

Small Changes: Quick Tips for Better Teaching

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Dr. Graziella P. McCarron teaches Leadership Studies Program, courses in ethics & leadership, and leading change.

A significant focus of Dr. McCarron's higher education practice includes improving access and experience for adult and first-generation learners.

At Mason, she has been awarded 2017 Online Course Excellence Award (from Stearns Center Digital Learning) for her online INTS 204 course; and she received 2018 University Teaching Excellence Award.

Dr. McCarron teaches in f2f and fully online formats.

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What I've Tried

Student Surveys: As a way to encourage consistent student feedback, which can lead to small changes for better teaching, I collect anonymous student surveys every 3 weeks. I review the feedback carefully and, often, implement quick changes that serve students' needs. Once I make those changes, I let students how their feedback led specifically to course improvement.

Instructor Journal: I journal informally (a small notebook carried in my bag or on a device) and both jot down quick notes as I notice opportunities for change as well as sit down for a few concerted minutes at the close of each week to reflect and brainstorm course improvements. Notes might include reminders to clarify a syllabus item, or a decision to revise an assignment.

What I'm Exploring

For online courses, specifically, I am exploring shifting to **multiple individual conferences with all students** (through Skype, Blackboard, and/or phone) as a way touch base on individual students' sense of the class as well as review proximal assignments. Online courses, at times, can disconnect the feedback loop crucial to providing opportunities for teaching improvement.

Currently, I am exploring/working with **my undergraduate TAs on lesson plan critiques**. Each TA, with fresh eyes can review a lesson plan/module of their choosing and identify 3-4 challenges. This activity is not only designed to help foster learning for the TA and honor them as partners in the teaching process, but it is also designed to generate expedient feedback for my teaching.

I Recommend...

- **Reading** Nilson, L. B., (2016). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- **Working** with a departmental colleague on a peer assessment/review of your course – whether they sit in on a single session, scroll through your online layout, or take a look at your syllabus and assignments – the feedback emerging from “fresh eyes” is invaluable.
- **Asking** for structured student feedback consistently (anonymous surveys once/month via Google Forms, Blackboard survey function, or hard copy) lead to quick improvements in teaching.
- **Subscribing** to the About Teaching in Higher Ed podcast and/or newsletter – loads of quick tips! <https://teachinginhigherred.com/about/>

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Dr. Katherine Rosenbusch's teaching interests include principles of management and leadership development; her research interests include international human resource development, global leadership development & talent management, and organizational culture.

At Mason, she teaches undergraduate & graduate courses.

She also has experience teaching in variety of delivery formats, including f2f, fully online, hybrid/blended & active learning classroom.

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What I've Tried

Online Courses—I balance the conceptual knowledge with the application. Providing at least three times that students will be exposed to the concept before engaging with conversations and applying the principles.

Active Learning Courses—I use a phased team project to get the comfortable analyzing the content and then using the content for a TedTalk style presentation. They study an organization, interview a manager and then pick a topic of most interest to engage the audience. The entire class is team based approach model in which every class we are discussing, dissecting and practicing the knowledge gained.

Hybrid Courses—Developing core curriculum in which they watch the lectures but then come into the classroom to practice the concepts. The connection between theory and practice is key in these courses.

What I'm Exploring

Online Proctoring: We are instituting online proctoring for the first time this semester.

Changes in TedTalk Assignment: I am thinking of revamping my TedTalk assignment to be more engaging and dynamic—it is going to take time and energy for me and the students.

Tips...

Always be willing to adapt and adjust even midstream.

The more you organize the better outcomes you often get—especially in Blackboard

Allow students a chance to fail in small ways to learn from their mistakes.

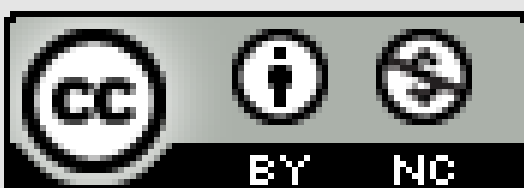
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TRY IT!

How might you apply these ideas, tips & best practices to a course you are currently teaching?

What additional information or resources might you need in order to try it?

For info and guidance, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning (4th Floor, Innovation Hall)



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