

## Faculty Conversations About Teaching

*In our faculty conversation, we will address strategies to give Mason students opportunities to participate in Mason Impact activities. How can we can deepen students' learning and development to create engaged citizens and well-rounded scholars prepared to act?*

**Laura Wheeler Poms, PhD, Assistant Professor in Global and Community Health & Undergraduate Program Coordinator, College of Health & Human Services (CHHS)**

### **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).*

Mason Impact is an opportunity for students to engage in significant learning experiences. According to Fink (2013), significant learning experiences change the way students live their personal, social, civic, or professional lives. These experiences extend beyond a single course. The key component to significant learning experiences is that they require both a process and an outcome. Students need to be engaged in their learning and their participation in the course has to have high potential for being of value, resulting in lasting, significant change. This is rather a tall order, but it is highly likely that many instructors are engaging in these high impact learning experiences but don't know that they are or just need to reframe their thinking a bit to achieve this.

### **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.*

- To develop undergraduate research skills, we've used a scaffolded approach introducing the basic concepts in GCH 300 Introduction to Public Health (basic skills and literature review), developing skills in GCH 380 Public Health Research Methods (analyzing the evidence base, research methodology) and applying these skills in GCH 465 Public Health Capstone (propose a solution to the opioid crisis in Virginia using the evidence base). GCH 465 is particularly relevant to Mason Impact because of its focus on students using the skill they've developed as well rounded scholars. By working on the case, and presenting

their solutions to an outside panel of experts, they learn how these issues are approached in a real-world context so they are prepared to act.

- In GCH 376 Health Ethics, Leadership and Advocacy, students learn about themselves in the context of organizations. We engage in various activities in relation to leadership, teamwork, conflict, negotiation, diversity, motivation, etc. About 25% of their grade is based on reflection on how the concepts we've practice in class relate to the "real world" and how they will use these ideas in a professional context.
- In GCH 376, students complete an advocacy project, in which students identify a piece of health-related legislation they either support or oppose. They analyze the bill, review where in the legislative process the bill is and identify members of Congress they would need to influence to either support or oppose the bill. Students are reminded of how the legislative process works and learn that they do have a voice in what happens regarding public health policy. This is project in particular exemplifies to me the idea that Mason students are engaged citizens and well-rounded scholars, who are prepared to act.
- Under development and supported by a Curriculum Impact Grant, is an interdisciplinary approach to teaching global health (GCH 205), with engineering and public health students working together. Many public health issues in developing countries can be solved by infrastructure improvements, which means public health professionals and engineers must work together. Students will spend the first 6 weeks working on global health and basic engineering content and the remaining part of the term working together to solve a specific problem.

### **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.*

- In general, I am exploring how to infuse more civic engagement into our BS in Community Health curriculum. Specifically, I want my students to propose some legislation and actually have a chance to visit Capitol Hill or Richmond. Then students would not only be prepared to act, they would be taking action.
- Grading these types of classes is challenging. I struggle with how to manage the grading load, particularly with reflections. I don't give tests in the GCH 376 class, so the reflections are expected to focus on course content. I also use case studies in that class and have found that participation is better when they are required to submit responses to preparation questions. Grading all of this material can be arduous and so I am trying to figure out how this can be better managed.

- I would like to make connections to the “real world” more intentional and explicit, but sometimes this gets lost in the need to provide more content. How do you balance the process with the outcome?
- How do I assess whether these really are significant learning experiences? What outcomes are achieved and are they important?

### **What are some Best Practices, Tips, or Resources I'd 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 implement Mason Impact, what would your list include?*

- Leave time to discuss the process as well as the expected outcome. Remember to leave room in the course schedule to focus what it means to work in a team or to manage a project.
- Expect that it might not work the first time you try a project or in-class activity, but that can also be a learning experience.
- Think about what activities or approaches you are currently taking. Can they be translated into something where students are responsible for some of the learning?
- Do not forget to figure out how to evaluate that you are doing. This will make promotion time a little easier.

### **Recommended Resources**

- Fink, L.D. (2013). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*.  
[https://www.unl.edu/philosophy/%5BL.\\_Dee\\_Fink%5D\\_Creating\\_Significant\\_Learning\\_Experi\(BookZZ.org\).pdf](https://www.unl.edu/philosophy/%5BL._Dee_Fink%5D_Creating_Significant_Learning_Experi(BookZZ.org).pdf)
- Barkley, E.F. & Major, C.H. (2016). *Learning Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. Jossey-Bass



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