The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Mississippi became a reality in February 2007. Created by Provost Carolyn Staton at the behest of a task force report, the Center is housed on the first floor of Somerville Hall. At the current time, the Center is staffed by Johnny W. Lott, Director, and Ms. Terry Russell, as the administrative assistant.

Dr. Lott came to the University of Mississippi from a similar position at the University of Montana, but he has spent most of his career in mathematics and mathematics education, teaching from sixth grade through the university. Additionally, he served as President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the largest mathematics organization in the world with over 100,000 members. Dr. Lott’s interest in teaching and learning dates back to undergraduate school at Union University in Tennessee and to graduate programs at Emory University and Georgia State University. From his early days working at the secondary level in DeKalb County and the Westminster Schools in Georgia, to the university and teaching in an Alaskan fishing village later, he had a passion for teaching and learning. He strongly believes that we as faculty have a responsibility to our students to understand how they learn and to use their tools and contexts as we strive to teach them.

In the Center at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Lott will help faculty as they consider teaching with different tools from those with which they may be most familiar and with ever-changing curriculum across virtually all disciplines. He believes that students who live and learn with cell phones, Ipods, wikis, and blogs are like many of their faculty members, but we, as faculty, must learn how to use these tools for effective teaching.

With a widely diverse Advisory Board helping the Center, a web site located at www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl, and The Mantle as the Center’s newsletter, Dr. Lott hopes to be able to reach all who are teaching at UM. More ways to reach and help faculty through the Center include the following: observations of teaching, evaluation of syllabi and grading rubrics, hosting the Faculty Development Luncheons provided by the Provost, conducting orientation sessions and establishing a collegiate teaching “certification” program. All faculty are invited to visit the Center in Somerville.

Call 662-915-1391 or email jlott@olemiss.edu for an appointment.

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Featured Faculty: David Willson  
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David Willson
CEO of the Classroom and the Pride of the South Band

David Willson would not likely have been singled out at an early age to be a teacher, an outstanding teacher, or an outstanding teacher at the University of Mississippi. But he is exactly that. The 2007 winner of the Elsie M. Hood Outstanding Teacher Award, Willson grew up in a single-parent home where criticism was used more often than praise. He describes the defining moments of his life as coming from teachers. One, he recalls was from a ninth grade English teacher here in Mississippi. This particular teacher announced that “you can get what's in this subject if you want to, but if you don’t want to, that's fine with me.” This same teacher ridiculed Mr. Willson in class over his family background, taught with “Here's a chapter; answer the questions at the end,” and made a never-to-be-forgotten impression on a young student. Perhaps it is fair to say that this teacher, by negative behavior, influenced Mr. Willson enough that his eventual goal as a teacher became telling students, “I won't give up on you. If you won't quit trying. I will not let you fail and you ARE going to get this if it takes going over it 100 more times.” He claims that students won't give up if you encourage them to flourish. And encouraging students to flourish is what Mr. Willson does. A second teacher influencer was Ollie Williams, a former band director at the University of Mississippi.

One former student and current band director in Germantown, Tennessee, Jill Ward, wrote “He [Willson] was and is a mentor, role model, father figure, and one of the most successful music educators I have ever known. Professor Willson was always prepared, kind/personal, but very demanding. His caring made me want to do all I could to please him.” So how did Mr. Willson reach this degree of success?

It is safe to say that David Willson has a passion for his work and more than that, he has a passion and love for encouraging students to succeed. He is a teacher who is willing to meet students where they are, who is willing to let them giggle and play for a short time before setting out the expectations for what they must do to succeed. He learns about what makes them tick, what they respond to in the way of praise and never fails to let them know what is expected if the praise is to continue. He describes a good lesson as one in which he changes what is going on in class about every seven minutes. The use of an outrageous joke or personal motivation is not out of the ordinary in his classes. And neither is a heart-to-heart talk outside of class about what a student needs to do to improve. He does not give vague generalities on what needs improving but gives specifics, even down to the finest detail. It is only by knowing his 250 students in the Pride of the South Band that he can do this. He uses passion and motivation to push students to be more than they thought that they could be. He is driven by his work and by the desire to help his students succeed.

By the beginning of each class, Mr. Willson has planned in detail what might happen. In the class, he tells students his goals of the day. And he sticks to the plan to try and reach those goals. He doesn’t always have success, but he has more success than failures. His use of humor and personal motivation has led him to be described as a cross-eyed discus thrower. The thrower may not set any records, but he keeps the crowd alert. Similarly, Mr. Willson's students may or
Teaching Tips

Two common student complaints about teachers are that (1) my teacher had no idea who I was and (2) my teacher was oblivious to the class and whether students understood what was being discussed. What are ways to help alleviate these complaints?

1. **Who are you?** As a faculty member, you meet many students every year. At the beginning of a class, ask students to sit in the same seats for two weeks while you practice the following:
   - **Be interested in who the students are.**
   - **Verify their names by calling on them, using a seating chart or whatever you need to make an association with a seat and an individual.**
   - **Picture it written on their forehead.** An old saw pictured an audience as being nude to make a speaker less nervous. You don’t have to go there to think about students with names written on their foreheads. OR have them place name tents in front of them.
   - **Imagine writing the name.** Don’t just imagine it; note the name on a grid as you call on people.
   - **Use word association.** This common technique could be problematic with some names. Use it wisely.
   - **Use it frequently.** CALL on students by name to ask questions.
   - **Record the name on a roll, on a card file, and in your mind.**
   

2. **Do you know what your students are thinking?** Knowing what students know is not an easy task for any teacher. One technique to practice is to ask questions of specific students. The questions should not be simply yes-or-no questions, should require some analysis or synthesis of material under discussion and should be answered by students and not you. The following paper points to some issues of knowing: http://bearcenter.berkeley.edu/measurement/docs/Pellegrino_1_1.pdf.

Thinking Resources

Shapiro, Howard N. “Promotion & Tenure & the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning,” *Change* 38 (March/April, 2006): 38-43.

Shapiro suggests changes in the promotion and tenure systems of colleges and universities to promote teaching and learning.


Article suggests using “open source” resources and tools to make education more widely available.
may not set records, but he does keep them alert. He says, “Distraction from the goals is a distraction from the team effort and leads to disciplinary measures. And yes, those are sometimes needed even with college students.” A measure of his success is that the band rarely loses more than 1% of its members in any given year—a truly remarkable trait.

Professor Willson describes himself as the CEO of the classroom. In this role, he (1) sets a safe atmosphere that makes students comfortable and open to new ideas, (2) provides the tools that they need to succeed, and (3) teaches them what they need to know to perform what is asked of them. He describes his preparation for teaching here as having been heavily influenced by his work as a classroom teacher in public schools and discuss-es the need for University of Mississippi colleagues to know some of the same techniques and strategies that were used in those schools. Many professors graduate and immediately start teaching at the university level without teaching techniques, strategies, and classroom management skills. They need an opportunity to be given those tools at the University level, else they will have many hur-dles to overcome towards being a successful teacher. Else they may not be successful teachers. Professor Willson is a role model for all as the 2007 Elsie M. Hood Award winner. He leads by example.