Carolyn Ellis Staton has been and is a strong advocate for excellence in teaching and learning at The University of Mississippi. As Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at The University of Mississippi, she initiated informal coffees with faculty to seek input about the academic mission of the University and opportunities to improve teaching. A faculty task force she appointed led to the creation of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning now in Somerville Hall serving all teaching faculty who wish to enhance their instructional methods and create learning strategies for greater student achievement. Professional development luncheons were also initiated to inform and refresh the instructional methods of faculty and graduate instructors across campus.

Teaching has been a passion for Staton. She is strong in her belief that a focus on teaching goes hand in hand with a focus on student learning.

At a small Catholic high school in Vicksburg, Staton had two energetic and passionate English teachers, leading to her choice to major in English at Tulane. However, her best college teacher was Dr. Robert Preston, music professor. His “wonderful and electrifying” Introduction to Opera course began as a simple fulfillment of a fine arts requirement but she says, “It was impossible not to be ignited by this professor.” He opened the world of opera and instilled in her a lasting love of it. This type of teaching with its wonder and electricity is crucial for today. While content is important, a teacher’s energy and passion opens new worlds to students, engaging them in active learning that stays with them for life. In other words, “undergraduate teachers need to touch their students educationally and to connect with them in multiple ways to transmit knowledge.”

Staton believes that the student audience has changed and that teachers can no longer simply rely on lecturing with old notes. Students need, expect, and demand more; their learning styles have evolved beyond listening passively to lectures, making it necessary for faculty members to evolve their teaching styles and to create interactive classrooms. “We must get students engaged in their own learning in an active way.”

Staton says, “Though not necessarily a popular notion to some academics, specific content may be less important than having the students involved in the content of a course.” Involving students in their own education is a key to unlocking significant learning. And involving students in their own education needs to happen both in the classes taken for their majors as well as courses taken to satisfy Student Engagement: A Key to Effective Teaching
A Student Record Primer
by Susan Mossing

Given that the end of the semester is upon us, it is an appropriate time to consider the question of what to do with student records. This article discusses the storage of grade-related materials and includes practical suggestions from officials from the office of the Registrar, Provost, Dean of Liberal Arts, University Attorney, and Faculty Development and Technology Center. To view these and other policies in their entirety, visit https://secure4.olemiss.edu/umpolicyopen/index.jsp.

Twice every semester, instructors calculate and report student grades on myOleMiss. Once final grades are submitted, the gradebook generally is no longer needed. However, occasionally students do not believe the submitted grade is accurate. A student’s right to question a grade is a primary reason for faculty or departments to keep grade-related materials. The policy guiding the maintenance of grade-related materials and the grade appeal process is given below.

Policy Code ACA.AR.600.002: Academic Grade Appeal Procedure
As part of the University’s grade-appeal procedure, faculty members are required to keep grade-related materials until the completion of the next regular (spring or fall) semester. Material that applies to an ongoing grade-appeal process must be retained for six months following completion of the grade-appeal process. In this section, “grade-related material” refers to examinations, projects, term papers, records on grades, attendance records, and other material that is used in the grading process and is not returned to the student. If materials are returned to the student, a student desiring to appeal must present any tests, examinations, term papers, or other graded material that form the basis for his or her appeal.

As the instructor of record for a course, students should contact you within 30 calendar days to initiate a grade appeal process. The protocol for subsequent appeals, if students are not satisfied with an instructor’s decision, is also included in this policy.

The student’s request for a grade appeal may be taken successively to the professor, the chair of the department in which the grade was given, and the dean of the school or college to which the department belongs, with a possible resolution of the conflict at any stage. Either the student or the professor may appeal a decision made at the dean’s level by making a written request for a review by an Academic Appeals Committee.

The policy dictates that faculty keep grade-related materials “until completion of the next regular (spring or fall) semester,” conventionally interpreted as one year. Furthermore, it is helpful to keep these records for longer than one year for reasons beyond grade appeals.

Instructors Who Leave The University
Because grade-related materials must be reviewed with appealed grades, instructors who leave the University should deposit these materials with the appropriate department. Not having access to grade-related materials creates a hardship for everyone. According to Holly Reynolds, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts, “It is good practice that when visiting faculty, adjunct instructors, and graduate instructors leave the University, they give department chairpersons their gradebooks and any remaining graded materials not returned to students.”

Administrative Withdrawal
Sometimes students register for classes but either don’t show up or stop attending. Faculty members should notify their department when this happens. Faculty should also direct students to the Registrar’s office to drop or withdraw from courses in the proper manner. Once the semester has ended, students’ only recourse is to petition for an administrative withdrawal. Such petitions are considered only if initiated within one year and absences are the result of documented medical problems. When such a petition is initiated, the Registrar’s office contacts the instructor of record to ascertain the student’s last date of attendance. If students are granted an administrative withdrawal, instructors are notified and allowed to submit a change-of-grade form at their discretion.

Letters of Recommendation
Students applying for professional schools, internships, scholarships, or positions after graduation naturally turn to teachers for needed letters of recommendation. Access to students’ grades (and samples of their work) can be very helpful when writing those letters.

Electronic Recordkeeping (Blackboard and Angel)
Many instructors use Blackboard or Angel to manage grades. However, teachers should always keep backup copies of the records. In addition to guarding against the loss of computerized information, having a backup copy allows access to grades without access to the network.

At the end of the semester, teachers should always download a final copy of their gradebook. “Old” courses with the accompanying gradebooks typically stay accessible on Blackboard. However with the December 2007 Blackboard upgrade, instructors lost access to old gradebooks. And even with accessible gradebooks, students’ individual gradebook records disappear as they graduate and leave the University.

Privacy Issues
Finally, it is important to be mindful of student privacy issues when considering student records. The policy governing access to student records impacts both the storage of grade-related materials and their release or disposal.
Teaching Resources

Many universities across the country are becoming increasingly concerned about what is being called “the lost sophomore year.” Check out this link for an article on this topic: www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/01/31/secondyear.

The April Provost Professional Development Luncheon led by Mr. Benjamin Deaton discussed online learning. Check out the statistics on the growth of online learning at the following site: www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/10/23/sloan.

College assessments have come under scrutiny in recent months. Consider the following informational website: www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/01/31/aacu.

Save the dates!
Planned dates for the 2008-09 Provost Professional Development Luncheons are the following:
September 3, October 14, November 5, December 3, February 3, March 11, and April 14.

Teaching Tips

Read the following on blogging for reflective journaling in a class:

Dr. Janet Rankin, Associate Director of MIT’s Teaching and Learning Laboratory, created the Facilitating Effective Research (FER) Program, a resource for graduate mentors at MIT. For a brief article about how Dr. Rankin uses graduate students to mentor undergraduate students to aid the learning of both, see http://web.mit.edu/UROP/newsletter/fer.html.

Policy Code ACA.AR.700.001: Access to Student’s Records
The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA or the Buckley Amendment) is a federal law which governs access to the students’ education records. This law grants students guaranteed access to their educational records; such access includes the right to inspect and review educational records, the right to obtain copies of the records (a copying fee may be charged), and the right to challenge or supplement information on file in order to prevent flawed interpretation. Certain records (i.e., medical records) are not deemed to be educational records and are therefore not accessible to students. Additionally, the Buckley Amendment prohibits the disclosure of “personally identifiable information” to third parties without the prior written consent of the student. Exceptions may be made only for University officials and others with legitimate educational interests…. If you have questions about the law or want more information, please contact the Office of the Registrar at (662) 915-7226.

Students have the right to see their educational records, and faculty members are obliged to protect their privacy. When the appropriate time has elapsed, student records no longer needed may be discarded. To dispose of a record, instructors must remove any identifying information from each page or shred the record.

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News Flash: Announcement of Graduate Instructor Teaching Award for 2008

Mr. Ryan Bubalo, graduate student in the Department of English, will be presented with the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Graduate Instructor Teaching Award for 2008. The date of the presentation has not been announced but look for the award plaque that will be in the J. D. Williams Library.
general education requirements. Though our classes are basically heterogeneous, students in those classes have widely varying learning styles. As faculty members, we need to adapt to the diversity in our classroom and be creative in devising appropriate learning experiences for all students. At a comprehensive university, we should be able to be “many things to many students.”

To develop a more interactive classroom environment, Staton challenges faculty to integrate teaching, research and service with students’ learning. While integrating these areas with student learning requires additional time and preparation, our technologically advanced society and the students’ abilities afford us the opportunity to be creative in that integration. Starting in this direction may require faculty members to begin with only two areas such as teaching and service, or teaching and research, but it is important that we start, according to Staton. “We have an opportunity to reach students and students have an opportunity to reach the community if we think carefully about how to do this.” Many small colleges have shown that this integration can be done, as have several of our own faculty members at the University. “It is with smaller groups of majors that departments and faculty members may be able to address such integration most effectively.”

A general goal of education is to facilitate learning so that students’ lives are personally enriched and students are prepared for a world beyond campus borders. Our challenge is to take general education classes and translate them into learning experiences that ignite students’ lives in a manner similar to that of Dr. Preston in the opera course. Such a challenge is not trivial and requires us as a community of learners to stay mindful of what we are doing and how it is working. One of our challenges is the many students coming to The University of Mississippi with limited pre-collegiate experiences. “We can introduce topics and concepts for them to consider that can enrich their lives and make a substantial difference as we open new pathways to them,” says Staton. But we have to work at it. The value and purpose of education differ for each student. Some students, like the faculty, learn for the sake of learning. Far more of them and their parents have a more practical view of education. “We have an obligation to work on both aspects of learning.”

Dr. Carolyn Staton has been instrumental in effecting change at The University of Mississippi. She, like Dr. Preston, has been electrifying and has been able to ignite faculty. Her commitment to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning on campus has been tireless. On behalf of the University of Mississippi community, we salute her.