

## Transforming Your Teaching through Course Redesign

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Dr. Mary Schumann teaches Psychology of Sport (SPMT 320), an advanced undergraduate course, in f2f and hybrid/blended format. She is currently transforming her course to online format, as part of the SPMT online program development.

### What I've Tried

- I have tried to create **experiential exercises** to help illustrate concepts from the theories and interventions in sport psychology. For example, when we try to teach present moment awareness and attention, I have incorporated **mindfulness exercises** to teach students how to use this skill to calm the body and prepare the body for competition or performance stress.
- I use **reflection journals** as part of the participation requirement for the course to have a private place to describe reactions (positive or negative) to the mindfulness exercises or other experiential tasks we do in class.
- A final project for the course is **an applied project** in which the student acts as a sport psychologist and works on a performance or behavioral goal using two psychological skills for the assortment of skills/intervention strategies we learn about in the course.

Mary is a clinical and sports psychologist. She has taught for 22 years at the college level, most recently at Mason.

### What I'm Exploring

She also has taught sports psychology skills to young international athletes and coaches visiting the United States in the Sports Diplomacy Program sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

- **Foster Critical Thinking:** I am interested in how to foster critical thinking in a creative way. In doing the course re-design for online teaching it made me consider where in my current teaching this takes place. I recognize that I will have to build more activities and assessments in order to meet the goal of teaching critical evaluation of research
- **Teach Students Responsibility for Own Learning:** I am also trying to teach undergrads to take more responsibility for their learning...What is challenging is I have to change my own expectations about what I am supposed to be doing as the professor, and let them do more preparation in order to engage in a less passive way.
- **Engage Students Through Peer Feedback:** I have thought more about assessment and engaging the students in ways that help them assess each others' work as another source of feedback.

She is the Founder and President of Mindful Athletic Performance, a consulting practice focused on the psychological and mental skills of athletes for performance improvement.

### I Recommend...

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- **Ambrose et al., "How do Students Develop Mastery?":** Ambrose's concepts of component learning and especially expert blind spots helped me recognize that I sometimes expect students to know how to approach a task without giving them a model, or teaching them in steps. Reference: Ambrose, et al. (2010). Chapter 4: How Do Students Develop Mastery? In *How Learning Work* (pp. 91-120). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- **Concept Map:** I think doing a concept map and clarifying my objectives for this course was a unique experience that helped me to articulate my values as a teacher and also what my objectives for the class. I have been teaching this class for a while, but putting it under the magnifying glass led me to think about it in new ways and to chunk the information differently.

# Faculty Conversations About Teaching: Transforming Your Teaching Through Course Redesign

Robert Pierce, PhD, Assistant Professor, Term Faculty, Business Foundations, School of Business



## What I've Tried

Dr. Robert Pierce joined George Mason in fall 2015. Prior to Mason, he has teaching and administrative experience in the United States and internationally. Rob has over 24 years of teaching experience.

At Mason, he regularly teaches Undergraduate (Mason Core) courses, BUS 100: Business and Society and BUS 200: Global Environment of Business.

His research interests include historical and social contexts of creativity and innovation

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## What I'm Exploring

- **Teaching for Divergence:** The singularly most profound experience I have had with respect to my teaching stemmed from working with (now retired) professor of education here at GMU, Lloyd Duck. Like many young teachers, I focused on whether my students were learning the material, the content. Thus, I imagined my instruction as a process of transferring my knowledge to them. Dr. Duck emphasized, rather, that having students engage with material in an open-ended way led them to think harder about the material, which then registered in the long-term memory. Nervous about this approach, I nonetheless tried it and found that student performance on external exams actually went up.
- **Application:** I routinely use application activities in class. An application activity occurs when students have learned a concept, but their knowledge lacks depth (is at the bottom of Bloom's taxonomy). Then, I will present some kind of scenario where the students must then apply the concept. Then we will de-brief. Sometimes the application is for convergence (one right answer), sometimes for divergence (more than one right answer). Regardless, the students get to cycle the concept through their thinking several times, which reinforces the learning. The different scenarios provide a higher-order thinking context, which moves the students up Bloom's taxonomy.
- **Physical Movement:** My preference is always for classrooms with wrap-around white boards. One of the ways to reinforce learning is have students to engage physically, which can be done in many ways. The wrap-around white boards provide for many of these physically moving activities.

- **Precision in Learning Objectives:** Too often, learning objectives, especially in courses taught by multiple teachers, have weak learning objectives...However, when we think like an assessor, we need great clarity about learning targets, the SLOs. They need to be precise, focused, achievable, and agreed upon.
- **Using Stimulus in Assessment:** The challenge is coming up with meaningful and appropriately challenging stimulus that (a) stimulates student thinking without giving the answer completely away and (b) allows for questions both for convergence and divergence.
- **Seeing the Best in Students:** What may appear as a bad attitude or resistance to learning reflects something else – fear, anxiety, poor social skills (but not knowing what good social skills are), etc. As teachers, we must embrace their good intentions, however hidden they may be.

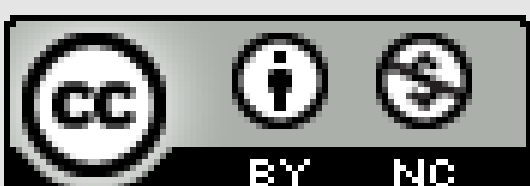
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## TRY IT!

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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