

# 'TEEC'HING

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## Teaching Effectiveness and Enhancement Newsletter



NKU is filled with faculty who are excellent teachers. Therefore, when I was asked to share thoughts about teaching for this newsletter, I hesitated. What could I add that you don't already know? After some consideration, I realized that this was exactly the point I needed to make about teaching; you are all excellent teachers. However, excellent teachers need to consider the downside of being excellent. The downside of being good at what you do is the risk of burnout. When one is passionate about work, it is easy to slide down the slippery slope of working too much. Working too much is a concern in a challenging environment where resources are stretched and students always seem to need help. Never mind the "other" significant time demands for research and service. Burnout occurs when one is emotionally and even physically tired from doing the job. Cynicism results and though present at work, one's mind is no longer fully on the job. In fact, there is no dichotomy of either being free from burnout or having it. Burnout occurs on a continuum. At the extreme end, job stress can impact psychological and physical health. So, what does one do when burnout emerges? Consider the following three ideas.

**1. Think deeply about how you feel about your work.** Spend some quiet time thinking about how you feel about your days. Do you love being in the classroom or is it becoming a drag? Do you enjoy engaging your students in conversation in the hall or do you feel too drained or too busy to build those relationships? Self-assessment is central to being a good teacher, but it is not easy. If you feel like your work-life balance should be altered, you first need to know what you like about your work and what may need to be changed.

**2. Ask yourself if you are achieving long-term goals for your students and for yourself.** I changed many things about my approach to teaching when I realized that some of my habits were not in the long-term interest of students. For example, I used to think that it was really important for me to promptly and fully reply to all student emails about classwork. However, I view it as an important goal that my students are ultimately independent problem-solvers who will be successful in their careers. Being responsive to students is not the same thing as helping them too much. Students benefit long-term if they learn to manage their anxiety and solve problems independently. Now, I require students to see me in person during the next class or during office hours for questions. Just having students wait 24-48 hours until the next formal meeting to get an answer results in most students figuring out most problems on their own. We have all heard of helicopter parenting, but I fear that we may engage in helicopter college teaching. A student only has to pick up their phone to send an email and an answer is often given.

**3. Work two hours less per week.** This final suggestion is an effective one that I have implemented at time when I felt burned out. I wish I could say that I am the source of this great idea, but in fact it came from a study where a company staged a burnout intervention that involved having all employees work two hours less per week. Measured productivity before and after the intervention didn't change, though everyone worked less and reported better work-life balance. In my experience, this is an easy change to make. One can practically gain these two hours by changing your strategy for responding to student emails (see point 2 above). So what to do with those two hours? Don't do laundry! Have some fun. Go to a museum, a movie, the park, or whatever else will bring you some joy. There are few things more invigorating than realizing that you control your time in a way that allows you to really enjoy your life.

Changing these three things may only be the beginning. However, you should really consider that these changes ultimately benefit our students. Our students need engaged professors who are patient and enthusiastic. When we take care of ourselves, we can really put students first.

*Cecile A. Marczinski, Ph.D., a faculty member in the Department of Psychological Science, is this year's winner of the Frank Sinton Milburn Outstanding Professor Award. An author of 44 publications and 2 books, she was recently named a Fellow of the American Psychological Association. Her research on the risks of combining energy drinks with alcohol is currently funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health.*

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Hello, my name is Molly Brausch. This past May I graduated from NKU with my Associates Degree in the field of Respiratory Care. Currently I am taking online classes to complete my Bachelors of Health Science in May 2016. In addition, I work as a full-time employee at the University of Cincinnati Hospital as a respiratory therapist.

Deciding what college to attend after high school was not a hard decision for me. I grew up in Alexandria, Kentucky and attended Campbell County High School. NKU was a college we were exposed to a lot during high school. I felt I didn't need to look at other colleges and planned on going to NKU from an early start. In addition, NKU is close to where I live so I was able to commute to classes when I attended on campus. My mother was also a big influence on my decision to go to NKU. When she attended college she also went to NKU and told me about the great experience she had on campus. The hardest part of starting college for me was deciding on a major. When I originally started college I was an education major following in my family's footsteps. As time went on I found this major was not right for me and I wanted to go in a different direction with my career. The process took some time, but that is when I found respiratory care. I never thought I would go into a health profession, but this major interested me the more I read about it. Growing up as a kid I vividly remember my mother suffering from asthma, from all the times she needed to go to the ER to ending up staying in the hospital overnight. Seeing how she suffered from asthma made me want to help people just like her and to become a respiratory therapist.

As I entered my pre-program classes I was nervous to start them, especially anatomy and micro-biology. I heard so many horror stories about these classes, and how they were used to eliminate people from the program who were not ready for it. I was nervous that I was going to be one of these people and have to pick another major! As time went on and I got accepted into the program I began to find my place in the university. I was very interested in the topic of respiratory care and my academics were showing it. I am one of those students that have a hard time with classes if I'm not very interested in it, but this major kept me interested and on my toes throughout the whole program. I was even awarded for the highest academic performance of my graduating respiratory class.

Looking back on my experience at NKU, I wouldn't change a thing. I'm happy that I started in a different major and took my time deciding what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I think if I would have gone into this major right away I wouldn't have been as successful and it wouldn't have been the same experience. Having time at the university for a couple of years before settling down and deciding on my major helped me grow as a student and an individual. If someone were to ask me about colleges to attend, I would recommend NKU based on the experience I had there as a student for six years. As I finish up my last year of online classes at NKU, I couldn't be happier with my career!

## TEACHING TIPS

Have you ever tried something new in class and then wondered how students felt about it? Perhaps you implemented a new assignment. Maybe you decided to try a flipped approach in one or two class sessions. There is no reason to wait until the end-of-semester course evaluations to determine how the students felt about the new approach. Mid-semester evaluations can tell you how well the course is going. It is easy to create a quick five-to-ten question survey to determine the climate of the class. Likert Scale questions such as "I feel the activities in class enhance the course material" and "I feel the assignments contribute to my learning" can help determine if the instructor is reaching the student. These surveys can be administered via paper and pencil or anonymously in Blackboard. However, if you plan to give a mid-semester evaluation, you should be prepared to switch gears when it comes to teaching methods, if need be, to promote student success.

## TEACHING CONVERSATION

We are excited to introduce you to a new feature of the TEEC Newsletter. In each newsletter we will introduce a topic that we hope will generate conversation about teaching on NKU's campus. Today's topic is growth mindset. According to Carol Dweck (2006), our intelligence and talent are not fixed. It is our mindset that inhibits us from growing and developing. The concept of growth mindset posits that human beings are fluid and in other words, work in progress, and with proper opportunities we can change and grow.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with a senior colleague several years ago. He told me that unless you get a normal grading distribution in your class, then you must be grading too easy or not rigorously teaching in your classroom. I almost asked him, "Are you assuming that our students' abilities are fixed? Are you saying faculty play no role in helping students learn and develop? Couldn't it be that we can motivate our students or they are motivated to learn and change during the course?" I didn't ask those questions, but according to Dweck's framework, I cannot help but think that colleague had a fixed mindset.

So, as teachers, we should be asking, "What mindset am I bringing into my classroom today?" How does such a mindset impact the way we teach and the way we interact with our students?

If we assume our students are capable of learning and growing, and that we can help them achieve their fullest potential, wouldn't that assumption impact how we teach? What would that classroom look like compared to others?

Let us have a conversation on growth mindset in the hallways or in our offices this semester.

Deck, Carol (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House, New York.

## TECHNOLOGY TIPS

Whether you're looking to expand upon your interactions in an online (or hybrid) course or expound upon a concept you introduced in a classroom, Adobe can help. Perhaps most well known for Acrobat Reader, Flash, and Photoshop, Adobe debuted two iPad apps last year that simplify the creation of electronic presentations: Adobe Voice and Adobe Slate.

Voice, a video-generating program, provides users with more than 25,000 images that can be used to illustrate a concept, a one-touch method of recording a voiceover, and a soundtrack. The app automatically adds animation to the story you've created, providing you with high-quality footage that can be posted to social media sites, sent out via e-mail, or uploaded to the webpage/video site of your choice.

Slate, on the other hand, offers users the opportunity to transform a document – be it a report, a newsletter, or lecture notes – into a slick, illustrated, magazine-style presentation. The ability to share and embed the link to your story makes sharing your information a snap.

Both apps are free, and available in the iTunes app store. To see more about either, visit <https://standout.adobe.com/>