
Re-Examining Academic Expectations: Using Self-Study to Promote Academic Justice and Student Retention

**Shirley M. Matteson, Colette M. Taylor,
Fernando Valle, Mary Cain Fehr,
Stacy A. Jacob, & Stephanie J. Jones**
Texas Tech University

With the current national and state economic strain and budget cuts in higher education, enrollment at universities has become an important issue. One way to boost enrollment is to *maintain* enrollment, retaining students who might otherwise discontinue their university studies. Although students leave for a variety of reasons, it is often due to academic discouragement. As some students are less prepared for higher education than others, learning and disciplined study may be more challenging for them. Now, more than ever, faculty members are called on to assist their universities with student retention. Student retention requires a shift in our expectations, how we view our roles, and how we approach our teaching. Many of us cannot teach the way we were taught, nor can we afford to have the unjust expectations of yesteryear if we want to retain our students. Gone are the days of saying on the first day of class, "Look to the left; look to the right; only one of you will still be here at the end of the semester." This elitist tradition causes some students to be academically disenfranchised. By finding ways to help students succeed rather than weeding out unprepared students, we create social justice in an academic sense. For the purpose of this article, the authors define the term *academic justice* as recognizing students' individual intellectual and cultural capital, and scaffolding their knowledge and skills with available resources to give them equal opportunities for success. We must shift from expecting students to predictably distribute themselves along a bell curve of academic performance to one of re-examining our teaching practices

to maximize their likelihood of success. But it can be a rocky road during the first couple of years as new professors. Pitt suggests that “hopelessness and helplessness” among new educators are recurring themes.¹ We are not automatically wired for such introspection while coping with new job duties and learning the ropes of life on the tenure track. Frustration and other negative emotions can preempt self-examination. However, in response to Pitt’s claim, Liston discourages educators from dismissing such negative emotions by suggesting that “...sustained conversations about new teachers’ and veteran teachers’ sense of hopelessness and helplessness should be welcomed, encouraged, and engaged.”²

Believing as does Liston, that there is value in exploring these feelings as part of our professional growth, rather than sweeping them under the rug, we were led to ask, “How do the thoughts of new junior faculty change over two years’ time to provide academic justice for their students, regardless of preparation, skill levels, or life situations?” This research question frames the following self-study by six new tenure-track professors.

The impetus for this study originated in a casual conversation between the authors. While sitting around a table in the faculty dining room, we began relating stories concerning our first few weeks of teaching. Each of us acknowledged similar experiences with students, articulating the stress, frustration and anxiety that many new faculty face. We began to search for solutions. The synergy produced by this ongoing group inquiry has produced understandings that each of us might not have gained by ourselves. Palmer and Zajonc suggest that “we often reflect, understand, and act in solitude. But we thrive on what arises between us—and never more so than when we are thinking and speaking about ideas and people for whom we deeply care.”³ As a result, our view of those people, our students, and how we teach them changed.

In her work *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Ellen Langer identifies five psychological states, “mindful states” that promote understanding: (1) openness to novelty, (2) alertness to distinction, (3) sensitivity to different contexts, (4) awareness of different perspectives, and (5) orientation in the present.⁴ This description of mindfulness provides insight into the reasons that new faculty and their students might not initially share similar expectations or fully understand themselves or each other. Langer states, “In the perspective of every person lies a lens through which we may better understand ourselves.”⁵ In their first semester, new faculty struggle to better understand their students, their work environment, and their individual academic identities. Using Langer’s framework, understanding in this context can be gained by cultivating

mindfulness, focusing that lens on ourselves, and possibly re-examining what seemed at first to be non-negotiable expectations.⁶

Experiences of new faculty have been cataloged by many researchers⁷ as stress, pressure, and uncertainty. Garrett noted,

In a perfect world, high school graduates all arrive on a university campus ready to become little sponges of knowledge; to hang on every word of their wizened professors; to show up early and often; to stay late; and to pepper the teacher with cogent, topical questions that move the learning in the right direction.⁸

Unfortunately, we do not teach in a perfect world. So we must find ways to become effective teachers for students who do not necessarily fit the description above. In this article, we explore the significance of self-reflection and re-examining our own attitudes, expectations, and teaching strategies in order to provide academic justice. We examine institutional context and the issues that new faculty sometimes experience. Finally, we conceptualize new ways to arrive at shared academic expectations with students and move beyond the frustrations often talked about only in faculty lounges.

To communicate the spirit of our conversations, we have chosen to use our individual voices to investigate and analyze the underlying themes of our experiences. The six narratives included in this article chronicle our first two years of improving our pedagogical competence, and re-conceptualizing our academic expectations related to university students.

Method

We used the method of self-study to examine our first two years of teaching on the tenure track and to use this experience to grow as professionals. Dinkelman defines self-study as “intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice. Included in this definition is inquiry conducted by individual teacher educators as well as by groups working collaboratively to understand problems of practice more deeply”⁹ Hamilton, et. al., describe self-study as being a scholar of one’s own practice.¹⁰ Self-study is becoming more widely used in teacher education as a means of praxis and more widely recognized as a research methodology. Self-study was formalized in 1992 when a group of scholars who have since become known as “the Arizona Group” met during the annual AERA conference to discuss common difficulties experienced by new faculty members.¹¹ Self-study’s emphasis on both reflection and the application of reflection to practice is a central tenet. Reflection alone could conceivably produce nothing more than musings. Dewey considers teaching and reflection to be inherently interconnected, and he cautions

that separating them can have a negative effect on one's practice.¹² But when we use reflection to improve practice, it benefits students, and when we share the reflections the benefit is extended to professional peers. Dinkelman offers the following theoretical rationale for using self study in teacher education programs:

- Self-study creates congruence of reflection with the practice of teaching.
- Self-study can produce valuable knowledge for both local contexts and the broader teacher education research community.
- Self-study creates opportunities to model reflective practice to preservice teachers.
- Preservice teachers can participate in self-study.
- Self-study can facilitate programmatic change.¹³

It is difficult to critique one's practice without the willingness to acknowledge flaws and to change. Self-study requires honesty with oneself and three essential teacher characteristics: open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility.¹⁴ We must approach self-study with a commitment to refocus our lenses and to apply what we learn from doing so. Self-study has the potential to impact teacher education on a broad scale. "When teacher educators adopt self-study as an integral part of their own professional practice, the terrain of teacher preparation shifts."¹⁵

Collaboration is an important element of self-study. Hamilton, et. al., suggest that collaboration enhances researcher integrity and makes the actual reform of practice more likely.¹⁶ In light of this, we participated in this self-study as a group of six new assistant professors, recognizing that we had much to learn through collaboration. This approach had a clear impact on the evolution of our thinking and our changing interpretations of initial teaching experiences. As we dialogued throughout this study, we recognized early tendencies in each of us toward viewing our students with deficit thinking, blaming students for their lack of preparation for university studies.¹⁷ Through reflection and discussions, we recognized the need to refocus our attention on what we should change *within ourselves* to scaffold our students for greater success. We realized that we must share the responsibility with our students, examine our own teaching strategies and attitudes, and make changes where needed. We did not *lower* our expectations, but we understood our obligation to help students meet them, filling in their knowledge gaps and helping them develop responsibility and strong academic habits—even our

graduate students. We needed to be more supportive, more willing to assist students who we initially thought would not need assistance. As time went on, our teaching landscape shifted toward academic justice.

A second important characteristic of self-study is that it is conducted methodically, over time. It takes a certain amount of time to recognize one's own biases, to move beyond initial self-assessments of one's teaching to see a situation more clearly. It takes time to cultivate the humility to admit flaws in one's own approaches and to view students with more compassion and less judgment. We began our self-study during our first few weeks as new faculty. We met for lunch and discussion periodically throughout the first two years, revisiting our initial concerns. Even during the process of writing collaboratively about our study, we made new realizations and arrived at new interpretations. It has been a gradual, ongoing, and challenging reflective journey together. We present each of our reflections here.

Reflections

Stephanie

My first semester as a full-time tenure-track faculty member was challenging, rewarding, and at times disappointing. It seemed that my expectations of students and their actual performances were negatively correlated. As a graduate of the program in which I now teach, my graduate experiences framed my expectations of students. Because my self-expectations as a graduate student were high, I never considered that others in the program might have conducted themselves differently. I simply did what was required and asked questions for clarification if needed. In my first semester as faculty, I wondered, "How can my students be so different?"

My expectations of graduate students are based on my self-expectations, my work ethic, and my professional experience as a higher education administrator. I expect students to make a commitment to the field and have an inherent understanding of graduate school rigor before they walk into class. I expect all of the students in our Higher Education program to operate in the realm of professionalism. This means they prepare for class and take the time to review all materials. I do not expect my students to immediately understand all the concepts presented, but I do expect them to make an effort to figure things out, as well as show up to class and ask thoughtful questions. Students at the graduate level learn through critical reflection on course content and their experiences.

I look at every student in our program as a potential employee in

higher education that I possibly will have the opportunity to recommend to a colleague at another institution or to hire myself. I believe that my students made a commitment to excellence when they applied to the program and I hold them to this expectation of excellence throughout my classes.

I was caught off guard when students challenged my syllabus and course requirements. Statements and questions still ring in my head: "I am taking nine hours and working full time; this sure seems like a lot of work to do. Do you really expect us to log into our course more than once a week?" Of course, my response was "Yes, I would not put the information in the syllabus if I did not expect you to adhere to it." Other questions included: "Do you accept late work?" "Do papers have a deadline?" and "Why, why, why?" My pat answer was, "Read the syllabus." Why, after I spent so many hours creating this 'masterpiece,' should I repeat what was so thoroughly articulated in a document readily available to my students?

I was also surprised when students questioned my assignment requirements. I was most troubled when one student asked why I recorded only the average and not the highest grade made on quizzes with repeated attempts. He claimed this is what a prior instructor had done and suggested I do the same. I quietly closed his email message, tempted to never respond, and secretly wondered if I could banish this student from that class and any other class I ever taught. I fumed, "When did assignments become negotiable? When did students start providing advice to faculty on how assignments should be graded?" After 24 hours of ranting and raving to my computer and new colleagues, I calmed myself, reconsidered my initial expectations, and realized that sometimes students need further explanation. With an adjusted attitude, I responded to the student with a sound rationale for my grading policy. The student apparently adjusted his attitude too, as evidenced by the fact that he became a model student.

Reflecting on the past two years, I find it has become necessary for me to re-examine my initial strict expectations of what students must achieve before leaving our program. I have found that I must be somewhat more accommodating, not lowering my expectations but working around student issues. Rather than viewing their difficulties as a lack of academic ability, I now realize that my students' issues are more likely due to inadequate time management and under-developed abilities to balance work, family, and school.

As a result of re-examining my expectations, I learned to prioritize what is negotiable and what is not. I found that being more accommodating has made teaching less stressful. I recently pondered why an

instructor would not accept a late paper. If students submit work late, the professor can penalize them, but what ultimately is the reason for not accepting the assignment? A late paper is not necessarily a low quality paper—it's just late. I reflected on this as it applies to all aspects of my teaching. After two years of evaluating my students, I have decided to be accommodating. I will work with students to help them master what I believe they should before leaving my classes. I realize that some students may take advantage of my kindness, but in the end I will better serve students by meeting them where they are, including being flexible with timelines and helping them balance their busy lives while attaining a higher education.

Fernando

Fresh from my dissertation experience, I envisioned facilitating passionate, face-to-face theoretical discussions and working closely with students to fine tune research and writing assignments. To my surprise, I was scheduled to teach a hybrid course. My concept of teaching was being redefined by this blended approach and the technology involved. Gone were my visions of intimate academic discussions in a physical classroom. Institutions of higher education are increasingly embracing distance education, and the number of students enrolled in distance programs is rapidly rising in colleges and universities throughout the United States.¹⁸

Shortly after introductions and a syllabus overview via interactive video in my first hybrid class, I was greeted with, “Thank goodness you are not going to lecture us to death,” and “We’re still numb from the hundreds of PowerPoint slides in our last course.” These comments were both a wakeup call and a direct pedagogical challenge to me as I encountered the disillusioned mindsets of graduate students, jaded from their previous distance learning experiences.

It became evident that many issues with the culture of previous distance courses, specifically IVC courses, had not been addressed. Students complained of being the “lonely-only,” feeling like passive observers and second-class citizens. Adding to the challenge of delivering instruction to multiple sites simultaneously, my students turned their microphones off so they could have side conversations during lectures, and they wandered in and out of the room at their whim as if I could not see them. This did not align with my expectations for student behavior. At first I felt annoyed with having to address etiquette in a distance learning situation. Shouldn't distance learning be about the dynamics of the learning process more than managing student behavior? My frustration led me to research the literature on distance education. I learned that new technological frameworks for learning environ-

ments require both students and instructors to adjust. Reza Hazemi and Stephen Hailes contend that students must be allowed to make choices about communicating and learning without regard to traditional organizational boundaries, distance, or time.¹⁹ I re-examined my own teaching strategies and realized that in order to have a successful class, I needed to modify the format to allow for better student engagement. I experimented with ways to create an active classroom, giving students purposeful “huddle time,” adequate time to share their thoughts with the class, and scheduled breaks.

As distance learning requirements develop and change, students also need to re-examine their expectations and become self-regulated learners. As our partnership progresses, I will continue to facilitate communication, assist students in managing their learning, and we will both need to re-examine our roles for this hybrid learning environment. Instead of wandering in and out of the room, my students now pull up their virtual chairs and enthusiastically engage in my class.

Stacy

Karen Kitchener outlines five basic principles the counseling professional should use in working with clients: Respect autonomy, do no harm, benefit others, be just, and be fair.²⁰ As a former administrator in student affairs, I take Kitchener’s principles to heart. Like most practitioners in the field, I hold this principle in highest regard: “benefit others.” My acceptance of a tenure track faculty position and my belief in this principle led me to a crossroad. For years, my time was mainly devoted to helping other people’s students through their developmental processes, and I had extreme flexibility in doing so. I held staff meetings in the evenings, worked weekends, and did what I could to be available to students. In my former position, I taught in and directed a program for students on academic probation, so unlike many of my new colleagues I was not shocked by the lack of preparedness of my students. As a tenure track professor, I was surprised that I no longer had the luxury of giving my time freely to students. To secure tenure I realized that I must become a slightly self-centered individual. My work was no longer focused solely on promoting and benefiting others, but rather on self-promotion. To earn tenure, I must publish; to publish I must write; and to write I must carve out time to do so. Carving out time to write takes away from both my teaching and the time I have to meet with students. This reallocation of time was a significant shift in both my lifestyle and my priorities.

I found this trade-off frustrating because I truly wanted to help my students grow and learn. I wanted to give them my time, but giving

them too much could be detrimental to my promotion and tenure process. Therefore, I found ways to support students more efficiently. I limited the inordinate time that I previously spent preparing for class meetings. I began to see students outside of office hours only when necessary. I reduced time spent on providing students feedback by using rubrics. Even so, I worried that I was not benefiting my students enough. It seemed I was at times only benefiting myself, and I felt badly for doing so.

I still struggle to reconcile my research time with my teaching time. I learned that in order to be successful as a professor, I need to reconsider my view of Kitchener's principles. Somewhere in all of this reflection, I realized that students *are* benefitting from my instruction because it is informed by my research. To continue offering more informed instruction, I must continue the research that also helps me meet the requirements for tenure. I now know that benefiting students depends indirectly on finding time for my research and writing. In re-examining my self-expectations, I found more efficient ways to prepare for my classes and allocate the time I give to students outside of class. By examining myself with a new lens, I have realized that I should apply Kitchner's principle of doing no harm to myself, since that will ultimately benefit students.²¹ As I grow as a professor, so too will my students grow and succeed.

Colette

As a new faculty member, I was prepared to struggle to establish my research agenda, create my courses, and not become overly involved in service or the politics of my institution. I developed my teaching style and beliefs over 14 years of working as a student affairs administrator and being the in the trenches with undergraduate students from different backgrounds. My experience taught me that communicating my expectations up front and challenging students to go beyond those expectations led them to work hard to meet my standards. I also believe that it is important for students to reflect on how *their* experiences relate to their studies. Based on my viewpoint as a higher education administrator, I was *not* prepared for my graduate students' lack of academic commitment, lack of eagerness for academic inquiry, and constant need for direction.

My department had hired several new faculty members, and students were adjusting to numerous changes, especially after years of adjunct instructors teaching courses on an irregular basis. But, was I really that far off? From my perspective in the 'good old days,' graduate students not only prepared for class, but were also expected to go above and beyond requirements stated in the syllabi.

For instance, after reviewing the students' performances on a mid-term exam, one student pointed to his low score and asked, "Why?" I

looked again at the student's answers and saw several disconnected statements of fact, as well as a failure to answer the second part of a two-part question. I explained to him that he had listed only the information he had memorized, while the test question required him to go further—to apply the concept to a new situation, develop a thesis, and construct an argument. Persisting, the student claimed he knew everything in the book, attended all lectures and spent many hours studying the material; therefore, he knew the answer to the question. I reiterated that the question required a demonstration of critical thinking skills, not just memorization. The student stormed away, convinced that my grading system was arbitrary and biased.

“Was this generation of graduate students prepared to be here?” I wondered. Through my lens, I expected a willingness to learn, adherence to the policies and procedures outlined in syllabi, and production of quality work. Faculty members expect students to apply concepts to a variety of situations; to gather, organize, analyze, and critique those concepts; and even to evaluate newly encountered theories, processes and arguments. Tasks of this nature often call for a shift in students' views of what it means to learn. To facilitate this shift, I had to examine myself as well to find ways of helping students understand the value of complex thinking and writing. It became apparent to me that I needed to re-examine my expectations of students. When a student came to visit during my office hours one day and said, “Dr. Taylor, I never had to write a research paper before your class, so how can you expect me to do one without some help?” I was shocked. It was very hard for me to wrap my head around the fact that I might be teaching underprepared graduate students. I had to reassess the abilities of the graduate students in our program. I have revamped my introductory courses. I now walk through examples of my expectations. I also started asking students questions about the syllabus and assignments throughout the semester, not just at the beginning, because many of our students do not refer back to the syllabus. Most surprisingly I realized that I needed to apply the theories I teach, related to college student development theory, to my graduate students as they are still learning and growing. My own graduate students are still developing, and it took me time to realize that they were not “fully” actualized individuals. In the end, I realized the irony of teaching student development theory, but not applying the theory to my own students.

Mary

One of my favorite aspects of working with preservice teachers is witnessing their metamorphosis from ‘college kids’ to professional edu-

caters. I watch them take on new responsibilities and develop or adapt their organizational skills and personal routines to support their new professional roles. However, in the beginning of this metamorphosis, sometimes my expectations, my student's *interpretation* of those expectations, and their self-expectations are not necessarily aligned.

As a tenure track faculty member, I felt certain I knew how to communicate my field placement expectations to my students, having taught previous methods courses as an instructor. On the first day of class as an assistant professor, my students and I discussed punctuality, professional attire, dependability, positive attitudes, initiative, work ethic, collegiality, confidentiality, good communication, and being prepared. I gave them a copy of the final evaluation form their mentor teachers would complete and a checklist I would use to evaluate their professionalism. "Is this clear to you?" I asked. They nodded in affirmation. "Are there any questions?" They shook their heads as if to say, "We're good..." They tucked the papers into their backpacks, and quickly shuffled out of the classroom, ready to test their wings as public school teachers.

Most students met or exceeded my expectations and handled the field placement with maturity. On the other hand, Nathan (pseudonym) was half an hour late on his first day in the field. He arrived to find me waiting in the school office and offered a jumbled, apologetic explanation involving a car, a cell phone, and an alarm clock. I initially took that to mean, *I don't have my act together yet*. I felt disappointed in him and annoyed. Surely he understood what I expected in terms of professionalism. Surely he was capable of manifesting this new maturity on Day One in the field, right? Maybe not. I realized that I needed to re-examine my approach to the situation. I realized that perhaps Nathan needed a little more support. We discussed concrete time management strategies for professionals, such as going to bed earlier, using a day planner, buying a new alarm clock, and accepting the fact that teachers must get to work on time.

The next morning, I learned that Nathan had been reassigned to a different mentor teacher and I worried that it was due to his tardiness on the first day or some other lack of professional behavior. I spoke with the principal and learned they had simply moved Nathan to a grade level better suited to his interests. By finding a better way to help Nathan understand his responsibilities, he developed the necessary skills and attitudes to be a professional educator. Re-examining my expectations led me to approach Nathan with patience, caring, and practical solutions. He embraced my constructive suggestions and grew as a professional. So did I.

Shirley

My doctoral studies provided me opportunities to interact with many types of graduate students: full time, part time, commuters, foreign students, older students, and younger students. My prior experiences—including over a quarter of a century teaching in public schools and the dual life I led while teaching full time and pursuing my doctoral degree—instilled in me a high sense of academic integrity and a strong work ethic. I expected that I would find graduate students at my new university with similar definitions of excellence, rigor, integrity, and achievement.

Now I know how naïve I was. I specifically believed an attitude of excellence would be visible in students' work as evidenced by class attendance, products created for class assignments, and ideas that flowed from class discussions. Transitioning from middle school teaching to university teaching, I expected the bar for student performance to be higher. Instead I found some graduate students exhibiting immature academic behaviors.

I was frustrated by my students' failure to use the American Psychological Association's (APA) format for written submissions. It seemed blasphemous to me that students would not see its importance. While students new to a degree program might initially struggle with the subtleties of APA formatting, students who are at the end of their respective programs have usually acquired competence in using it. To my horror, my students did not possess this skill. In fact, several students suggested I was wrong to include APA formatting in project grading standards and believed I should be more concerned about content than format.

Not only did students resist APA formatting requirements, but also my concerns for avoiding plagiarism fell on deaf ears. I had been faced with similar situations as a public school teacher and knew that consensus would not be likely. I felt my only option was to impose consequences as stated in my grading rubric and course syllabus.

While I was trying to assist students in developing higher standards, I had my own academic integrity and standards to maintain. I realized that I had to take a look at the reasons for this discrepancy in our expectations, and I began to ponder, "What could we infuse into the academic culture to communicate to students that writing standards are non-negotiable?" By re-examining my expectations, I realized that I need to help students understand important writing standards, specifically APA formatting and avoidance of plagiarism.

I have learned that my graduate training is part of the reason for the discrepancy between my expectations and those of my students. My doctoral classes had a strong research emphasis and we were expected to know APA. I realized that, as a new professor, I could not

assume all of my students have this proficiency, and that I must teach APA formatting more directly. The second time I taught this course, I deliberately scheduled time at the library to show my students how to locate and cite materials. We discussed plagiarism and why it needs to be addressed with students at all levels, since my students are future teachers. I scheduled a library orientation for my students with our college's librarian. This session benefited me as much as it did them. For example, I learned about the library's e-book collection and I looked at various citation tools that are readily available to students and faculty. I have since used these resources with all of my students, including those who are writing dissertations.

To prevent misunderstandings about my expectations, I now require students to visit with me in my office at the beginning of each semester, and I believe these one-on-one sessions help head off potential problems. Even if there is not an issue to address, these meetings seem to make me more approachable in students' eyes. Misunderstandings still arise occasionally, but overall my teaching has become more pleasurable and students are meeting my expectations.

Discussion

We recognize that as new faculty, we all came to the institution with individual expectations. Kate Kinsella reminds us that new faculty default to teaching as they were taught or mirror the teaching styles and methods from which they best learned.²² This default created our teaching expectations, which do not necessarily consider the needs of our diverse student population. After our initial reactions to the discrepancy between our expectations and those of our students, we learned it was necessary to re-examine our teaching and share responsibility for student success. We also recognized some common themes in our experiences related to time, change, and academic justice.

Time

Several of the accounts above are related by the common thread of time-related concerns. They include references to the use of limited time by both faculty and students. Concerns were expressed in a number of ways.

Stephanie refers to the many hours she spent developing her course syllabus, only to receive frustrating messages from students who would have found answers to their questions in the syllabus if they had only looked there and taken it seriously. Stacy struggled to balance her teaching time with her research time, feeling as though she could no longer give freely of her time to students in order to carve out enough time to

write, publish, and position herself for tenure. This struggle to balance one's professional time in academe is well-known to junior faculty.

As we have come to understand more clearly, students have time constraints just as we do. They must often balance their studies with jobs and family responsibilities. Stephanie remembered her students saying, "I am taking nine hours and working full time; this sure seems like a lot of work to do. Do you really expect us to log into our course more than once a week?" Although this might seem like an irresponsible question, it does highlight the fact that they have busy lives, too, and often need strategies for coordinating their activities. Mary's student experienced difficulty in managing his time at first, allowing life's minor challenges to disrupt his punctual arrival at his field placement school. Students' time in class also needs to be considered in making pedagogical decisions. Fernando found that his students needed "huddle time" during his IVC course, to balance the amount of time they were expected to spend listening quietly. Shirley found that she could prevent many challenges in the classroom by setting aside instructional time for an orientation session at the library. She also now schedules time for individual student consultations at the beginning of each semester. Both pedagogical strategies have solved what were once problems.

The authors acknowledge that it took time to realize the source of their initial challenges and frustrations and it required a time investment to resolve them. Through this gradual process of growing and changing, they each found ways to provide for their students' needs while balancing multiple demands on their own professional time.

Change

The topic of change permeates the narratives above. At first, the rigidity of our expectations led to dismay and disillusionment. However, we quickly realized that if we expected our students to change, we had to be willing to change, too.

Our accounts demonstrate that we initially resisted changing our expectations of students. We were at first paralyzed by a sense of shock and disappointment in their performance. But in the end, our expectations changed in ways that were unique to each of our situations. Understanding that we could experience more growth if we embraced the challenges and looked deeply within, we learned to rethink our initial expectations and be open to changing our focus from one of inflexible demands to one of accommodating needs.

Our students changed, too. Many of them came to us from a constrained K-12 paradigm of managed curricula and a disproportionate amount of test preparation instead of the cultivation of inquiry, critical

thinking, and academic responsibility. They were not prepared for the expectations we held for them, but because we created supportive, collaborative learning spaces, our students matured as learners and began to take on the responsibilities we handed them.

Change also occurred in our pedagogy. With the availability of a variety of technology tools, we must adapt our teaching strategies to use them successfully. Fernando had to rethink his ways of teaching in an IVC classroom. He found that without a professor who is passionate enough about his teaching to make necessary changes in pedagogy, these tools will not enhance learning and might even get in the way of it. Shirley made changes in the way she prepared students for effective research and proper citation of sources. Stephanie relaxed her policy about late papers. Mary provided extra counseling and practical suggestions for demonstrating professionalism and responsibility. Colette applied developmental theory to the way she taught her graduate students. These changes narrowed the gap between our expectations and those of our students.

Human behavior is resistant to change, and this certainly applies to educators and their students. But when engrained habits of behavior (and habits of mind) and conflicting expectations impede learning, who will end the stalemate? It is up to us, the professors, to remedy the situation and to create conditions for student success, create academic justice. We had to confess to ourselves that we had perhaps established expectations that were out of our students' reach, for one reason or another. We had to take the first step in behavioral change, but both faculty and students must ultimately move toward the middle ground for a situation to shift significantly. It requires getting in sync with each other's thoughts, expectations, and actions. This is similar to the synchronization required of relay racers to pass a baton. They must have a common goal. They must match each other's pace. They must be attentive. They must coordinate their movements. This takes much practice, and learning to synchronize with our students takes practice too. And it required changing our behaviors.

Academic Justice

While the phrase 'academic justice' does not appear in the narratives above, it emerged as a concept while discussing our narratives with each other. Recognizing the importance of this theme, we coined the term. Academic justice is recognizing students' individual intellectual and cultural capital, and scaffolding their knowledge and skills with available resources to give them equal opportunities for success. In other words, rather than view students through a deficit lens and

as a product of our growth as faculty, we began to view each student as coming from a place of value and honored that value while working with the student to move her or him toward academic success. In our narratives, several themes emerged that demonstrated our move to an academic justice lens.

First, many of us began to recognize and meet student needs. Stephanie demonstrated this idea when she realized that her students' issues were likely due to inadequate time management and under-developed abilities to balance work, family, and school, rather than a lack of academic ability. Colette reassessed the abilities of her graduate students and revamped her introductory courses to scaffold their writing of research papers.

Second, many of us took the time to recognize student strengths and build on them. Mary learned that taking the time to talk with a well-intentioned student and approach critical tasks through his viewpoint helped her find a better way to help him understand his responsibilities. As a result, the student stepped up to the role of a professional educator. Fernando viewed his IVC classroom through his students' eyes and realized that it was not engaging his students enough. After re-examining his teaching strategies, he modified the class format to allow for greater student engagement and opportunities to talk about course content with each other. Acknowledging the importance of student input, he created academic justice.

Third, several of us expected students to understand things we felt were basic to our field, and when they did not we were surprised and discouraged. However, after reflection we began doing what a good teachers do—scaffolding students for understanding. Shirley demonstrated this idea when she realized that she must teach APA formatting more directly and schedule time at the library for students to learn how to locate and cite materials. She reports that the orientation provided by the college's librarian benefited her as much as her students.

Finally, all of us had to be willing to change our thinking in order to enact academic justice. Mary demonstrated this idea when she stated that re-examining her expectations led her to approach a student with patience, caring, and practical solutions. In response, he embraced her constructive suggestions and grew as a professional. Stephanie's comments also illustrate a move toward academic justice. Understanding that students have busy lives too, she was able to recognize the distinction between a merely late paper and a low-quality one and allowed more flexibility in her late policy. She then considered how this realization might apply to all aspects of her teaching and decided to be more accommodating. As an unexpected benefit, she found that this lowered her own stress in teaching.

Our initial responses to each of our situations were clearly emotional. We were shocked, disappointed, frustrated, disillusioned, annoyed, and even indignant. Why did we respond in that way? What was at stake? Our standards? Our reputations? Our sense of efficacy as professors? Our futures? Our pride? Did we feel a need to “stake a claim” and “stand our ground?” Something deep inside was causing these exaggerated responses; something that we needed to examine more closely. Stengel suggests that new professionals must be ready and willing to exhibit “fitting responses” to challenging situations such as ours.²³ Stengel qualifies this by pointing out that these responses are sometimes wrong, but wrong in a *useful way*.²⁴ Indeed, we learn from our mistakes. But according to Stengel, new educators must “have the courage to act forthrightly, knowing both that success is not guaranteed and that what counts as success may be a shifting target.”²⁵ Acknowledging our negative emotions and taking the time to examine them more closely will hopefully lead us closer to that moving target of success.

How did we mature through this self-examination to see our situations differently? After our first two years of teaching and ongoing self-reflection, it has become obvious that our initial reactions stemmed from a variety of concerns, such as feeling a loss of control when students disregarded our instructions and arrived late or left the room in the middle of a lecture. We have realized that by gaining maturity and confidence as teachers, we learn to more effectively convey our reasons for our instructions, adjust our strategies, show students how to meet our expectations while we strive to meet theirs, balance our multiple responsibilities, and help our students mature and develop more appropriate perspectives, expectations, and performances.

Many of our initial academic expectations of students were viewed through the lens of our previous experiences, while students were seeing things differently. We discovered that while adjusting ourselves we must also learn to understand our students’ thinking. We believe that today’s faculty should center their efforts on teaching and communication methods that resonate with today’s students. We also believe that today’s faculty should re-examine and re-evaluate differing perspectives in order to become more effective teachers. When we engage in self-examination and redefinition, we adjust the mind-sets that have previously impeded our ability to provide academic justice to our students. In turn, students are enabled to change their habits of mind as well.

We do not live in the aforementioned perfect world described by Garrett.²⁶ Many of our students come to us with a need for guidance and academic growth of which they may not be aware. They might not understand our expectations, and our initial expectations might oppose

theirs. Time constraints lead to very real tensions between offering our best to our students and preparing for our bids for tenure. However, Palmer argues that we should not dismiss this tension, but fully experience the contradictions with sometimes painful awareness of the “polarity” of our professional lives.²⁷ Uncomfortable as it may seem, this can lead to growth.

We have learned that understanding these situations does not occur naturally or automatically; it happens as result of a conscious, focused effort to examine oneself and change one’s practice. Ignoring the need to change could cause us to forget that all of our students are capable and deserve our best teaching. Too often ignoring these needs lead to student attrition. Today’s faculty must make a determined effort to re-examine and clarify expectations, support students, balance time productively between students and research agendas, and retool pedagogical skills. Faculty who make these courageous efforts can bring students’ academic expectations into better alignment with their own, promote success, and better understand the emotional responses that are often experienced at the beginning of a teaching career. We can look inside, remind ourselves of what we already know about student needs and best teaching practices, and transform ourselves from dismayed, judgmental professors to successful communicators and student advocates. If we teach mindfully and are honest with ourselves, we can create academic justice and promote student retention.

Notes

¹ Alice Pitt, “On Having One’s Chance: Autonomy as Education’s Limit,” *Educational Theory*, 60 (2010), pp. 1-18.

² Daniel P. Liston, “Contemplating Teaching’s Conflicts and Paradoxes,” *Educational Theory*, 60 (2010), pp. 29-38.

³ Parker J. Palmer, Author Zajonc, & Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), p. 153.

⁴ Ellen Langer, *The Power of Mindful Learning* (New York: Addison-Wesley), p. 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷ See also Robert Boice, *The New Faculty Member: Supporting and Fostering Professional Development*; Mary Sorcinelli & Ann Austin, “Developing New and Junior Faculty” in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*; and Eugene Rice, Mary Sorcinelli, & Ann Austin, “Heeding New Voices: Academic Careers for New Generation” in *New Pathways Inquiry*.

⁸ Paul Garrett, “913. Student Motivation: Problem Solved?” Tomorrow’s Professor Blog. January 13, 2009, <http://tomprofblog.mit.edu/2009/01/13/913-student-motivation-problem-solved/#more-320>

⁹ Todd Dinkelman, "Self-Study In Teacher Education A Means And Ends Tool For Promoting Reflective Teaching," *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(1) (2003), p. 56.

¹⁰ Mary Hamilton & others (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-study in Teacher Education* (London, UK: Falmer Press, 1998).

¹¹ John Loughran, *International Handbook of Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2004).

¹² John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916).

¹³ Dinkelman, "Self-Study in Teacher Education: A Means and Ends Tool for Promoting Reflective Teaching."

¹⁴ John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1933).

¹⁵ Dinkelman, "Self-Study in Teacher Education a Means and Ends Tool for Promoting Reflective Teaching," p. 60.

¹⁶ Mary Hamilton & others (Eds.), *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-study in Teacher Education*.

¹⁷ Sonia Nieto & Patty Bode. *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. 5th Edition (New York: Allyn & Bacon Publishers, 2008).

¹⁸ Kyong-Jee Kim & Curtis Bonk, "The Future of Online Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: The Survey Says...," *Educause Quarterly*, 4 (2006), pp. 22-30.

¹⁹ Reza Hazemi & Stephen Hailes (Eds.), *The Digital University: Building a Learning Community The Digital University: Building a Learning Community* (New York: Springer-Verlag Inc., 2001).

²⁰ Karen Kitchener, *Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2000).

²¹ Karen Kitchener, *Foundations of Ethical Practice, Research, and Teaching in Psychology*.

²² Kate Kinsella, "Peer Coaching Teaching: Colleagues Supporting Professional Growth Across the Disciplines," in *To Improve the Academy*, Ed Neal & Laurie Richli (Eds.). (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 1995).

²³ Barbara S. Stengel, "Autonomy or Responsibility?" *Educational Theory*, 60 (2010), pp. 19-28.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 19-28.

²⁶ Paul Garrett, "913. Student Motivation: Problem Solved?"

²⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1980)