memo 2: Analyzing Teaching Methods

In the second memo faculty reflect on their teaching methods, course assignments, and course materials.

Two key questions:

- What approaches do you use to achieve course goals?
- What are you asking students to do to achieve the course goals?

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Questions for Memo 2

- What teaching methods are you using during your contact time with students and how do these methods facilitate students' achievement of course objectives?
- How do you measure student learning via these methods?
- In what ways do you expect your choices for methods, materials, and assignments to assist your students in meeting the goals of your course?
- **Talk is cheap!**

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Challenge ideas - Examples

Idea 1: If the goal of an examination or quiz is to test a student's mastery of the course material, then why is there a time limit on it? What if an assessment were untimed?

Idea 2: If the goal is that students learn, why not let students re-do activities (homework, labs, exams) as many times as needed until they do it correctly?

Idea 3: Will you let a student "test out" of your course?

Idea 4: Linking to your student audience Example: Biology for non-Biologist. Have them create illustrated stories on the topics. Posters.

Memo 3: Documenting Student Learning or Performance

In the third memo, faculty analyze and reflect on their student work.

Key questions:

- Do you see evidence of students meeting learning goals? Where do you see it?
- What criteria do you use to assess student performance or understanding?
- How do you document this performance?

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Reflective Commentary

Portfolio authors need to comment on student work to support overall claims:

- Why did you include it?
- How do you know that this example represents or affected students' learning?
- How does this example illustrate goals or claims about teaching and learning?

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Assembling the Portfolio

- Link together the 3 memos and the reflective analysis and future plans
- No set checklist – each unique to the course, instructor, and the thematic focus of the portfolio

Portfolio Repository

Repository of Course Portfolios:
www.courseportfolio.org

Over 360 course portfolios written by faculty from 14 different schools so that work can be shared, used, and reviewed by other faculty

Searchable index to learn about others' teaching

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SoTL – Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Scholarly teacher

- reflective, systematic, sharing and collaborative

SoTL researcher

- knowledge of the relevant literature
- focused on investigating teaching and student learning in connection with disciplinary/professional conversations

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Impact on a UNL Faculty Member

**A successful researcher and an excellent teacher
(numerous teaching awards, member of UNL
Academy of Distinguished Teachers)**



**Christine Marvin
Associate Professor
Special Education
and Communication
Disorders**

“...I was amazed and embarrassed to discover that I had course objectives I never taught, I had course objectives I taught but never assessed, I had course objectives I assessed and never taught, and I had material I taught and assessed but never listed as a course objective.

By reorganizing the goals of my course, developing rubrics for evaluating student work, and assessing my classroom activities, I now have a focused approach for linking my teaching to my students' learning.”

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Faculty Skepticism

- Challenge 1:** Classroom inquiry takes too much time.
- Challenge 2:** “This work won’t be rewarded in my department” or “My campus cares about research, not teaching.”
- Challenge 3:** Teaching is an art that can’t be assessed.
- Challenge 4:** I have academic freedom.
- Challenge 5:** Student learning is not my responsibility.
- Challenge 6:** I’m not an educational researcher—I don’t have expertise to do classroom research.

