

Faculty Conversations About Teaching

In our faculty conversation, we will discuss strategies for “teaching without a textbook”, i.e., creating and adapting course materials from a wide variety of sources, to better address course learning outcomes. Mason faculty will share how they’ve created, adapted, and incorporated open educational resources (OERs) and non-traditional textbooks in their courses.

Teaching Without Textbooks: Collaborating and Developing OER for Your Courses

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My Opening Idea or Definitions

Provide a 50-150 word opening statement with your understanding of the most interesting or important aspects of this topic (to you and your teaching).

By the time textbooks reach the market, they are often outdated. Maintaining student interest may necessitate material design based on recent events (e.g. implementing information about current refugee crises in preparing students for an immigration discussion). Such activities should turn abstract textbook concepts into more personalized and concrete examples for students. In this way, material retention may increase. In addition, using online spaces typically inhabited by students outside of class (e.g. Khan Academy, Reddit, itch.io) may bridge student culture with the content of the course. Finally, bringing in elements from other cultures (including viral news from different nations) grant students greater intercultural ability and learning through plurilingualism.

What Have I Tried?

Summarize 3-4 approaches, emphases, scenarios, or assignments, each briefly explained (50-100 words each) so that participants can envision your past and/or current teaching experiences, whether successful or still evolving.

- I used Khan Academy and Edx to have students learn about a topic outside of class, and then write summaries about what they learned.
- I used subreddits to introduce students to Reddit as an academic and social tool. Students wrote summaries on the purposes of subreddits and gave examples with explanations of how the posts fit the subreddit’s purpose.

- I used an itch.io game to introduce gender discrimination in the workplace, asking students to play and critique it.
- I remixed Accounting course material as exercises for Socrativ and Kahoot, increasing interaction and competition.
- I used Kahoot, YouTube, and comparative tables of two countries' visa process to introduce a campus conversation on US immigration policy.
- I used YouTube as a means for students to discuss education methodologies, learn other students' languages, and explain concepts in their languages to other students.
- I used Squiffy, a programming language for text-based adventures, to teach students about environmental issues and other nations' geography.
- I used up-and-coming apps and tech services to allow students practical examples of VUCA analysis for conducting business in a multilateral world.

What Am I Exploring? What Am I Interested In?

Provide a list of 3-4 questions, activities, or options that you have been considering as you continue to adapt your teaching approaches.

1. What do students think?

Getting honest student feedback is not easy. Certainly, students are interested in current events and in anything that reduces the cost of education, but what type of activities do they prefer, and what is more helpful or less helpful about textbook-free materials?

2. How do electronic/online games become useful for students?

While games are a good source of input and give a more realistic feel to a situation, they do require additional time in explaining directions (i.e. how to play?) Which games are just gimmicks and which games are actually enriching?

3. What types/practices of assessment are humane?

Student assessments and final grades should indicate their ability to perform in real-world situations using readily-available tools. Changing test practices to allow for group work or use of smartphones may better reflect their future use of class content. Such practices are referred to as dynamic or human assessment.

What are some Best Practices, Tips, or Resources I Would Like to Share with Other Faculty?

If you could recommend a list of 3 core values, teaching tips, and/or resources (articles, books, and links) that faculty across disciplines could find helpful to increase quality feedback for students, while also saving you time, what would your list include?

Dynamic: Classrooms should be a flurry of different activities and seating/grouping arrangements that make time seem to fly

Learner-centered: Classrooms are responsive to learner feedback and seek to instill greater responsibility/autonomy for students to exert control over their learning and the classroom. Classrooms, especially in a commuter school like GMU, are aware of students' other responsibilities to family, friends, and career.

Productive/Interactive: Like Feynman's idea of teaching being the ultimate demonstration of content mastery, activities should favor student production over teacher production whether in group or smaller pairings.

Sociocultural Education: Traditionally, much of the course content is taught through reading in the United States. This is not true for the rest of the world. In France, for example, teacher lectures are often students' first encounter with the materials and the primary source of information for content. Textbooks are used as supplemental if at all. Sociocultural approaches to education see learning in universities as socialization to enter into communities of professionals and academics; in the terms of Wenger-Trayner's "Communities of Practice", learning moves students inside occupational domains to become well-versed in scripts and jargon of a particular pursuit. In other words, if after our classes, students can "walk the walk" and "talk the talk", they show ability to future professors and employers.

Wenger-Trayner, Etienne & Beverly (2015) Introduction to communities of practice.
<http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>



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