Quick Hits for Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FROM AWARD-WINNING TEACHERS

EDITED BY
ROBIN K. MORGAN, KIMBERLY T. OLIVARES, AND JON BECKER

FOREWORD BY
BARBARA A. BICHELMAYER

CONSULTING EDITOR
ROBERT WOLTER
Quick Hits for Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers
SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FROM AWARD-WINNING TEACHERS

Non-tenure-track lecturers and adjunct instructors face particular challenges at US colleges, including heavy teaching loads, lack of office space, little control over the selection of course topics or textbooks, and long commutes between jobs at two or more schools. *Quick Hits for Adjunct Faculty and Lecturers* contains short, practice-oriented articles by experienced instructors that offer valuable teaching and career tips for balancing competing demands, addressing student issues, managing classrooms, and enhancing professional development.

ROBIN MORGAN is Professor of Psychology at Indiana University Southeast and director of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET). She is coeditor of *Quick Hits for New Faculty: Successful Strategies by Experienced Teachers* (IUP, 2004) and *Quick Hits for Teaching with Technology: Successful Strategies by Experienced Teachers* (IUP, 2012).

KIMBERLY T. OLIVARES is a former Administrative Manager of FACET. She is coeditor of *Quick Hits for New Faculty: Successful Strategies by Experienced Teachers* (IUP, 2004) and *Quick Hits for Teaching with Technology: Successful Strategies by Experienced Teachers* (IUP, 2012).

JON BECKER is Senior Lecturer in Mathematics and Actuarial Science at Indiana University Northwest. He has won eight awards for excellence in teaching, including the Indiana University President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching.
ON BEING “ROOTED” IN THE CLASSROOM: TOP THREE TEACHING TIPS FROM “THE BAREFOOT PROFESSOR”

SHARILYNN ROBINSON-LYNK
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Sharilynn Robinson-Lynk, LMSW, ACSW, is a Lecturers’ Employee Organization adjunct lecturer at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI School of Social Work. She was also recently nominated by the students as the 2014 Professor of the Year for the School of Social Work.

Keywords: Connection, Environment, Professional Development Path, Career Path

I must begin by clarifying that while I do indeed often teach without my shoes, I am not at all suggesting this as a teaching tip! However, there is a connection. What I am suggesting as my first teaching tip is that every instructor must find some way to be “rooted,” or connected if you will, to her/his students. None of the following tips, nor any other’s you may read I dare to say, will be successful if the students do not feel you are invested and concerned about their learning journey.

One of the many ways in which students have shared with me that they know I am invested in their learning, which also often times includes creating a safe (even if not always comfortable!) environment is that I always share my teaching journey. It is this expression of vulnerability and trust that opens up the classroom for mutual sharing and growth. It is with my teaching journey that I will begin this article.

It was towards the end of a successful fifteen-year professional social work career that I unexpectedly stumbled onto an opportunity to present a guest lecture on living and working in the profession with multiple intersecting identities to a class of social work students. After the lecture, the professor of the class (herself, “barefoot” literally, as well as figuratively, as far as I could assess!) offered to walk me out of the class and immediately announced that I needed to be teaching! Though I had never entertained the idea, I felt the pull that afternoon. The very next semester I was not only guest lecturing again in her class, but also co-teaching a class with her. When an adjunct teaching position became available the following semester, with her guidance, I applied and accepted the offer to begin my teaching career.

She was my instant mentor and I taught at that university for over five years. Rewardingly enough, I experienced all of these wonderful opportunities at my graduate school alma mater. I later went on to teach social work courses for three additional local universities and introductory anthropology courses for the local community college before my arrival at the University of Michigan in 2010. Needless to say, teaching is not just a profession for me. I feel quite confident and comfortable saying I “am” a teacher and I happen to also have the joy and honor of doing so for a living.

Since I have always been quite fascinated with improving my teaching skills, my teaching journey also included some time working in the area of the scholarship of teaching and learning. It was during that time that I became aware of several pedagogies which I found fit my need to be “rooted” in the classroom and vulnerable with the students; or, as students have often said to me, “real.” These include all of Paulo Freire’s pedagogies, especially his work on critical pedagogies. Highly recommended readings on these critical pedagogies which have been particularly moving and integrative to my teaching have been, Pedagogy of Love, which is a compilation of Freire’s pedagogies by one of his protegés, Antonia Darder, bell hooks’ trio of teaching wisdom which includes, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom; Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope and Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom are also highly recommended readings.

While Paulo Freire is known for much pedagogy, it was the critical lens in which he viewed the educational system, terming it a, “banking” method and advocating instead for a liberationist educational system, which greatly influences my teaching.

Thus, my second teaching tip, is to, whenever possible, encourage critical thinking and reflection and to teach through dialogue. However, to do so, we must first prepare our students through a series of experiences which will have them reminisce and remember, then acknowledge, that their previous educational experiences (most likely!) included them passively having information “deposited” into their brains and then during test-taking time being told to “withdraw” the information; all of this with the absence of critical thinking or praxis. Once we have tackled this acknowledgement...
the skill of dialogue, which also includes defining how these are different from, and connected to, debate, discourse and discussions, can then be taught and applied.

Though last, my final teaching tip is one in which I would say guides the previous two tips. I strongly believe that being rooted while expressing vulnerability and trust and encouraging critical thinking through dialogue cannot be successful without the presence of love. Once we have the good fortune of graduating from kindergarten where words and deeds of affection are not only taught and encouraged, but expected, we tend to focus on love in its purely romantic and sexual sense. I maintain that a genuine sense of caring and concern and connectedness to our students will go a long way in assisting them with successfully integrating all of the content and learning outcomes we are required to ensure that they have.

Best wishes to all who read this and to our students.

Love,

Shari