**Gen Ed News**

**Update on General Education**

As a follow up to Bobby’s email the other day regarding the Strategic Plan implementation, I wanted to give you an update on the Gen Ed program. As of now, nothing has changed. UWGEC is reviewing and approving course proposals, and the students are completing their required courses. However, there is a small team of people starting to have conversations around the recommendations that were made by the Gen Ed Task Force and the Strategic Planning group. There will be some pilots in the coming semesters and lots of discussion. I will do my best to keep Gen Ed faculty informed on these discussions, but feel free to contact Elliott Cheu (echeu@email.arizona.edu) or Elaine Marchello (evm@email.arizona.edu) with your input.

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**Tutoring: Face-to-Face, Online, and Hybrid**

*CESL offers tutoring options for all levels and needs!*

**Basic Tutoring:** For beginning to intermediate English speakers

**Possible Formats:** Face-to-Face, Online, and Hybrid

**Cost:**
- $175 for 5 hours
- $300 for 10 hours

**Elite Tutoring:** For intermediate to advanced English speakers, graduate or professional students.

**Possible Formats:** Face-to-Face, Online, and Hybrid

**Cost:**
- $345 for 5 hours
- $600 for 10 hours

**Skill Intensive Workshops** for small groups (2-5 people)

**Possible Formats:** Face-to-Face, Online, and Hybrid

**Cost:** $750 total for the group (shared among students) for 10 hours

**General English Skills (all levels)**

- Grammar
- Reading
- Vocabulary
- Writing
- Speaking
- Accent reduction/pronunciation
- Presentation skills

**Specific Topics (intermediate—advanced)**

- Business English
- American culture
- Discussion and presentation skills
- TOEFL or IELTS preparation
- Writing for specific purposes (e.g. technical reports)

Contact Dr. Veronika Williams (vaw@email.arizona.edu) today for more information and to get matched with a tutor!

**Website:** www.cesl.arizona.edu/learn/tutoring

**Phone:** (520) 621-9180
An Assoc. Professor at the Honors College, Tom has been a faculty member of the University for over 18 years. He earned his B.S in Biology from Reed College and his Ph.D. in Soil and Water Science from UA. Tom then accepted a Lecturer position in the Dept. of Soil, Water and Environmental Science.

Current courses: HNRS 170A Human Reproduction and the Environment; HNRS 202H Introduction to Conservation Biology. He also co-teaches summer classes in Namibia, Australia, and a winter class in Ecuador, through UA Global. He has received the CALS Faculty Teaching Student Award, the Provost’s General Education Teaching Award, and the UA Excellence in Academic Advising Faculty Advisor Award. He is also a Bart Cardon Teaching Academy Fellow in CALS.

**Why do you teach Gen Ed?** Teaching general education classes offers me the opportunity to change society. Since students who take these classes are not in related majors, they are not usually familiar with the topics, so they can gain a new perspective about something they had previously considered.

More importantly, communication, collaboration, and diplomacy are built into these classes, since students from diverse backgrounds, interests, professional aspirations, and perspectives come together in the classroom, and they must work together effectively. These are skills and experiences which makes students better citizens, and according to employer survey data, makes them better employees as well.

**What is the most rewarding aspect of teaching Gen Ed?** Knowing that I have truly engaged my students, and that they are thinking about what I teach when they don’t have to. Also, getting to know these students through the semester, and through the years.

**What is the most challenging aspect of teaching Gen Ed?** Ensuring that my students are engaged, when they have been conditioned to be passive learners, focused entirely on the grade. Equally challenging: conveying the importance of general education.

**How do you get to know your students?** At the start of each class, and during my field trips, I interact with students. I will ask them why they are taking the class and what they want to do when they graduate. I also encourage them to visit with me outside of class.

**What do you do to engage students in your course?** I teach in collaborative learning spaces, so I give assignments for each group, developing a concept map for example, or a response to a controversial topic. Also, I have debates in my class, and all students must work together. Often I assign a brief perspective paper about the topic before the debate, then assign students to defend the opposite side.

**What is the strangest question anyone has ever asked you?** “what is your preferred method for eating an Oreo cookie?”

**What is your favorite cookie?** Butterscotch chip.

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**Time to Make Your Mandatory-Attendance Policy Optional?**

Advice in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 13, 2019, by two of our very own: Joe Gerald and Benjamin Brady

Pretty much all faculty members agree that attending class is critical for students to learn. Where we differ is on what, if anything, we should do to get students in their seats. Many instructors think a mandatory-attendance policy is the way to go, arguing that it holds students accountable and prepares them for future employment. Others favor a laissez-faire approach that treats students as self-regulating adults by forgoing attendance checks that can disrupt the classroom experience.

While both positions have merit, they create a false dichotomy—that instructors should either mandate attendance or have no policy at all. Such reasoning implies that faculty members cannot simultaneously respect students’ autonomy and structure course policies to compel attendance.

Students seem to share that dichotomous view. Multiple surveys have shown that undergraduates tend to dislike a mandatory-attendance policy but admit they would miss class more frequently without one. Similarly, most students think that regularly attending class improves their grades but also believe that it is ultimately their decision whether or not to attend.

As instructors of a large, required, upper-division course for public-health majors, we think we’ve found a middle ground that is supported by recent theories of human behavior:


- In his 2011 book, Thinking Fast and Slow, Daniel Kahneman said people are guided by two processes in making decisions: an emotive, reactionary one that favors immediate gratification, the consequences be damned (fast), and a rational, deliberative one that is willing to make immediate sacrifices in return for long-term rewards (slow).

- In their 2014 book, Think Like a Freak, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner offered concrete suggestions on how to reward desired behaviors like classroom attendance. For example, instructors should not be offended when students invariably attempt to “game the system,” but rather acknowledge their ingenuity, close identified loopholes, and move on.

- Before applying those principles in our classroom, we used extra credit to incentivize, but not mandate, attendance. However, simply providing extra credit wasn’t enough to yield consistent attendance. In hindsight, our policy was missing a crucial piece: an upfront commitment from students that could not easily be broken.

- Growing tired of lecturing to a half-filled auditorium, we tried a different approach: Give students a choice of policies. We asked them to pick one of two attendance policies—the old “optional” one, which offered extra-credit incentives to encourage attendance, or a new “mandatory” one that would reward consistent attendance but penalize frequent absences.

- On the first day of class, we shared data substantiating a link between attendance and course performance. Then we explained the behavioral principles that informed our new policy and encouraged students to select it. We cautioned them that their choice, once made, could not be undone.

- By approaching students early in the semester, we hoped to engage their slow, deliberative thought process, allowing them to view regular attendance as a sacrifice worth making to achieve a good grade. Students who selected the new policy would be well positioned to defeat their fast, emotional thought process on those days when doing literally anything other than attending class would seem worth it in the moment.

- By deducting course points for frequent absences, the new mandatory policy provided a stronger incentive than the old one, which only rewarded attendance but didn’t include penalties for skipping. Students who selected the new policy and who missed fewer than three class meetings would earn a 15-point reward, and those who missed more than seven would suffer a 10-point penalty. Meanwhile, students who selected the old policy could earn up to a 10-point reward but could never be penalized for missing class. Overall, the incentives were small relative to the 500 points they could earn in the entire course.

*Given a choice, students overwhelmingly selected the mandatory attendance policy. In fact, in the five semesters since we adopted this approach, 85 percent of our students have chosen the mandatory policy—revealing their desire to hold themselves accountable for attending class regularly.*

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Got any ideas for Gen Ed News stories? Want to brag about something great and innovative you are doing in Gen Ed? Send ideas or content to evm@email.arizona.edu
Attendance Policy cont.

So we added a sign-out requirement at the end of class. But that caused students to queue after dismissal.

Now we ask students to sign in with their TA, and we use a seating chart to mark attendance at dismissal. That process seems to work well, as it obliges students to interact regularly with their TAs, allows students to exit class unimpeded, and makes it difficult for anyone to game the system.

Nontraditional students — particularly older ones with children or work commitments — appreciate having an attendance choice that allows them to manage conflicts that invariably arise in their busy lives without the risk of academic penalty. For example, students who know they are at risk of future, unplanned absences for work or personal reasons can select the optional policy without fear of being penalized if they can’t attend class.

Nevertheless, our attendance ritual still disrupts class and adds a burden to an already harried teaching team. In that regard, we have not been able to resolve all of the concerns raised by those who view taking a daily roll as unnecessarily burdensome. For us, the trade-off seems worth it, and we would encourage other instructors to consider our approach.

When given a choice, most students will choose to impose on themselves a system that rewards consistent attendance and penalizes absenteeism. Making mandatory attendance optional is a mechanism that allows instructors to treat their students "like adults" and to encourage, but not force, them to make decisions that they themselves believe are in their own best interest.

Joe Gerald is an associate professor and director of graduate studies in public-health policy and management in the University of Arizona’s College of Public Health. Benjamin Brady is a lecturer in the University of Arizona’s College of Public Health.

WRITING TIP OF THE MONTH: SKIMMING AND SCANNING AS TOOLS FOR DEEPER READING

Experienced academic readers use a variety of strategies to comprehend and analyze academic genres. Some might first read the abstract and then the conclusion to see how deeply they want to read, while others may read the title, the introduction, and the headings. In both of these examples, the reader makes sure they have some level of knowledge about the text before they start a more detailed reading. We should not be surprised to learn that having some familiarity with the content before reading can help with comprehension and deep understanding, nor should we be surprised that many student learners do not read in this way.

Students may continue to read their assigned academic texts from front to back, losing out on opportunities for deeper learning, without guidance on academic reading strategies. We’ve identified three strategies here, with an assist from the English Language Learning Program at the University of Toronto. Taking 5-10 minutes at the end of class to introduce some of these strategies or building a few previewing or skimming questions into a homework task can greatly benefit student success when reading difficult academic texts.

Below, find a few suggested strategies with related questions for previewing, skimming, and scanning a text.

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<tr>
<th>Previewing</th>
<th>Skimming</th>
<th>Scanning</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use the title and headings</strong> to get an idea about the subject matter. What do you know about this subject already?</td>
<td><strong>Read this introduction (or introductory section) and predict the direction of the coming explanation or argument.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skim with a tighter focus. Keep your eyes moving through the page looking for specific terms, data points, or subject matter.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Where</strong> was this text published? What type of publication is it, and what do you expect to find in it?</td>
<td><strong>Read the first one or two sentences of each paragraph, as well as the concluding sentence.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Annotate sections where you’d like to come back and read more closely.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Why</strong> has your instructor assigned this text? Where does the text fit into the course? What are your goals for reading this text?</td>
<td><strong>Read carefully the concluding paragraph(s). What does the author’s purpose seem to be? How do you know?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Write any questions you have that could be answered with a more detailed reading.</strong></td>
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