Sheri Rieth: Hard Work Will Become Your Work Ethic!

From the great plains of the extreme northwest corner of Kansas, to the red hills of Mississippi, Sheri Fleck Rieth has made an impression in the field of art, and on the students that she teaches.

Rieth received the Liberal Arts Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award for 2007. Her connection with art in interdisciplinary settings influenced her teaching as did some early teachers. In school Rieth was taught the importance of reading by Judith Gull; mathematics, history and geography by Virgil Baumfalk. English and literature taught by Catherine Swearingen reinforced the importance of language and language use that Rieth learned from her mother at home.

Rieth reflects on the patience, the laughter and the honesty of these early teachers.

Rieth discovered her passion for printmaking in the classes of John Talleur, at The University of Kansas, and continued with Dolph Smith, Fred Burton and Tom Lee as outstanding art teachers. Rieth describes Lee as “the sweetest nasty man I ever met. He once pulled my work off the wall during a critique and said that I should never make work like that again. It was too easy. He wanted me to learn to think and to challenge myself.” She relates that all her excellent teachers told students when they needed to repair and re-think work.

“Students were not told that they had failed; neither were they left with that feeling of failure. Successful works and areas of works were always pointed out and praised, and specific examples of ways to improve work were offered. Projects could be improved and turned in for, possibly, a better grade. These teachers were honest and encouraging when talking to students about projects and ideas, letting them know that success could come with time and work.”

Rieth’s teaching efforts began as a child teaching neighborhood pre-school children to read and later as informal teaching with children’s art classes and her own two children. It continued with work in the psychology department at Indiana University, with the Puck Players Puppet Theatre in Indiana, and at Vanderbilt University on a children’s early language research project. Now Rieth’s sons, Loren and Herb, follow in mom’s footsteps as teachers. Sheri has exhibited with Herb, an art professor at Mississippi State University.

Rieth discusses skills and qualities she feels make a good teacher. “First and foremost, a teacher must have patience. Don’t make learning a scavenger hunt. Tell students what you seek as their teacher, show them how to do it, teach them how to think, encourage the application of what they know, encourage them to apply their own interests to projects, and put theory to work in practice.” For example, in her book arts class Rieth lets students know that they must learn to create content in their book projects using both text and images. The content is based, with few restrictions, on student interest. Images used and text produced have to tell a compelling story about the content.

At the beginning of a class, Rieth tells her students, “I will work you really hard. Hard work may not be your work ethic

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Building Teaching Commons at the University of Mississippi

In Change Magazine, Huber and Hutchings (2006) discuss building teaching commons, “a conceptual space in which communities of educators committed to pedagogical inquiry and innovation come together to exchange ideas about teaching and learning and use them to meet the challenges of preparing students for personal, professional, and civic life” (p. 26). Has the time come for the University of Mississippi to develop such a shared conceptual space? To consider such a development, one needs to think about the pros and cons of the needed commitment.

Pros of Building Teaching Commons

1. Teaching is an integral part of the basic mission of the University. Faculty members need time and resources to do research in the scholarship of pedagogy and to discuss their research in open forums.

2. Faculty members are increasingly challenged by a diverse student population with different educational goals, socio-economic backgrounds, mores, work habits, and learning styles. As a result, faculty members must do active and personal research to determine good ways to reach these students to improve their learning while improving teaching. This research needs to be recognized and shared with others.

3. Becoming more proactive in the area of teaching and learning and sharing what is discovered opens new avenues of dialogues to faculty members everywhere. Examples of different fields involved in teaching experiences are seen in literature in physics, mathematics, political science, and other fields. The International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL), founded in 2004 at Indiana University, welcomes the organization of interest groups of 10 or more ISSOTL members who share interests such as discipline, pedagogy under study, nationality, region of residence, educational status, and institutional type (see www.issotl.org/get_involved.html).

4. A teaching common would allow faculty to explore whether the contextualized setting for one teaching strategy or bit of research is generalizable to other settings and other contexts. Setting and context have tremendous influences in education and educational research. With a faculty talking together, much can be learned about what might work in general on campus and what might only work in some situations. A basic question is always whether what is being discussed will work in “my” classes.

5. Technology engulfs today’s students outside the classroom. Open discussions of faculty could lead to a better understanding of how the university might tap into the technological world of today’s students for improved learning.

Cons of Building Teaching Commons

1. Effort in building a community through teaching commons is time consuming in an era when faculty members have limited time. The introduction of teaching commons would not automatically require more preparation than faculty members should already be making for their classes. However, if successful, it would require that they share and discuss what they are doing and finding.

2. Depending on the level of involvement and interest, use of an electronic toolkit such as the Carnegie’s Knowledge Media Laboratory (see www.carnegiefoundation.org/KML/Keep/index.htm) could require faculty to develop new skills. Developing new and different skills and thought models for teaching could push faculty members out of their comfort zones.

3. Departments could have to begin having conversations about critical learning issues. This could mean more meetings or using a part of normal faculty meetings for discussion about teaching issues.

4. When work is shared in a commons, faculty members may not always acknowledge others’ work on a subject or topic. [This issue is presented in the Change article.]

5. Building a working commons will take not only time, but energy and money.

If you are interested in forming a teaching commons with a local group, please send an email to tlcenter@olemiss.edu. If there is enough interest, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning will plan and coordinate an initial group meeting.

REFERENCES
Carnegie’s Knowledge Media Laboratory
www.carnegiefoundation.org/KML/Keep/index.htm
International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
www.issotl.org/get_involved.html
Teaching Tips: Examples of Evidence-Based Education

The Advisory Board of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning requested that “Teaching Tips” include examples of evidenced-based education. Discussion of the term and one example is given here. The Center invites you to submit good examples of evidenced-based education in your field for future publication. (Send articles or references to tlcenter@olemiss.edu.)

“Evidenced-based education” was a jargon term of British educationalists (see www.worldwidewords.org/turnsofphrase/tp-evi1.htm). It had its roots in the field of medicine and is still prominent in that literature. However, for the past few years, the term has been used by Whitehurst, Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, to mean “the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction” (see www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/presentations/evidencebase.html). Whitehurst and the Department of Education used the term to suggest major changes in the pre-collegiate education of students.

The article “What is evidence-base education?” by Davies (1999) calls for education to be more based on evidence and calls for high-quality systematic reviews and appraisals of educational research. Venter, Director of the Human Genome Decoder, wrote, “I am optimistic (and hopeful) that one of the key tenets of scientific investigation, “evidenced-based decision making” will be extended to all aspects of modern society. …We need to push harder for an education system that teaches evidence-based decision making while we hold our public leaders to a higher standard and less partisan behavior as we attempt to tackle some of the historically most difficult challenges facing the future of humanity.”

In the vein of Venter, evidence-based education is gaining acceptance in fields other than medicine at the university level. Howard and others (2007) state that adoption of pedagogical methods on a large scale in social work could improve social work practice. They ask that faculty be trained in methods of evidenced-based practice, suggest that a committee be established to track and implement demonstrably effective instructional innovations, that continuing education courses be provided to promote scientifically supported practices and that a course devoted to the described teaching methods of such practices be established. Additionally it is recommended that faculty members be rewarded for using the pedagogical skills in a superior manner, emphasize specialty practice education to an unprecedented degree, and test for competence in specialty practice areas.

REFERENCES


Thinking Resources


The article discusses podcasting and some of the ways that it is being used in universities. With podcasting now available on the University of Mississippi campus, this article gives a light introduction.


Many of the thirty things are common sense notions about adult learning, but there are some gems in the mix.
Sheri Rieth continued from Front Cover

when we start, but hopefully, it will be by the end. You may have come to the University of Mississippi from schools without enough teachers, from schools where the teachers don't have enough time to give you individual attention, and you may not know how to read and write well but we will bring you up to speed.” Further she says, “If I believe in them [the students] though they may be very different in thoughts and feelings from me, they will get an education here.”

Rieth’s other tips for good teaching include the following:

• Keep all content interesting—to you and the students.
• Be patient! Listen.
• Don’t teach unless you really want to teach and you have the time to give students.

Rieth clearly exhibits a desire to teach, patience and a willingness to spend time with students. She lives her desire to make content interesting. She too might pull a student's work off a wall during a critique, and tell them not to do it again if she knew that they could do better and were willing to work to improve it. Would you do that?

Provost’s Luncheon
Faculty Professional Development Fall Semester Sessions

October 16: Drs. Ken Sufka and Kelly Wilson, Department of Psychology, Don’t Make Me Shoot Your Momma: A Wise Guy’s Guide to Academic Success

November 7: Dr. Tamara Goulet, Department of Biology, Pedagogical Applications of Clickers

For more information, email tlcenter@olemiss.edu.

Book Reviews

*The Mantle* would like to publish very brief reviews (3-4 sentences) as teasers for books or articles of interest about teaching. A complete review will be published online at [www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/cetl), the Center’s website. We invite submissions from faculty or a list of recommended books that could be reviewed. Please email any information to tlcenter@olemiss.edu.

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