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Faculty Virtues and Character Strengths

Reflective Exercises for Sustained Renewal

Thomas V. McGovern
To Patricia Pausha McGovern
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtue Ethics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtues and Character Strengths</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the Reflective Exercises</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Map of the Four Modules</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Processes for the Exercises</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module One: Core Virtues</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining an Ideal Teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socratic Images of an Ideal Teacher</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Six Virtues Defined and Applied to Teaching</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing the Core Virtues via the Character Strengths</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtues and Character Strengths for Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Two: Thinking About Learning</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISDOM &amp; KNOWLEDGE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Five Character Strengths of WISDOM &amp; KNOWLEDGE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Strengths of WISDOM &amp; KNOWLEDGE: Syllabus Exercise I</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity &amp; Ingenuity</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity &amp; Openness to New Experiences</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking, Judgment, &amp; Open-Mindedness</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of Learning</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective &amp; Wise Counsel</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMANITY</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Character Strengths of HUMANITY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Strengths of HUMANITY: Critical Incidents Exercise I</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, &amp; Nurturance</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Three: Learning About Teaching</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUSTICE</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Character Strengths of JUSTICE</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Strengths of JUSTICE: Syllabus Exercise II</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Strengths of JUSTICE: Critical Incidents Exercise II</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, &amp; Teamwork</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ iii ~</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMPERANCE</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four Character Strengths</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of TEMPERANCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Strengths of</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEMPERANCE: Critical Incidents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility &amp; Modesty</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness &amp; Mercy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretion &amp; Prudence</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control &amp; Self-Regulation</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURAGE</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four Character Strengths</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of COURAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Character Strengths of</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COURAGE: Critical Incidents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity, Integrity, &amp;</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bravery &amp; Valor</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence &amp; Perseverance</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm, Vitality, &amp; Zest</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module Four: Sustainable</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal for Learning and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSCENDENCE</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Five Character Strengths</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Transcendence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISE</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of Beauty and</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence, Awe, &amp; Wonder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope &amp; Optimism</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor &amp; Playfulness</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality, Faith, &amp; Purpose</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synopsis</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Planning Checklist</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Resources on the</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values In Action (VIA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature Strengths Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Teacher Behaviors</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklist (TBC) © Keeley,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, &amp; Buskist (2006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Teacher Behaviors</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized by Core Virtues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Integrating</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources from the Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Psychology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

With William James’ distinctions in mind from *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, this faculty development handbook has well-defined roots. Its fruits will be left to you, and to the gatherings of other academic storytellers who are invested in a sustained renewal of their teaching and commitments to academic life.

My first reading of Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* was as an undergraduate taking an ethics course at Fordham University. Early drafts of what you are now reading were completed during the 40th anniversary year of my graduation from there. This book’s roots can be excavated from those early liberal arts experiences and from a career teaching doctoral students and undergraduates at Southern Illinois University and Virginia Commonwealth University. Helping to build a brand new interdisciplinary campus at Arizona State University West for the past 21 years has been of invaluable benefit for the breadth and depth and diversity of its ideas.

Shortly after the turn of the millennium the first works on Positive Psychology appeared. I began using the Values in Action (VIA) Signature Strengths Survey in my undergraduate humanities and social science courses. Students’ responses were uniformly enthusiastic about the personal benefits accrued from evaluating their priorities for 24 different character strengths and six virtues. Reading and composing essays about the virtues and character strengths stimulated their subsequent reflections. Using the virtues as an organizing schema for several courses led me to adapt them to the faculty tasks of teaching and learning. As a counseling psychologist, I saw the multicultural, transdisciplinary, and professional growth possibilities in these applications.

The Association for Psychological Science (APS) and the American Psychological Association’s Society for the Teaching of Psychology (APA / STP) sponsored the first workshop on these exercises for sustained renewal at their 17th Annual Teaching Institute in 2010. As a Fellow of both associations, I was honored to have this meeting as a place to start. *Preparing Future Faculty* workshops for an array of disciplines and professions at the Graduate College of Arizona State University enhanced the content and processes described in this text. With the manual field-tested in different settings and with different audiences, the STP Editorial Committee approved this addition to their E-Book series. We hope that the readily available, downloadable format will increase its potential contribution to faculty development and renewal efforts.

The addition of J. Gerard Smith’s photographs, enhancing my reflections on the virtues with his meditative images, was the final needed touch. We planned teaching careers as first-year undergraduates together at a liberal arts college, and have remained lifelong learners. His now global audiences appreciate how his lenses and gifts widened beyond the traditional classroom.
Acknowledgements

Many colleagues assisted me in clarifying the ideas and the methods for these faculty development exercises.

Samantha Leigh Miller was there at the beginning, creating the first applications of the virtues and character strengths to teaching. She co-authored an article on the topic in a special issue of *Teaching of Psychology* on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. As co-editors of that special issue, Bill Buskist and Randy Smith offered their critical insights and wise counsel, and my ideas got to see the first light of day. David Myers has been a wise advisor during this project. Tracey Zinn extended an invitation to speak at the APS/STP Teaching Institute plenary session in 2009 and then to conduct the special workshop in 2010, where abstract concepts could have a forum for faculty interaction and refinement. Marty Seligman and Chris Peterson affirmed the directions in which I was heading in applying the virtues and character strengths that they had first defined in their encyclopedic handbook in 2004.

Long-time friends and teachers, Allan Brawley, Jim Korn, and Tony Miserandino read the earliest drafts of the exercises and offered their fine-grained observations on the whole project's elements. Faculty colleagues in ASU's New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences -- Owen Anderson, Patrick Bixby, Darryl Hattenhauer, Matt Newman, Ramsey Eric Ramsey, and Vince Waldron -- offered critical commentaries from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. I am grateful to the many faculty participants and graduate students in workshops for their continuing feedback.

David L. Fleming S.J. at St. Louis University breathed a second soul into my pages as an exceptionally gracious consultant about spirituality and personal and professional renewal. Phyllis Zagano at Hofstra University refined my understandings of the parallel processes in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* and established a bridge for my approach to the virtues and character strengths.

As my undergraduate research assistant, Faith Bone gathered materials from far-flung sources and various authors' writings on teaching and on sustained renewal for the Food for Thought sections.

I am exceedingly grateful to Jeff Stowell as my STP E-Book editor for this project. Translating a print text into its electronic cousin was made possible only by his adroit guidance and continuing patience with my primitive skills in this area. His fine-grained attention to so many details will benefit every reader and workshop participant who uses this text in the years to come.

My daughter, Elizabeth Fitzgerald, brought her professional photographer's expertise to the project and edited all the images, insuring their intended effects would be heightened in an E-Book format.

I have treasured Jim Smith's friendship and creative work longer than anyone else except that of my wife, Pat. When he agreed to lend me his photographs to complement my words, our collaborative fantasies finally came to fruition. We came full circle back to our earliest days together as teachers.

Finally, an autobiographical note: In 1996, I received ASU West approval for a sabbatical leave to compose a book on faculty development and the qualities of excellent teaching. A life-altering illness intervened and several years in physical therapy rehabilitation became an alternative agenda. Sixteen years later, with the abiding support and loving inspiration of my wife, Pat, a very different book came to fruition. The unplanned "time-out" from the original project helped me to
capture the transcendent capacities of learning and teaching more appreciatively, and I hope, more wisely.

Tom McGovern

Phoenix, Arizona & Portland, Maine

2012
Introduction

Consider the following four quotes from scholar-teachers, writing about what they love.

“. . .we can speak to the teacher within our students only when we are on speaking terms with the teacher within ourselves. . .we need to learn as many ways as we can of talking to ourselves. . .To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.”


“I must content myself with being a good professor, which I think I can be; I am capable of transmitting enthusiasm for fine things, perhaps even understanding; the creation of fine things seems, as yet beyond me, and I’m not going to worry about it, very much. . .I think of teaching as quite literally the noblest of professions, when done nobly. And life is too short and too final for one to risk doing anything but the very best thing there is to be done.”


“Our appetite for the big experience -- sudden insight, dazzling vision, heart-stopping ecstasy -- is what hides the true way from us. Therefore, we need a discipline that undoes our attachment to a discipline. Thus the meaning of the famous sutra, ‘If you meet a Buddha on the road, kill him.’ But, of course, we first need a Buddha to teach us this, to teach us that we are already there, on a road of our own. When you need a teacher, the Hindus say, a teacher will appear. But we can’t know in advance what we need to learn; else we would not need to learn it. Therefore, we won’t know who our teachers are until we have been taught. As a result, each teaching is a surprise.”


“I think the thing I’m aiming for is a sense of the classroom as sacramental. The class experience itself becomes the end and aim of education. Not something learned that you can take away from class, not a skill, or even a perspective on the world, but an experience worth having as it goes by, moment by moment. I’m really looking for somebody to give me permission to think these things.”


Faculty members are storytellers with advanced degrees. These exercises – whether read as a book and completed privately, or taken with a group in online or face-to-face workshop formats -- are a means to bring together storytellers to talk about that which they love (most of the time) and to reflect on what fuels their enthusiasm for teaching. Our identities as teachers and learners require periodic renewal. During an academic career, we navigate the mountains and valleys of the work with a diversity of companions. We listen with pride to students’ epiphanies, to their spoken and unspoken gratitude. We respond to undeserved critical commentary from those who entrust us with society’s futures. We bear witness to values and ethical principles that transcend subject matter and particular environments. We fail, sometimes in large measure, but noticed only by ourselves. We obsess with a passion to “reach them,” to “inspire their better selves,” to “make a difference in their lives.” We tire of the scrutiny, the lack of appreciation, the casual commitments

~ 1 ~
or careless attention to that which we love and work so hard not to reduce to the repetitive ordinary.

Teaching becomes a central feature of our identities that we construct as an anthology of our most powerful stories. We are this anthology's constant editors. By weaving memory's episodes into a narrative text, we renew our selves with a moral imagination that illuminates new meanings from life's daily experiences (see McGovern, 2006, 2007).

Plato likened Socrates -- an oft-invoked paragon of teaching -- to a gadfly, a midwife, and an electric eel or stingray. The gadfly goads us with prickly challenges to inflexible assumptions and certainties. With resolute and caring assistance, the midwife draws from within us that which deserves to be birthed for others to behold. The stingray stuns us by the power of an idea and we feel perplexed. We must stop business as usual, to pause and consider our place in the flow of ideas, before swimming back into the streams of daily tasks (see Arendt, 1971). The exercises in this book should function like Socrates did – as a gadfly, midwife, and electric eel.

Teaching's roots and fruits are timeless. Secular and sacred sages were teachers: Aristotle, Buddha, Confucius, the Hebrew Prophets, Jesus, Lao-Tzu, Mohammad, and Plato (see Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). One root of the word, "sage," comes from the Latin salvia and means "the healing plant;" the other comes from sapere and means to "be wise." Teachers connect healing and wise counsel in their lives and by their words.

My goal is to bring together storytellers to talk about the common experiences that enhance or deflate their enthusiasm. These exercises were not designed as a skills-development set of tasks. Instead, my hope, echoing the authors of the four opening quotes, is to:

- Get teachers "talking to themselves" to learn deeply about their teaching.
- Celebrate the "nobility" of teaching at every stage of an academic career.
- Prepare teachers to "be surprised" by listening closely to ordinary experiences.
- Link teaching to virtues and strengths that sustain development and can make the experience "sacramental."
Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is a touchstone concept for these renewal exercises.

In his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle stated that his purpose was not to create theoretical knowledge, but to inspire action, not to compose an inquiry into the nature of goodness, but to help individuals learn how to lead a good life. Contemporary scholars suggest that the *Nichomachean Ethics* can be interpreted as a teaching textbook with his *Politics* as its companion lab manual. His audience was a group of ambitious Greek citizens, concerned with how best to lead active, contributing lives. They had the wherewithal to do so by virtue of their privileged gender and economic status.

Today, scholars across the disciplines and professions recognize that we no longer act in homogeneous groups with singular or shared, common values. We must take the principles of virtue and ethical behavior for “being good,” and explore how best they apply with different audiences and complex circumstances. We must bring into harmony the inevitable conflicts we all encounter between reason and desire, between goals and processes (or ends and means), while neither discounting nor disparaging either. Our struggle to learn how to do so leads us to develop habits of good conduct (the Greek word for character derives from the word for habit).

As teachers well know from sharing stories about good decisions made in the classroom as well as their not so good ones, choosing the middle ground in conflict situations is a daily task and may provide satisfaction. If such satisfaction can be shared with colleagues, then the deeper pleasures of friendships developed in community become possible. Aristotle goes so far as to say that for a good life, such friendship is essential. Teachers too often live their professional lives in almost total isolation from one another. We need to connect with one another.

“. . .virtue is inextricably communal. Humans gain an appreciation of character from others, learn the virtues from others, engage in virtuous activity with others, pursue goods we can only hold in common with others, and practice many primary virtues (e.g., friendship, generosity, justice) only with others. Each individual must decide whether or not to engage in admirable activities, but the context, meaning, import, and recognition of fine actions is profoundly social.”

Virtues and Character Strengths

At the start of the new millennium, Martin Seligman (1991, 2002) and others (Seligman et al., 2005) created the Positive Psychology movement. Having spent much of his life studying the origins, consequences, and treatment of clinical depression, he shifted gears in the last decade of the twentieth century. An important research focus in this movement led scientist-teacher-practitioners to examine shared virtue and its consequences for individual happiness and pluralistic social improvement. Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman (2005) evaluated sages’ texts that transcended time, place, cultural context, and individual authors. In Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification, Peterson and Seligman (2004) provided an encyclopedic review of six virtues:

- Wisdom
- Humanity
- Justice
- Temperance
- Courage
- Transcendence.

They construed these virtues as generalized ends to which diverse, global peoples aspire, and by which societies endure as healthy communities. Individual variations are manifested in unique secular and sacred commitments, and with many public and private expressions.

Psychologists defined 24 character strengths (e.g., curiosity, social intelligence, fairness, humility and modesty, perseverance, gratitude) as the means to achieve these virtuous ends. I evolve my priorities for the character strengths, using them to implement our identities in personal and professional interactions. They make our lives richer because the gratifications from work and personal relationships can be linked to our capacity to deploy our priority strengths on a regular basis. Respondents from 50 countries participated in research using online assessment measures (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004, 2006) and the Values in Action (VIA) Institute on Character now supports continuing research and practice on the efficacy of the character strengths (See Appendix A). With my interest in faculty development, I translated all this rich material into specific definitions that apply directly to the challenges of teaching and learning.

The 24 character strengths are the means used by faculty in their teaching to achieve higher education’s desired ends – students’ lifelong learning outcomes.
Structure of the Reflective Exercises

For many years, I conducted skills development and training programs on various topics for professional and student audiences. There are well-researched cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies to accomplish short- and long-term outcomes. My experience with all of these groups, however, is that after assessing needs, delivering workshops, and evaluating the results, a critical question often remained.

*I feel more competent and more satisfied with the WHATS and the HOWS of my professional responsibilities. Now I find myself asking: WHY do I continue to do this work?*

The reflective exercises for sustained renewal in this book address this *WHY* question and will do so using the scholarly, transdisciplinary material on virtues and character strengths. The overall structure for the exercises in this handbook can be mapped thus:

- Module One  *Core Virtues*
- Module Two  *Thinking About Learning*
- Module Three  *Learning About Teaching*
- Module Four  *Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching.*

In ‘Core Virtues,’ we begin our reflections on the virtues and character strengths by focusing on qualities that are the heart of all we do in learning and teaching. This module stimulates a first exploration of their applications via a memory's episode exercise about an ideal teacher.

In ‘Thinking About Learning,’ we explore *Wisdom & Knowledge* and *Humanity,* and their respective character strengths.

In ‘Learning About Teaching,’ I use a critical incidents approach to evaluate challenges that emerge during a semester. We will reflect on the virtues of *Justice,* *Temperance,* and *Courage,* and their character strengths, applying them to situations with students, peers, supervisors, and others from whom we may learn more about our teaching.

In ‘Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching,’ the focus will be on *Transcendence.* After our courses’ final sessions, after grades have been posted, and commencement activities completed, how can we reflect on our teaching in a holistic fashion? How can we appreciate the arc of a semester from designing our syllabi, to surviving and thriving through critical incidents, to arrive at a reflective appraisal of our achieved outcomes? These are potential responses to the *WHY* question, and not just to improve our management of WHAT and HOW tasks. Responding to these larger questions flows naturally into a concluding section on developing a strategic plan for a sustained and renewed commitment to learning and teaching.
Detailed Map of the Four Modules

- **Introduction**
  - Virtue Ethics
  - Virtues and Character Strengths
  - Structure of the Reflective Exercises
  - Learning Processes for the Exercises

- **Module One: Core Virtues**
  - Introduction to the theory and practice of virtues and character strengths, with specific applications to the challenges of teaching & learning
  - The Core Virtues
  - Imagining an Ideal Teacher Exercise
  - Preview of the 24 character strengths for Modules Two, Three, and Four

- **Module Two: Thinking About Learning**
  - WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE and HUMANITY’S character strengths are central to defining our course outcomes and processes.
  - Syllabus Exercise I and Critical Incidents Exercise I focus our attention on the required faculty tasks that precede a first day in class.
  - Stimulus Reflections and Food for Thought quotes on character strengths

- **Module Three: Learning About Teaching**
  - We weave JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE, and COURAGE’S character strengths into our courses’ challenges and conflicts, often without consciously acknowledging that we are doing so.
  - Syllabus Exercise II and Critical Incidents Exercises II, III, IV, & V target the day-to-day challenges that affirm AND deplete our work.
  - Stimulus Reflections and Food for Thought quotes on character strengths

- **Module Four: Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching**
  - Reflection on TRANSCENDENCE’S character strengths sustain our commitments and integrate the other virtues.
  - A Guided Reflection Exercise synthesizes the material from the other virtues and guides continuing development.
  - Stimulus Reflections and Food for Thought quotes on character strengths
  - Designing and implementing a strategic plan for sustainable renewal

- References and Appendixes
Learning Processes for the Exercises

Transdisciplinary audiences at varied stages of an academic career may benefit from these exercises: graduate school teaching assistants, new faculty appointments, seasoned veterans, and pre-retirement faculty transitioning to new roles and ways of teaching.

One of my inspirations on sustained renewal is a book that I first read as an undergraduate at Fordham University, and several times again while composing this text—Saint Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. Ignatius revised his exercises over a twenty-five year period, culminating in the work’s publication in 1548. I had the benefit of a contemporary translation and retreat directors’ notes by David L. Fleming S.J. (1996) in *Draw me into your friendship: The Spiritual Exercises. A literal translation and a contemporary reading*. David was instrumental at the earliest stages of my exercises’ composition by asking me to re-think my assumptions about how to sequence learning about the six virtues and the 24 character strengths.

The Positive Psychology movement leaves behind the arbitrary divisions between the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, especially philosophy and religious studies. My exercises are not a psychological gloss on a timeless theological text. Neither are they a religious paraphrasing of scientific research on the virtues and character strengths.

I was struck by Ignatius’ teaching method—his processes lead a retreat participant from an examination of core values, through a consideration of an exemplary life and what we can learn from that person, and then through contemplative exercises that renew a commitment and sustain a hopefulness that our life’s work has meaning and value. Ignatius constructed his *Exercises* to engage the head and the heart, moving an individual from recognizing imperfection to being open to the grace of small and large experiences, thereby recapturing a sense of purpose in one’s professional and personal life.

The exercises in this text were designed to engage your head and heart, too. The most important elements are the reflective prompts on the character strengths. Faculty members asking themselves the questions must “do the work.” The person leading the workshop is not the source of renewal. Renewal derives from how the faculty member engages with the reflective material and translates those insights into learning and teaching practice.

After the chapter on the Core Virtues, Modules Two, Three, and Four examine each of the six virtues and all 24 character strengths via the following steps:

- Review the definitions of the character strengths that contribute to each virtue.
- Complete an exercise designed to elicit how we currently deploy the specific character strengths of that virtue in our teaching.
- Focus on each character strength and consider five questions on learning and teaching.
- Work through, privately, or discuss the question prompts in a group, using them to crystallize our understandings.
- Consolidate all the character strengths for that virtue as part of a strategic plan for sustained renewal.

You also will encounter Food for Thought passages integrated with all 24 of the character strengths. These quotations come from scholars and practitioners at many levels of education, and selected to extend your exploration and deepen your insights.
Finally, a word about Jim Smith’s photographs, images that illustrate and grace this book. They provide visual reflections on three themes: colors, trees, and keys. The *Oxford English Dictionary* helps us understand their simple elegance as metaphors for our teaching and learning.

*Colors* are “a particular tint; pigmentation; hue of the skin as reflecting a physical or mental state; sensation produced on the eye; the general effect produced by seeing the whole picture.”

*Trees* are “a perennial plant, typically having a single stem or trunk growing to a considerable height.” Used in phrases like: “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” “barking up the wrong tree,” “out of one’s tree,” or colloquially as in “tree-hugger,” and more recently in technology circles like doing a “tree search” and “tree diagrams.”

*Keys* are “an instrument to lock or unlock; symbol for power of custody or control; the way to open up something; a solution or explanation to something unknown, mysterious or obscure; a system of notes definitely related to one another; a thing that holds together or joins the parts of a structure and of paramount or critical importance.”

You began with a photograph of a box of differently colored red apples on the cover. Reflect on the images that bracket each virtue and its character strengths. And finally you will come full circle and respond to the same keys that introduced you to the exercises. Perhaps you may see them in a different way.
Conclusion

Consider three more quotes before getting started.

In 1896, William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, made it perfectly clear what must be the university’s primary task.

“It is an opportune moment to lay emphasis upon the work of teaching as distinguished from that of investigating. There is a danger that the importance of teaching may be overlooked. The young doctor sometimes forgets that the institution in which he works is under obligation to furnish the best possible instruction to the students whom it has gathered within its walls... If a man is unable to teach, he cannot rightly receive an appointment in the University. If, after having been appointed, he shows the inability to teach, the University in justice to its students, must without question find someone who is able to teach.”


“I am not saying that polishing our virtues and curbing our sins is the way to develop into skillful teachers. But surely virtue is necessary to great teaching. Even a lesser art, an honest craft of teaching, cannot be achieved without it. For the teaching I admire moves toward the most complete attainments of its higher ends, and it deals in virtue as much as in anything else. It is not just knowing or doing to which we aspire in learning. Our knowledge is seldom free from doubt, our doing rarely pursues its way in certitude. If we learn anything from teaching, it may be that we all seem to fall short of some ultimate necessary learning. The formal postures of teacher and student are only systematic and partial ways of seeking illumination. As both Montaigne and Thoreau avowed, the lessons one teaches are not just for someone else; they are those we teach ourselves.”


“The work of a teacher – exhausting, complex, idiosyncratic, never twice the same – is, at its heart, an intellectual and ethical enterprise. Teaching is the vocation of vocations, a calling that shepherds a multitude of other callings. It is an activity that is intensely practical and yet transcendent, brutally matter-of-fact, and yet fundamentally a creative act. Teaching begins in challenge and is never far from mystery.”


*Let’s get started.*
Module One: Core Virtues

In *Core Virtues*, we reflect on the virtues and character strengths, focusing on qualities that are at the heart of learning and teaching.

An exercise that prompts you to recall an Ideal Teacher introduces the vocabulary of six virtues.

Practicing the *Core Virtues* via applications of the character strengths are linked to the teaching tasks of the academic year.

This module is an effective introductory, half-day workshop agenda on the Faculty Virtues and Character Strengths.
Imagining an Ideal Teacher

We create our identities as an anthology of stories. Remembering and revising these stories in light of new experiences will be a touchstone for sustained renewal.

Recall an ideal faculty member from elementary, high school, undergraduate, graduate, or postgraduate educational experiences. Imagine yourself back into the scene of one of their class sessions. See their presence. Watch the interactions they are having with students. Recall moments when you and they engaged one another—whether with words, ideas, conflicts, challenges, or an emotional connection. Spend some time reflecting on your memories of this person.

As a first step, focus on just one person, although we can anticipate that no single person will exemplify all six virtues.

Consider the following questions:

- Over and above all the specific ideas and methods you encountered in this teacher's course(s), what learning lingers most? **WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE**
- How did your teacher exhibit a kind and generous spirit and foster safe connections among very different students? **HUMANITY**
- How did your teacher work with students as a community of learners in which everyone was treated fairly and with respect? **JUSTICE**
- How did they respond to conflicts, work them through, or use them as teaching moments for you and the other members of the class? **TEMPERANCE**
- Do you remember being challenged to crystallize what you thought and believed, and to communicate those thoughts openly in discussions or in writing? Your teacher may have expressed such a statement on one or more occasions. **COURAGE**
- How did your teacher stimulate “magical moments,” filled with insight and wonder, connecting them with larger meanings, or instilling a hope that all was possible? **TRANSCENDENCE**

Jot some recollections down for each question on the following page.
Imagining an Ideal Teacher

- WISDOM

- HUMANITY

- JUSTICE

- TEMPERANCE

- COURAGE

- TRANSCENDENCE
Socratic Images of an Ideal Teacher

Recalling some ideas from the Introduction, what Socratic images match with how you remember your Ideal Teacher? Sketch some episodes or recollections for the qualities below.

- Gadfly

- Midwife

- Electric Eel

- Sage

- Healer
The Six Virtues Defined and Applied to Teaching

Let's focus more closely on how six specific virtues may be applied directly to teaching.

- **Wisdom & Knowledge** are strengthened when we use cognitive capacities to acquire and create knowledge.

- **Humanity** is fostered when we use interpersonal character strengths that involve tending and befriending.

- **Justice** is practiced when we use civic character strengths that contribute to diverse and healthy communities.

- **Temperance** is demonstrated with a discipline that protects against excess in our relationships with students, faculty colleagues, and administrators.

- **Courage** is practiced using emotional character strengths to accomplish goals despite internal or external obstacles.

- **Transcendence** is experienced with character strengths that forge connections to a larger universe and meanings.
Virtues and Images of an Ideal Teacher

Re-examine your recollections of your ideal teacher.

Using the vocabulary of the virtues, revise/add to what you remember about your ideal teacher.

- WISDOM

- HUMANITY

- JUSTICE

- TEMPERANCE

- COURAGE

- TRANSCENDENCE
Practicing the Core Virtues via the Character Strengths

In the previous pages, you sketched your images of an ideal teacher, and then recast those images using the vocabulary of the six virtues.

Practicing the character strengths are the means to virtue’s ends.

In Modules Two through Four we will explore the virtues and the 24 character strengths in the following ways:

• Review, one by one, the definitions of the character strengths that are the means to achieving each virtue’s ends;

• Complete an exercise designed to elicit how we currently deploy the specific character strengths in our teaching;

• Consider five questions that focus each character strength on learning and teaching;

• Work through, privately, or discuss the question prompts in a group, using them to crystallize our understandings of each character strength;

• Consolidate all we have discovered and fashion a strategic plan for sustained renewal.

To preview the exercises in Modules Two, Three, and Four, let’s take a first look at the definitions of all 24 character strengths and their relationships to the virtues and the teaching tasks of a semester.
Virtues and Character Strengths for Learning and Teaching
Adapted by McGovern (2011b) from Peterson and Seligman (2004)

Thinking About Learning
(Module Two)

Teaching Tasks: Identify student learning outcomes and structure class dynamics to create a syllabus with clear expectations

WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE: Cognitive strengths used to acquire and create knowledge

- Creativity & Ingenuity: Construct original and innovative strategies for learning and teaching

- Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences: Examine processes as well as outcomes of learning and teaching; find gratification in the mundane phenomenology of required tasks and topics

- Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness: Seek and evaluate evidence fairly, and respond differentially, even when contrary to personal beliefs or perspectives

- Love of Learning: Pursue new discoveries and methods in the world of ideas, systematically, and appreciate serendipity

- Perspective & Wise Counsel: Provide wise counsel to students and teachers, grounded in reflected experience, and with empathy for diverse ways of seeing and being in the world

HUMANITY: Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending

- Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance: Contribute ethically and responsibly to the welfare of others despite a breadth or depth of differences

- Social / Emotional Intelligence: Attend to subtle cues in teacher and student and colleague relationships and group dynamics; able to use one's emotions as part of problem solving

- Love: Create safe-havens in the classroom that foster reciprocal relationships of support and respect; demonstrate cognitive and affective acceptance of others
Learning About Teaching  
(Module Three)

Teaching Tasks: Design group dynamics and learning activities that accomplish outcomes and respond effectively to conflict situations

JUSTICE: Civic strengths that contribute to diverse and healthy communities

- **Citizenship, Loyalty, & Teamwork**: Build collaborative communities of learners rather than solely rewarding individual achievements or solo performances; foster effective group dynamics
- **Fairness**: Develop nuanced capacity to identify biases in our perspectives; reason, make judgments, and implement ethical actions
- **Leadership**: Facilitate the task demands and interpersonal dynamics of learning environments

TEMPERANCE: Discipline that protects against excess in our relationships with students, faculty colleagues, and administrators

- **Forgiveness & Mercy**: Diminish anger with empathy; sustain and renew relationships despite setbacks that derive from others' shortcomings or mistakes
- **Humility & Modesty**: Communicate genuine self-assessments of strengths and limitations, valuing multiple perspectives and outcomes
- **Discretion & Prudence**: Take care in daily choices; promote measured balance and harmony in the pursuit of intended goals
- **Self-Control & Self-Regulation**: Manage initial reactions to consider and implement disciplined responses, especially in difficult, “no-win” classroom and professional situations

COURAGE: Emotional strengths to accomplish goals despite internal or external obstacles

- **Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty**: Declare clear principles and values; present oneself sincerely and act genuinely, modeling how this quality is essential for trusting relationships
- **Bravery & Valor**: Act with conviction, despite risks and dangers; to “bear witness”
- **Persistence & Perseverance**: Sustain effort despite obstacles, boredom, or frustration, and without apparent rewards; find pleasure in completing tasks
- **Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest**: Show a passion for teaching, learning, and deliberate practices for well-being; demonstrate a focused sense of priorities
Sustained Renewal For Teaching And Learning  
(Module Four)

Teaching Tasks: Appreciate the arc of a semester from designing syllabi, to surviving and thriving through critical incidents, arriving at a reflective appraisal of achieved outcomes

Create a strategic plan for sustained renewal

TRANSCENDENCE: Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and meanings

- **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder:** Recognize and take pleasure in others’ and one’s own talents and creativity, and especially in the splendid discoveries of students

- **Gratitude:** Be thankful for grace of both simple and profound gifts from learning and teaching

- **Hope & Optimism:** Respond to successes and adversities with an open-minded perspective tempered by humility and wisdom; expect the best and work to achieve it

- **Humor & Playfulness:** Approach life with a playful recognition of incongruities and circumstances beyond our control

- **Spirituality, Faith, & Purpose:** Foster inquiry about higher purposes and meanings; enable students to genuinely grapple with mystery and what is sacred in their life experiences

In Module Two, we will focus on

**Thinking About Learning.**
Module Two: Thinking About Learning

In *Thinking About Learning*, we explore the virtues of **WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE** and **HUMANITY**, and their respective character strengths.

Having spent time reminiscing, savoring, and synthesizing your memory's episodes about an ideal teacher, we now examine the applications of each virtue, one-by-one, and their respective character strengths. Remember that the exercises were organized around four renewal processes that build on one another and can be integrated into your academic life:

- Core Virtues
- Thinking About Learning
- Learning About Teaching
- Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching

Pragmatically, the exercises are anchored by a progression of specific faculty tasks over the course of a semester:

- Defining student and course learning outcomes and crafting a syllabus
- Managing critical incidents and shaping the group dynamic to accomplish specific objectives
- Evaluating successes and setbacks
- Reflecting on renewed and sustainable goals for the future

In a summary chapter from a national conference handbook on undergraduate education, McGovern (1993) proposed an interdisciplinary and interactive set of questions to consider:

- What kind of outcomes can be achieved with
- What kind of students taught by
- What kind of faculty using
- What type of teaching methods as part of
- What kind of curriculum? (p. 218; italics in original)

Conceptualized in this way, thinking about learning becomes a complex matrix for you to consider, and not just how much you know and how well you can communicate what you know. Before even the first day of class, we must establish how we and our students conceptualize our commitments to lifelong learning.

In this section on *Thinking About Learning*, we will focus on the two core virtues of **WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE** and **HUMANITY** and how they tap into the head and the heart of what we do.
WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE

WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE are strengthened when we use cognitive capacities to acquire and create knowledge.

The goddess of wisdom, Athena, came to earth in the form of Homer’s character, Mentor—a crusty, older man—to act as a guide for safe passage in a lifelong journey. He reminded young protégés of their special qualities and to keep their eyes on the prize. With wisdom, we learn how to balance ends and means in our discoveries. I begin (rather than end) these reflective exercises for sustained renewal with WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE because its questions are among those that we ask first, as we articulate our philosophies of teaching by prefacing our syllabi with the working assumptions we hold about learning and teaching [see Korn & Sikorski (2010) GUIDE].

At the start of every academic year or semester, we consider the substantive content of what we will teach and how to incite students’ enthusiasm for that material. If we are predisposed to a scientific way of seeing the world, we may analyze the cause-effect relationships between our teaching strategies and their outcomes. If we feel a closer kinship with an artistic perspective, we may block and choreograph the scenes of a semester to achieve some unified performance and lasting appreciation by our audiences.

Teaching subject matter to “cover it all” sometimes consumes us. Thinking about the nuts and bolts of students’ content mastery gives pleasure to our precision or operational impulses, and satisfies an illusory need for control. To accomplish lifelong learners’ outcomes, however, we must weave into our syllabi WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE, in order to answer a deceptively simple challenge: How do I know that my students know what I want them to know?

There are several central questions to consider for this virtue and its character strengths:

- Who else gets paid to seek out new ideas every week, create innovative strategies for discovery, and to have conversations with others to clarify and amplify these processes?

- How did we develop a relentless curiosity about those small details that keep us fresh even when we may be assigned multiple sections of the same course?

- How easy is it for us to disclose, “I don’t know,” and display a constant critical thinking and open-mindedness, even though our audiences may expect us to be finished experts?

- How do we show students why we love learning so much that we chose to work in its sandbox as a career?

- Have we been able to re-focus our perspective after a colleague asks: how do YOU do that?

What WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE do we want students to learn – for today, tomorrow, and for many future days? The character strengths will become the means we use to teach the desired ends of our students’ lifelong learning outcomes.
The Five Character Strengths of WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE

With Creativity & Ingenuity, we construct original and innovative strategies for learning and teaching.

With Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences, we examine processes as well as outcomes of learning and teaching; find gratification in the mundane phenomenology of required tasks and topics.

With Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness, we seek and evaluate evidence fairly, and respond differentially, even when contrary to personal beliefs or perspectives.

With Love of Learning, we pursue new discoveries in the world of ideas, systematically, and appreciate serendipity.

With Perspective & Wise Counsel, we provide wise counsel to students and teachers, grounded in reflected experience, and with empathy for diverse ways of seeing and being in the world.
Character Strengths of WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE: Syllabus Exercise I

Evaluate one to two recent syllabi from different courses that you have developed or taught. Examine the learning outcomes that you stated for these courses. Match a specific student learning outcome with one or more of the five character strengths of WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE that you model in your teaching for that particular outcome and that you want your students to develop.

- Creativity & Ingenuity
- Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences
- Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness
- Love of Learning
- Perspective & Wise Counsel

Having matched your existing outcomes with this new schema of virtues and character strengths, let’s probe further. In the following pages we will examine these five strengths in greater detail, stimulating your continuing reflection and how you may deploy them regularly in your teaching. Although we used the Syllabus Exercise as the prompt for a pre-assessment, ALL of the strengths are integral parts of your teaching strategies at every stage of an academic semester, as well as after the term ends.

You might be asking: What am I supposed to do with my responses to these Stimulus Reflections? Fair question.

Remember—Virtues are ENDS. Character Strengths are MEANS. WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE are strengthened when we use cognitive capacities to acquire and create knowledge. The responses to the prompts will offer you a broader and deeper set of means to this virtue’s end. Your courses’ student learning outcomes are the goals for your course, and students’ learning will be enriched by your modeling of the specific character strengths in your teaching.
**Creativity & Ingenuity**

With *Creativity & Ingenuity*, we construct original and innovative strategies for learning and teaching.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What do I know about my students’ background characteristics: on my campus, for my program’s majors, for those who take my courses on a regular basis, and about those in my course right now?

How are my campus, school, or program populations different from the first time I taught there? How is this semester’s sample of students different from the last time I taught this particular course?

What have I read that keeps me in touch with this generation’s “new student” and their strengths and limitations?

How do I conform AND vary from the traditional ways to think about a course and its potential for learning? The topics covered? The established pedagogy? The tried and true evaluation methods or standards?

What can I do this semester or term that will catch my students by surprise? Provide them with opportunities to think and perform “outside the box”?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Creativity & Ingenuity

“. . .the presentation of a mystery such as that of the unseen matter in the cosmos is a marvelous instructional technique. Students find it hard to keep themselves from proposing solutions. Some of my best classroom experiences come when my students find themselves gripped suddenly by the lure of a delicious enigma. Once this has been achieved, the function of the instructor is no longer to “effectively communicate the material.” It is no longer to “maintain the students’ interest.” It is to control a stampede.

The urge to solve problems appears to be innate, and, in my experience, common to us all. There are those who speak in reverential tones of the nobility of science, of the selfless dedication of the scientist. The profession is sometimes held up as a shining example to a world steeped in venality and sin. But I would disagree with this view. So far as I am concerned, there is nothing noble about science at all. Scientists, in truth, are merely behaving according to their innermost natures.

In claiming that the urge to solve mysteries is common, I am far from saying that every student is really a closet scientist at heart. I am rejecting the notion that people are of two sorts: normal humans on the one hand, and on the other those who by some strange quirk are “interested in science.” I am claiming that there is nothing remotely unusual about the impulse which motivates the scientist—and that this is what makes education possible.

‘It is not at all true that the scientist goes after truth,’ Soren Kierkegaard once commented, ‘it goes after him’.

George Greenstein (1991), The Dragon, p. 17.

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“Education is discipline for the adventure of life: research is intellectual adventure; and the universities should be homes for adventure shared in common by young and old. For successful education, there must be a certain freshness in the knowledge dealt with. It must be either new in itself or it must be invested with some novelty of application to the new world of new times. Knowledge does not keep any better than fish.”

Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences

With *Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences*, we examine processes as well as outcomes of learning and teaching, finding gratification in the mundane phenomenology of required tasks and topics.

**Stimulus Reflections**

Teaching the same topic, how often do I return to original sources to rediscover those texts with fresh eyes? How often and in what ways do I refresh my test items or essay prompts to evaluate my students’ performance?

What do I assume about how my students learn? Do I ask them that basic question? Why (not)?

How often and in what ways do I solicit my students’ feedback? What do I do with it?

In what ways do I communicate to students that I am a scholar-teacher committed to lifelong learning?

When did I last ask a colleague how they thought about and taught the same material? How they evaluated their students’ learning?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Curiosity & Openness to New Experiences

“Teaching is an art form. I shall not argue for that claim since there can be no disagreement if one accepts certain paradigmatic propositions, as Wittgenstein called them, and there can be no argument if one does not. The artistic medium of the teacher is the narrative; her teaching is a narrative enactment. When we teach, we tell stories. We tell stories about our disciplines, about the place of those disciplines in the structure of human knowledge. We tell stories about knowledge, about what it is to be a human knower, about how knowledge is made, claimed, and legitimated. The stories we tell are stories built on other stories; they work to forge continuity between our stories and those of others, to confirm community among ourselves and others, and to initiate others into our communities. In educational theory, we tell stories of teaching, stories that at once reveal, constitute, and confirm the values that give significance to pedagogical acts . . . I am interested in those stories of teaching that tell us that its practice is an art and that the curriculum is an art form.”

Jo Anne Pagano (1994), Teaching Women, p. 252.

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“As Einstein said, the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible. I believe that physics teachers are among the most fortunate inhabitants of the universe. How lucky we are to live in a world, where so many interesting things happen, where we can understand some of them, and where we have the opportunity to try to understand others while simultaneously introducing a new generation to this search for understanding, this search for the true beauty of the universe in which we live.”

Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness

With *Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness*, we seek and evaluate evidence fairly, and respond differentially, even when contrary to personal beliefs or perspectives.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What are my persistent (intractable?) stereotypes about students?

What teaching strategies do I embrace and use with(out) critical questioning? Why (not)?

How do I invite diverse students (e.g., academic strengths or limitations, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, gender, generational, or values/point of view) to ask me questions in and out of class?

How do I evaluate requests made by administrators or faculty colleagues (younger and older) for changing the curriculum, its delivery systems, my teaching and learning assessment strategies, or redefining the types of students enrolled in our programs?

How do I motivate my students to become amiable skeptics about my points of view, and their own?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Critical Thinking, Judgment, & Open-Mindedness

“How can an undergraduate liberal arts education follow Socrates’ example? The most important ingredient of a Socratic classroom is obviously the instructor. No curricular formula will take the place of provocative and perceptive teaching that arouses the mind. And a dedicated instructor can enliven the thinking of students in almost any curricular setting. Socratic activity can take place in virtually any humanities or social science course, in connection with readings of many different kinds, as long as the instructor knows a good deal about the particular nature of the student body and strives to develop each individual’s capacity to reason. Although in principle any humanities course might teach Socratic reasoning, many such courses do not focus intensively on critical argument. But such a focus, characteristic of the professional philosopher, is necessary to teach students how to analyze the arguments that they and others make. Given the tremendous importance, for citizenship and for life, of producing students who can think clearly and justify their views, a course or courses in philosophy play a vital role in the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum. If philosophy presents itself as an elite, esoteric discipline preoccupied with formal notation and with questions of little evident human interest, it will not be able to play this role. But professional philosophy has increasingly, over the past twenty years, returned to the focus on basic human interest that it had in the time of John Dewey and William James. Questions about justice and rights, questions about love, fear, and grief, questions of medical and legal and business ethics—all these are now not at the margins of the profession but at its heart. The profession is once again, like Socrates, bringing philosophy from the heavens down to the earth.”


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“Observers like Allan Bloom are wrong when they claim that contemporary liberal arts education is closing students’ minds. There are, obviously, biases of all sorts embedded in our educational system, and inevitably there are fads that arouse passions to a fever pitch before exhausting themselves. We may not be doing as well as we once did at conveying a body of facts—historical, geographical, and cultural—to the young. But there is no compelling evidence that we have killed curiosity or skepticism. To be sure, students feel the press of competition and the weight of debt, and—as I have noted—this may constrain some students’ sense of freedom. But the students I see are alive to the challenges to learn more deeply about themselves and the world they inhabit. They are open to seeing the connections between their own experiences and the larger structures that shape those experiences. . . . The classroom remains an exciting place. The range of permissible questions is expanding, and the chances for fresh insight increase. Students are as willing as ever to explore the ways that societies reproduce themselves, even when that stirs anxieties about inequality, individual responsibility, and equity. If we use education only to bolster privilege, we will all be the poorer. The choice, as in all things social, is ours.”

Love of Learning

With *Love of Learning*, we pursue new discoveries and methods in the world of ideas, systematically, and appreciate serendipity.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What are my cues for feeling “in a rut of predictability” about my subject matter or its pedagogy?

How do I seek out different lenses to examine my teaching and my students’ learning?

What strategies do I use, and with what regularity, to re-ignite my passion for learning new ways of seeing the world, then evaluating and communicating what I observe?

Do I venture into transdisciplinary reading or cross-generational, multicultural colleague conversations and to what end?

How broad of a range of ideas and methods and their conflicts do I integrate into my courses?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Love of Learning

“Teachers sometimes linger over preparation... because they find there, in miniature, one of the main satisfactions of their vocation: the time to read, to think, and (with luck) to think new things and to prepare them for an imminently experimental ‘publication’, by word of mouth, more immediate than anything they can achieve in print. For many... to prepare a text for teaching is to go back to the beginnings, to imagine a student’s first encounter with a text, which of course in large measure means to remember one’s own. The pleasure of anticipation gets curiously mingled with that of recollection.”

Elaine Showalter (2003), Teaching Literature, p. 45.

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The mathematician David Hilbert gave a speech to the Second International Conference of Mathematicians in Paris in 1900. It was his “State of the Discipline” at that juncture of history, as well as a forum for him to propose 23 unanswered, critical questions that would shape the near and long future of that field of study. His reflections extend beyond those of one particular field of study.

“Who of us would not be glad to lift the veil behind which the future lies hidden; to cast a glance at the next advances of our science and the secrets of its development during future centuries? What particular goals will there be towards which the leading mathematical spirits of coming generations will strive? What new methods and new facts will new centuries disclose in the wide and rich field of mathematical thought? ... we must let the unsettled questions pass before our minds.

It is difficult and often impossible to judge the value of a problem correctly in advance; for the final award depends upon the gain which science obtains from the problem. Nevertheless, we can ask whether there are general criteria which mark a good mathematical problem. An old French mathematician said, *A mathematical theory is not to be considered complete until you have made it so clear that you can explain it to the first man whom you meet on the street.*

Quoted in Herbert Kohl (2003), Stupidity and Tears, p. 42.
**Perspective & Wise Counsel**

With *Perspective and Wise Counsel*, we provide wise counsel to students and teachers, grounded in reflected experience, and with empathy for diverse ways of seeing and being in the world.

**Stimulus Reflections**

How often do students appear during my office hours, and what do they usually talk about?

Do students take a second or third course or independent study with me? Why (not)?

How often and why do my colleagues or administrative officers ask me to join them in research, teaching, or service projects?

What can I discern from the types of individuals who seek my counsel and the themes they seem most apt to explore with me?

How can I respond to interactive and interdisciplinary questions like: What kind of outcomes can be achieved with . . . What kind of students taught by . . . What kind of faculty using . . . What kind of teaching methods as part of . . . What kind of curriculum . . . In what kind of setting?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Perspective & Wise Counsel

“. . . I pray you’ll never lose the sense of joy and tenderness that brings good people to the task of teaching in the first place. I wish you years of happiness among your children, plenty of hugs and lots of foolishness, many caterpillars, snails, and other interesting things that creep and crawl, unhurried hours of unfolding treasures for your children on the reading rug and helping all those little pipers you may meet to overcome their furies just enough to learn their lessons, channel their passions into patterns that may rescue them from needless times of suffering when they get into higher grades of school, and, for at least a couple of hours every day, to stay connected to their chairs!

And, when it is needed, I also wish you rightful anger, vigorous denunciation, and the saving grace of sly irreverence and the skillful uses of ironical detachment from the soul-destroying practices and terminologies of experts who are positive they know “what works” within the unjust and unequal system they no longer choose to challenge or denounce but who seem to know only too little of the hearts of children. Resist the deadwood of predictability. Embrace the unexpected. Revel in the run-on sentences. Dig deep into the world of whim. Sprinkle your children’s lives, no matter how difficult many of those lives may be, with hundreds of brightly colored seeds of jubilation. Enjoy the wild flowers!

Thank you, Francesca, for teaching me far more than I have ever taught to you.”

Jonathan Kozol (2007), Letters to a Young Teacher, pp. 237-238.

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“To teach is to choose a life of challenge. Another challenge is to look deeply into the contexts within which teaching occurs—social surround, historical flow, cultural web. While the unexamined teaching life is hardly worth living, the examined life will include pain and difficulty—after all, the contexts of our lives include unearned privileges and undeserved suffering, murderous drugs and deadening work, a howling sense of hopelessness for some and the palpable threat of annihilation for others. To be aware, too, of what has yet to be achieved in terms of human possibility, is to be a teacher capable of hope and struggle, courage and action.

But of course the teacher can only create a context, set a stage, open a curtain. The teacher’s task is excruciatingly complex precisely because it is idiosyncratic and improvisational—as inexact as a person’s mind or a human heart, as unique and inventive as a friendship or a love affair. The teacher’s work is all about background, environment, setting, surrounding, position, situation, connection. And relationship. Teaching is tougher than learning because teaching requires the teacher to let others learn. Learning requires action, choice, and assent from the student. But teaching is always undertaken without guarantee. Teaching is an act of faith.”

Synopsis

We learn about Socrates’ perspectives on education in several of Plato’s texts: *Meno, Republic, Theaetetus*, and *Symposium*. Two themes are that teaching is a complex and difficult task and that students (like Freud’s clients) must discover their insights from within. In a thought-provoking set of passages in *Theaetetus*, Plato likens Socrates to a midwife, and notes their critical similarities:

- Midwives do not give birth and Socrates does not have wisdom of his own; Socrates can discern who has a real idea from his many interactions with others, just like midwives know who is pregnant;
- Midwives have tools to prompt or diminish the pains of labors, and Socrates can excite or reduce intellectual labors;
- Midwives are responsible to cause abortions when they deem necessary, and Socrates must expose ideas that are unworthy to continue thinking about;
- Mothers of aborted children sometimes resent midwives just as Socrates faces harsh criticism from those whose ideas he kills;
- Ignoring a midwife’s recommendation to abort will have the negative consequence of either an eventual miscarriage or early death after birth, while students who reject Socrates’ advice will return to their illusions and remain ignorant rather than clear thinking. (Chappell, 2004)

Socrates expressed it in this way.

“Now, my fine Theaetus, I have drawn this subject out at such length because I suspect that you have conceived something or other within you, and are in the pains of labor. So present yourself to me: to the midwife’s son and a kind of midwife myself. Apply yourself to answering, as well as you can, the questions that I put to you. I will examine each thing that you say, and if I think it is a sham child, I will discreetly remove it from you and expose it. If I do that, do not rage at me, as mothers rage if they lose their first child. For many before now, my gifted friend, have felt so extraordinarily angry towards me for exposing some nonsense or other of theirs that they were ready to bite me. They couldn’t believe that I had done this out of good will.”

*Theaetetus*, 151 b 8.

Take another look at your syllabi. How might you integrate some of these ideas, drawn from *Wisdom & Knowledge* and its five character strengths into your future offerings?
**HUMANITY**

**HUMANITY** is practiced when we use interpersonal character strengths that involve tending and befriending.

A university president at commencement intones the formula: "By the powers vested in me, and upon the recommendation of the faculty, I confer upon you the degree of _____, with all its rights, privileges, and responsibilities, and welcome you into the community of educated women and men." Students focus on the awarded degree, but it is in behalf of the community of educated women and men that faculty have worked since the day they arrived on campus. The character strengths of **HUMANITY** are the bonds that create and nurture this community.

Aristotle wrote about "character friendships" that are enriched by shared common goals. We learn from one another’s virtuous actions, celebrate affirmations, offer compassionate responses to failure and tragedy, and we try to transform negative emotions while sustaining positive ones. **HUMANITY’S** character strengths enhance faculty members’ life narratives with a memory bank of significant and lasting episodes that resulted from their tending and befriending.

**HUMANITY** goes to the heart of learning and teaching as a social interaction. We transform the intimate associations we have with our scholarly subject matter into character friendships with students and colleagues with whom we work. At the heart of **HUMANITY’S** character strengths is empathy, a *sine qua non* for all tending and befriending. We connect with a *caring, respect, love, and social intelligence* that understand the world and its problems through the other’s eyes. Through this virtue and its character strengths, we sustain the communities of truth and learning despite all of the obstacles inherent in the myriad of audiences to whom we listen and then speak.

Tending and befriending between student and teacher are unique among professional relationships. Codes of ethics and professional standards admonish us about all of the different ways by which this relationship can be impaired or even destroyed because of poor boundary setting. Paradoxically, **HUMANITY** draws its power from not setting boundaries in our *compassion*, or the patient and probing inquiry into another’s point of view, or the unconditional regard that sets teaching moments apart from many other memory’s episodes.

Compassion begins first with the wise discernment of another’s limitations or even suffering, and is sustained by diligent and patient courageous acts. *Love, caring, and kindness* rest on these platforms, from which we can then extend our reach for **TRANSCENDENCE** and its character strengths.

Aristotle believed that an individual will sacrifice all other goods in order to preserve friendship. Tending and befriending are at the very heart of teaching and learning. For our students, it may begin with a simple observation like--"she knew and remembered all of our names"--and ends with the profound experience of--"I felt heard.”
The Three Character Strengths of HUMANITY

With Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance, we contribute ethically and responsibly to the welfare of others despite a breadth or depth of differences.

With Social & Emotional Intelligence, we attend to subtle cues in teacher and student and colleague relationships and group dynamics; able to use our emotions as part of one's problem solving.

With Love, we create safe-havens in the classroom to foster interpersonal relationships of support and respect by demonstrating cognitive and affective acceptance of others.
Character Strengths of HUMANITY: Critical Incidents Exercise I

Most teachers choose the profession because, at heart, they tend to be caring individuals with varying degrees of interpersonal skills. Developing a depth of expertise in one’s scholarly area usually comes after being able to listen with respect and having a basic capacity to communicate complex ideas effectively. Yet, after teaching for only a short time, we begin to realize that “doing what comes naturally” to us in interpersonal situations needs continued personal growth. We learn more about the parameters of our own motivations and responses via authentic reflections about our relationships with diverse populations of students and peers.

Recall two distinct episodes from your teaching and advising experiences. The first should capture an interaction when your efforts to “tend and befriend” worked and the second should be about when similar efforts did not work. What were the dynamics (you, student or peer, problem) that led to success in one situation and similar or different dynamics that led to less than success in the other? The richest learning comes often from experiences that blend outcomes – e.g., an awkward and difficult early interaction leads to more positive, longer term results OR a smooth, seemingly easy intervention or assistance leads to more negative consequences for any number of reasons. Use the concepts of the three character strengths in describing each situation.

Positive Situation: The tending and befriending worked
- Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance
- Social & Emotional Intelligence
- Love

Negative Situation: The tending and befriending did not work
- Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance
- Social & Emotional Intelligence
- Love
Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance

With Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance, we contribute ethically and responsibly to the welfare of others despite a breadth or depth of differences.

Stimulus Reflections

Who are the students or peers to whom I have little difficulty in extending my generosity and kindness? And those to whom I find it more difficult?

What is the proportion of positive/negative commentary that I offer students on their verbal and written work in my classes? What calculus have I developed for balancing the “tenderness/toughness” dimension in my feedback, to different individuals with their unique qualities?

How do I communicate my accessibility and a willingness to listen to more than what has already been spoken? Do students or peers feel “safe” in their interactions with me?

How do I recognize my grumpy days, my sour views of particular students or peers, and my basic need for respect in unsupportive environments?

In my responses to students and peers, how do I balance an ethic of caring and of justice?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Care, Compassion, Generosity, Kindness, & Nurturance

“There is another kind of generosity we must exhibit if learning is to go well. We must fight off the feeling that particular students or institutions are not worthy of our effort. There are bad students, I suppose, and bad institutions, I know, but there are also bad teachers, including those who stay with bad students in bad places because they have neither the courage to leave nor the fortitude to fight for better conditions nor the practical wisdom to do what they can. Teachers can, if they choose, shift responsibility for good teaching to the school or to classroom conditions or to the abilities, interests, backgrounds, etc., etc., etc., of the students. It would be better to follow Whitehead’s advice: ‘It should be the chief aim of the university professor to exhibit himself in his own true character—that is, as an ignorant man thinking’. Why should students not be ignorant? What is fulfilling about teaching students who are already brighter than we are?”

Kenneth E. Eble (1972), Professors as Teachers, p. 40.

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“What is to be thought and hoped of me as a teacher if I am not steeped in that other type of knowing that requires that I be open to caring for the well-being of my students and of the educative experience in which I participate? This openness to caring for the well-being of the students does not mean of course that, as a teacher, I am obliged to care for all my students in the same way. What it does mean is that I am not afraid of my feelings and that I know how to express myself effectively in an appropriate and affirming way. It also means that I know how to fulfill authentically my commitment to my students in the context of a specifically human mode of action. In truth, I feel it is necessary to overcome the false separation between serious teaching and the expression of feeling. It is not a foregone conclusion, especially from a democratic standpoint, that the more serious, cold, distant and gray I am in my relations with my students in the course of teaching them, the better teacher I will be. Affectivity is not necessarily the enemy of knowledge or of the process of knowing.”

Social & Emotional Intelligence

With Social & Emotional Intelligence, we attend to subtle cues in teacher and student and colleague relationships and group dynamics; able to use emotions as part of one’s problem solving.

Stimulus Reflections

How adept am I at reading both verbal and nonverbal messages (i.e., texts and sub-texts) from students and from colleagues?

What evokes the most “noise” in my interpersonal relationships and gets in the way of my empathy?

In what situations, with what persons, and for what reasons do I routinely censor my direct or candid responses?

How do I develop a stronger intuitive sense for responding to the content and process of interpersonal communications?

How do I facilitate in my classes the group dynamics of gathering and sharing of ideas, engaging in productive conflict, and of mutual problem solving?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Social & Emotional Intelligence

“Sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound effect on the life of a student. I will always remember one such gesture in my life when I was an adolescent. A gesture that marks me profoundly but whose significance on my life was almost certainly not noticed or known by my teacher. At that time I experienced myself as an insecure adolescent, not at home with a body perceived as more bone than beauty, feeling myself to be less capable than the other students, insecure about my creative possibilities, easily riled, and not very much at peace with the world. The slightest gesture by any of the better-off students in the class was capable of highlighting my insecurity and fragility.

On this occasion our teacher had brought our homework to school after correcting it and was calling us one by one to comment on it. When my turn came, I noticed he was looking over my text with great attention, nodding his head in an attitude of respect and consideration. His respectful and appreciative attitude had a much greater effect on me than the high classification he gave me for my work. The gesture of the teacher affirmed in me the self-confidence that obviously still had much room to grow. But it inspired in me a belief that I too had value and could work and produce results—results that clearly had their limits but that were a demonstration of my capacity, which up until that moment I would have been inclined to hide or not fully believe in. And the greatest proof of the importance of that gesture is that I can speak of it now as if it had happened only today.

The importance of the kind of knowledge transmitted by gestures such as these, which are part and parcel of daily school life, needs serious reflection.”


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“One of the hardest things for teachers to do is to imagine the fear that students feel as they try to learn what we teach. If we have been teaching in a particular discipline, content, or skill area for a long period of time, we have most likely forgotten what it feels like to come to this learning as an uncertain novice. Moreover, since most of us tend to teach what we like to learn, we probably never felt much anxiety about it in the first place. If we teach what we’re good at and love, it is almost impossible for us to understand, much less empathize with, students who find our subject boring or intimidating. The more we teach something and the farther we travel from our first experiences of learning it, the easier it is to forget the fears and terrors new learning can provoke.”

Love

With Love, we create a safe haven in the classroom to foster interpersonal relationships of support and respect, demonstrating the enduring value of cognitive and affective acceptance.

Stimulus Reflections

How do I facilitate students learning as much from each other as they do from me?

What are the rewards for caring and kindness and generosity in my classes?

How do I reweave the threads of apathy, vulgarity, or disrespect into a tapestry that expects similarities and celebrates differences?

How do past and current students in my classes connect with each other and with me as lifelong learners?

How do I fulfill my needs for intimacy and community by the work that I do and with the colleagues who share the same academic life?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Love

“Faith in the learner leads some teachers to find strengths where others see nothing but weakness and failure. Such faith, which is a component of teaching sensibility, is a form of what I call the love for students as learners. It is important to pause over the idea of loving students as learners, which is not the same as simply loving students. Each of us has only a limited amount of love we can offer, for love is not cheaply won or given. I care about all my students, and respect them, but love grows slowly and requires attention and effort that cannot be spread around to twenty or thirty people simultaneously. Love also engages all parts of one’s life, and teaching, for all its demands, is still just a part of one’s total life as a parent, lover, citizen, and learner. I don’t trust teachers who say they love all their students, because it isn’t possible to love so many people you know so little about and will separate from in six months or a year.

Yet a certain kind of love is essential to good teaching, and that is what I choose to call loving students as learners.”

Herbert Kohl (2009), The Herb Kohl Reader: Awakening the Heart of Teaching, p. 172.

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In Client-Centered Therapy (1951), Carl Rogers wrote about “student-centered teaching.” Similar principles and processes can be found in On Becoming a Person (1961). In Freedom to Learn (1969), in the chapter, “The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning”, he wrote:

“Those attitudes which appear effective in promoting learning can be described. First of all is a transparent realness in the facilitator, a willingness to be a person, to be and live the feelings and thoughts of the moment. When this realness includes a prizing, a caring, a trust and respect for the learner, the climate for learning is enhanced. When it includes a sensitive and accurate empathic listening, then indeed a freeing climate, stimulative of self-initiated learning and growth, exists. The student is trusted to develop. I have tried to make plain that individuals who hold such attitudes, and are bold enough to act on them, do not simply modify classroom methods, they revolutionize them.”

Synopsis

In the synopsis section for WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE, we made central Socrates' midwife qualities. For HUMANITY, we shift to Aristotle's ethical discourse about character building. Recall how Aristotle’s effective citizens practiced their virtues; they did not just think about their abstractions or debate their nuanced qualities.

HUMANITY’S character strengths require our heads and our hearts. Teaching is an inductive learning process, fashioned out of our reflections on daily experiences, and our capacity to learn from tending and befriending relationships that work and that don’t work.

Our initial motivations to maintain an unconditional positive regard and affection for all our students becomes more complex after many encounters with genuinely unlikeable, or even hostile students and colleagues. Early career assertions of pervasive altruism grow tempered by a more seasoned humility but will flourish, too, via our zest and courageous perseverance.

One of the fundamental principles of these exercises is that teaching is a social interaction. Sustained teaching excellence requires collegial communities of educated women and men. This is why I placed HUMANITY as one of the core virtues that is foundational for all that we do. (I am indebted to David Fleming S. J. who was instrumental in my doing so.) Yet, as we will explore in coming sections, HUMANITY’S sometimes unreflective passion may need to be disciplined by TEMPERANCE, COURAGE, and JUSTICE and their respective character strengths.

Without HUMANITY’S abiding and powerful outcomes, TRANSCENDENCE may appear more abstract than real. Like WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE, HUMANITY fosters teaching as a “surprise” (recall Carse’s words) and “sacramental...the class experience itself becomes the end and aim of education” (recall Tompkins words). Reflecting on HUMANITY and its character strengths helps us appreciate why we might sacrifice almost every other virtue just to sustain this foundational value.

In Module Three – Learning About Teaching – we will focus next on JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE, and COURAGE. The character strengths of these virtues will be appreciated for their direct applications to the gritty challenges of the classroom and collegial interactions.
Module Three: Learning About Teaching

In *Learning About Teaching*, we will use a critical incidents approach to evaluate challenges that emerge during a semester.

In the preceding section on *Thinking About Learning*, we focused on **Wisdom & Knowledge** and **Humanity**, and their respective character strengths. With **Wisdom & Knowledge**, we imagine semesters and academic years during which the best we have to offer our students will result in the best learning outcomes that they will be able to achieve. With **Humanity**, we imagine the most positive interpersonal outcomes that we can foster in our class dynamics.

Alas, most semesters seldom unfold according to ideal scripts. There are eruptions that take us away from the intended sequences we carefully constructed. Surprises elevate us. Sometimes, conflicts or monotony deflate us. Most of the time, there are long middle weeks in every semester when the process of learning is all about patience and consistency, communicating relentless enthusiasm, and maintaining rigor and commitment to the tasks at hand.

No matter how often or how well we have planned our teaching, the critical incidents that we must navigate will be the measure of how well we are judged and how satisfied we feel at the end of the day. These will often be the episodes that students long remember as defining moments in their individual experiences with us.

Keeley, Smith, & Buskist's (2006) Teacher Behaviors Checklist (TBC) in Appendix B offers a thought-provoking strategy for a new teacher or a seasoned veteran to inventory their behavioral responses to the daily tasks of learning and teaching, and the checklist in Appendix C is re-organized by the six virtues. In Appendix D, Integrating Resources for the Teaching of Psychology, you will find a cornucopia of evidence-based materials on contemporary pedagogy in one discipline, and the best practices and quality benchmarking applicable to the transdisciplinary and professional programs with which you may identify.

In *Learning About Teaching*, we will focus on exhibiting **Justice**, **Temperance**, and **Courage** as our desired ends. Their character strengths will be the means by which we meet the challenges of the critical incidents.

There is another Syllabus Exercise and several Critical Incident Exercises for each virtue in this section, followed by Stimulus Reflections and FOOD FOR THOUGHT selections matched with each character strength.
**JUSTICE**

*Justice* is practiced when we use civic character strengths that contribute to diverse and healthy community life.

In a culture enamored with rugged individualism, commitment to common purposes and using disciplined means to achieve social justice is a tough sell. Yet, in an early narrative, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) observed a nation with a citizen service tradition where **loyalty**, **teamwork**, and a sense of belonging were valued as "habits of the heart" (Bellah et al., 1985). Social scientists have reminded us that "bowling alone" (Putnam, 2000) is a recent phenomenon; leagues and civic associations and their projects thrived in earlier days.

The Greeks construed education as their means to achieve a virtuous society. Two thousand years later, John Dewey’s progressive vision for public education was as a school for democracy. Students needed to participate in an embryonic community life, with the character strengths of **JUSTICE** woven tightly into the fabric of teaching and learning. He wrote in 1900, "relate the school to life, and all studies are of necessity correlated" (Dewey, 1968).

Prophets and public servants educate us by bearing witness to social justice. Their message is too often, too hard to hear and stimulates others to push back. Those who favor the status quo see the advocates of **JUSTICE** as radical, whether the issue is about equality of opportunity, the distribution of resources, or the waging of war. The Hebrew prophets were social gadflies, challenging their audience that to be "chosen" had a *quid pro quo* of adhering to social commitments versus pursuing only individual satisfactions. Twentieth century social prophets in America balanced the public teaching roles of the gadfly and the midwife. History then confirmed that their teachings, like the electric eel, thwarted clung-to social and cultural norms dead in their tracks, and changed the course of human affairs and its change mechanisms.

Teachers are among society’s soft-spoken stalwarts for social **JUSTICE**, having the wherewithal to accomplish student awakenings and commitments, one-by-one. They model **fairness** because they invest their **creativity**, **enthusiasm**, and **perseverance** in achieving performance and personal changes for the whole span of their students’ talents, motivation, and prior academic successes or failures. Whether an individual has been privileged as the best and brightest by their prior education, or they are newcomers to quality education, they deserve our time and very best talents.

Students’ futures as global citizens are entrusted to us. Teachers understand that they cannot level all the playing fields. Many may consider that creating laboratories for democracy, regardless of the subject matter being learned, is neither their task, nor often within their expertise. Nevertheless, teachers do accept that their influence lingers long after face-to-face time has expired, and it is more often not just because of the content of their courses.

**JUSTICE** asks you to consider what are your expectations and commitments for building diverse and healthy civic relationship models into the dynamics of your classes. At a minimum, teachers construct communities of truth-seeking where students encounter others who possess different intellectual gifts, expectations, sensitivities, and motivations. Students can learn that, regardless of others’ *a priori* assumptions or achievements, we are all peers when it comes to learning. Inevitably, we will accomplish outcomes in uneven, different, and unique ways. What are the **JUST** ways to understand such learning and to facilitate its social consequences?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Justice

“Socrates: Then go back to the beginning and answer my question. What do you and your friend say that virtue is?

Meno: Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. . . . you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes in contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. Yet I have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well, too, or so I thought.

Socrates: As for myself, if the sting ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself, then the comparison is just, but not otherwise. It isn’t that knowing the answer myself, I perplex other people. The truth is that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself. So with virtue now, I don’t know what it is. You may have known before you came into contact with me, but now you look as if you don’t. Nevertheless, I am ready to carry out, together with you, a joint investigation and inquiry into what it is.”

From Meno, 79e – 80d
The Three Character Strengths of JUSTICE

With Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork, we build collaborative communities of learners rather than solely rewarding individual achievements or solo performances; foster effective group dynamics.

With Fairness, we develop a nuanced capacity to identify biases in our perspectives; reason, make judgments, and implement ethical actions.

With Leadership, we facilitate the task demands and interpersonal dynamics of learning environments.
Character Strengths of JUSTICE: Syllabus Exercise II

Syllabus Exercise I asked you to examine your learning outcomes and to map them against the five character strengths of WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE.

Evaluate again one or two recent syllabi from courses that you have taught. Consider the explicit statements in your syllabi for what students can expect about the learning methods and required activities in your course. If you don't build such process/pedagogy statements into your syllabi, then what would peers observe as the typical group dynamics on any given day?

Match one or more of the three character strengths with how you structure the daily and cumulative group dynamic as the means to your learning outcomes/ends. List the different ways that you model JUSTICE’S character strengths in your teaching.

- Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork (e.g., group discussions or projects; faculty or peer feedback mechanisms)

- Fairness (e.g., clarity/flexibility of standards and evaluation methods)

- Leadership (e.g., individualism and collaboration ethos; modeling many literacies)
Character Strengths of JUSTICE: Critical Incidents Exercise II

It may be difficult to connect with character strengths in the abstract. However, we do have images of the ideal class session or of the “perfect” semester in which almost everything planned went well, and there were frequent unanticipated affirmations. Imagine the following beginning to a class session.

Several minutes into your opening presentation, an average student in the class asks a particularly insightful question. She is followed by another student who builds on the first question and probes the issue even more deeply by sharing some of his personal experiences. You then offer a less apparent perspective from which to evaluate the problem, building on the first two students’ comments. Without warning, one of your best students in the class suggests: “Can we break into small groups and try to work out our understanding of this issue? It’s really important because many of us are struggling with that question RIGHT NOW.”

What happens next? What decision do YOU make? Why (not)?

Describe below how one or all of the 3 character strengths of JUSTICE could be demonstrated in responding to this scene.

- Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership
Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork

With Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork, we build collaborative communities of learners rather than solely rewarding individual achievements or solo performances; foster effective group dynamics.

Stimulus Reflections

How do I balance learning necessary content material and learning to collaborate with others in behalf of learning?

Are my classrooms communities of truth, pluralistic learning environments with bridges to a global world beyond? Are the necessary trade-offs in emphasizing such dynamic goals versus a more traditional content-oriented course in my home discipline or interdisciplinary area possible? Worthy of further study on my part?

How do you, as a teacher, think that the social ethos of classrooms are and are not like families? Are and are not like neighborhoods? Are and are not like governance or social organizations?

What is my balance between facilitating the achievements of independent learning and the communitarian bonds fostered by collaborative learning?

How might I collaborate more effectively with other scholar-teachers with whom I work? How willing and/or able am I to be public about my teaching with colleagues who may be very different from me on personal or professional dimensions?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Citizenship, Social Responsibility, Loyalty, & Teamwork

“Collaborative learning, then, is a structured learning activity that addresses major concerns related to improving student learning. It involves students actively, thereby putting into practice the predominant conclusion from a half-century of research on cognitive development. It prepares students for careers by providing them with opportunities to learn the teamwork skills valued by employers. It helps students appreciate multiple perspectives and develop skills to collaboratively address the common problems facing a diverse society. And it engages all students by valuing the perspective each student can contribute from his or her personal academic and life experience. That said, collaborative learning is not an educational panacea. Collaborative learning is an appropriate method for achieving some learning goals and tasks, but not for others. In most cases, we see collaborative learning not as a replacement for lecture, discussion, or other traditional methods, but rather as a useful complement . . .

Teachers over the generations have searched for the “best” method of teaching, and there has been considerable research comparing various teaching methods. Psychologists at the University of Michigan reviewed more than five hundred research studies pertaining to teaching and learning in college classrooms. When asked what is the most effective teaching method, McKeachie and his colleagues answered that it depends on the goal, the student, the content, and the teacher—but the next best answer is, “Students teaching other students.” (McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, & Smith, 1986, p.63)


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“Society is the process of associating in such ways that experiences, ideas, emotions, and values are transmitted and made common. To this active process, both the individual and the institutionally organized may truly be said to be subordinate. . . .Personality must be educated, and personality cannot be educated by confining its operations to technical and specialized things, or to the less important relationships of life. Full education comes only when there is a responsible sharing on the part of each person, in proportion to capacity, in shaping the aims and policies of the social groups to which he belongs. This fact fixes the significance of democracy.”

**Fairness**

With *Fairness*, we demonstrate a nuanced capacity to identify biases in our perspectives; reason, make judgments, and implement ethical actions.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What is the nature of “authority” in my classes? Of reasoned and responsible decision-making for the choices about what to learn and how?

How do I establish and adapt standards for learning and evaluation? How do I balance the inevitable tensions between what is fair for the greatest number, yet responsive to each individual?

About what policy or practice do my students most often say: ”That's unfair”? And then how do I respond?

How does someone “fail” in my classes? How much freedom do I allow for students to choose to fail? How much responsibility am I willing to take for not letting someone fail?

What individuals or groups of students “get left behind” in my classes? In my program? On my campus? How do I think about them? Respond to them and the environments that produced them?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Fairness

“The class must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It must begin somewhere in place and time and proceed to another point, however arbitrary. Students must be aware of progression, and they need to feel their own development—a sense of having had certain ideas and then found them undermined, challenged, and refashioned. I'm aware that I'm trying to make each student independent of me, capable of confronting a body of material and absorbing it in an individual way, critiquing it, remaking it. The worst thing that I can imagine is for a student merely to accept what I say, without question. My authority in the classroom is, in a way, a fiction: I present myself with authority, but I do so in ways that allow students to confront my point of view, to risk challenging my authority.”

Jay Parini (2005), The Art of Teaching, pp. 48-49.

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My present oppositional theory tells me that I should exaggerate... my gatekeeper functions rather than run away from them. The more I try to soft-pedal assessment, the more mysterious it will seem to students and the more likely they will be preoccupied and superstitious about it. The more I can make it clear to myself and to my students that I do have a commitment to knowledge and institutions, and the more I can make it specifically clear how I am going to fulfill that commitment, the easier it is for me to turn around and make a dialectical change of role into being an extreme ally to students... That is, I feel better about being really tough if I know I am going to turn around and be on the student's side more than usual. And, contrarily, I do not have to hold back from being an ally of students when I know I have set really high standards. (Peter Elbow, 1983, pp. 335-336)

“What he (Elbow) says about students applies to new faculty as well. Where we separate our roles, we can begin with and persist in high standards and expectations in one role; as we set clear expectations and establish ongoing feedback, we can communicate our other role, that of an ally who will help coach new faculty to their best performance.”

Robert Boice (1992), The New Faculty Member, pp. 250-251.
**Leadership**

With *Leadership*, we facilitate the task demands and interpersonal dynamics of learning environments.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What is my leadership ethic and how do I adapt it for the dynamics of specific environments and diverse populations of students or colleagues?

Recollected memories communicated in a variety of ways are rich sources about the importance of a teacher’s influence. What anecdotal data do I have to answer questions like: Who did I touch, and how? Who did I miss, and why? What lingers in my students’ lives from the time they spent with me?

How do I respond to the identification of students in contemporary academic settings as “consumers”? How do I assist my students to think of knowledge as individually and collaboratively created, and not just consumed?

How do I respond to the expectation/identification of faculty in contemporary academic settings as “entrepreneurs”?

Liberal learning outcomes cut across the curriculum – writing, critical thinking, ethics, numeracy, multicultural and global awareness, scientific and psychological literacy. How do I model these literacies for my students as socially responsible citizens and future leaders?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Leadership

“Dear Professor Tompkins,
I've read your article, and I think you're fooling yourself. You're cheating your students under the guise of liberating them. These students need guidance; they need a model. They need to hear books discussed boldly, rigorously, with discipline, and in a spirit of inquiry. They're only eighteen or nineteen; they don't know how to be intellectuals. It's your job to show them, and you're not doing it. You ought to be fired. “DISGUSTED”

Dear DISGUSTED,
You may be right. But twisting in my seat, looking away in agony or frustration, staring down at the desk, and taking deep breaths, I've learned to curb my impulse to correct the students, to show them the way, because when I do, it shuts them up. Allowed to meander to its furthest most insignificant trickle, ending in a long moment of emptiness, or allowed to reach a pinnacle of disorderly, excited hilarity and confusion, a class discussion can give birth to the moment that changes the destiny of the course. The student too afraid to speak up at any other time may step into that moment of silence; or the giddiness of the atmosphere may produce an insight, a wild metaphorical leap of the imagination on someone's part that crystallizes everything. Then there's the silence that attends the recognition of an important event. To me that precarious path is more precious than all the modeling in the world. Besides, they get that from their other professors.”


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“What, then, does the teacher contribute to the process of learning that students cannot supply on their own? At least three important things. As the intermediary between the class and a body of knowledge, he or she offers each student structure, evaluation, and support. Structure comes through the teacher's ability to anticipate the likely trouble spots ahead, and willingness to help students find and maintain a realistic pace until they have mastered (or at least reviewed) a coherent body of work. The insights that come from unsupervised reading and extracurricular activities, however intense, are often random experiences; they cannot duplicate the careful sequence and sustained growth of ideas fostered by a well-crafted course. The teacher also provides the critique and stimulation of dialogue. Students will be required not only to absorb the instructor's explanations but also to answer questions, to defend a position or react to criticism. Such probing often reveals fundamental gaps in knowledge or misconceptions that must be pointed out before they can be corrected. Finally, a teacher's interest and encouragement can play a crucial role in motivating students to reach beyond self-imposed limits. By participating in the give and take of a learning community, under the guidance of an experienced leader, students share in group resources that usefully supplement their own, and must confront standards that can be ignored or evaded when studying alone. The fact that another person takes the trouble to engage the student's ideas seriously helps that student to do the same. . . . The "structured dialogue" between teacher and student common to all now becomes a silent, inner dialogue where the student acts the teacher's part, offering self-criticism and self-encouragement. . . Teaching does make a difference.”

Synopsis

In the synopsis section on WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE’S character strengths, we reflected on the concept of midwife in Socrates’ approach to teaching. In this section on JUSTICE and its character strengths, we spotlight the roles of gadfly and electric eel. Like the Greeks’ faith in higher education as the source of civic virtue and public decision making, John Dewey’s progressive ideas encouraged us to construct our classrooms for present and future social responsibility.

Faculty, by virtue of their personalities or the nature of their subject expertise, may invest less time in advancing the social justice outcomes of learning. Yet, in post-millennium statements on American education, scholar-teachers suggest that a liberal education is one that fosters ethical responsibility and social commitments. In the 1800s, when common baccalaureate curricula were the order of the day, and before disciplinary or professional specialization became “major,” students’ capstone course was in Moral Philosophy, and often taught by the college’s president. Its learning outcome could be stated thus: Now that you are on the threshold of entering society as educated women and men, how will you become full and contributing citizens by using what the faculty has taught you? McGovern et al. (2010) saw the emerging, global outcome for undergraduate majors in their discipline as becoming psychologically literate citizens.

Consider Socrates once again to synthesize your understandings of JUSTICE.

“It is completely unreasonable for someone who professes a concern for justice to keep on and on arguing unfairly. Someone argues unfairly when they do not keep apart verbal athletics and true dialectic. In a mere verbal contest, you play childish tricks on your opponent, and catch him out whenever you can. But in true dialectics you apply yourself—you even help your opponent to get his argument straight. The only stumbles that you point out to your opponent are those that he himself is responsible for, or that arise from the way he was taught philosophy in the past. . .my friend, see what happens when the philosophical man draws someone else upwards; when someone else is willing to rise above the level of questions like “What injustice have I done to you, or you to me?”, to the level of an inquiry into justice and injustice themselves, as to what each of them is and how they differ from everything else and from each other."

Theaetetus, 167 d 4; 175 b 9.

Take another look at your syllabi. How might you integrate some of these ideas into your next editions? How have the lenses through which you view your classes’ group dynamics changed by reflecting on the character strengths of JUSTICE?
TEMPERANCE

TEMPERANCE is demonstrated with a discipline that protects against excess in our relationships with students, faculty colleagues, and administrators.

To “temper” is to moderate, to discover the proper measure of strength and resilience. Why is he being so temperamental? Does she have the temperament for this group dynamic? What we really need is a temperate response to this crisis situation.

Teaching and learning are “full-contact” activities that trigger a whole range of affective responses to the varieties of students and situations we encounter. Finding just the right proportion demands a self-disciplined thinking about the strong emotions that characterize our uniqueness.

Every sacred tradition invoked “deadly sins” – e.g., pride, anger, envy, slothfulness. Their excesses diminish the practice of virtue. The pursuit of excellence in teaching and learning is no different in its expectations for vigilance about excess. Consider the following temptations:

• We strut our advanced learning or professional accomplishments sometimes without merit and without a consciousness of its distancing effect on our students or peers.

• We are appalled by others’ lack of respect and their vulgar responses to the questions we pose or the pedagogy we construct.

• We struggle with boundaries and keeping clear our motivations about complex relationships that we choose to have with students, with peers, or with supervisors.

• We are poorly rewarded for all we have learned and prepared and jealously may compare our economic well-being with others within and outside of our profession.

• We grow weary with the constant demands of time management, lack of predictability, and lack of appreciation, often biting our lip while trying to stay motivated and fresh.

When we practice TEMPERANCE, colleagues and students will remember our grace under pressure. They will have encountered a model for a sense of balance and for measured but plain-speaking responses to complex situations or conflicted people. They will have a vivid but disciplined image to guide them through their own future crises by asking:

What would Professor ___ do if they were in my place, right now?
The Four Character Strengths of TEMPERANCE

With *Humility & Modesty*, we communicate genuine self-assessments of strengths and limitations, valuing multiple perspectives and potential outcomes.

With *Forgiveness & Mercy*, we diminish anger with empathy; sustain and renew relationships despite setbacks that derive from others’ shortcomings or mistakes.

With *Discretion & Prudence*, we take care in daily choices; promote measured balance and harmony in the pursuit of intended goals.

With *Self-Control & Self-Regulation*, we manage initial reactions to consider and implement disciplined responses, especially in difficult, “no-win” classroom and professional situations.
Character Strengths of TEMPERANCE: Critical Incidents Exercise III

In this exercise, let’s focus on three basic reactions that we may have in response to critical incidents with students, with peers, and with supervisors: mad, sad, or scared. Cull your memories for scenes in the classroom, or in a faculty meeting, or in one-to-one interactions. As you recall the scenes, listen to the words and see their dynamics. Try to connect to the affective and cognitive reactions that you had then, although its intensity may now be somewhat diminished. Watch as the drama unfolds. Try not to censor or sanitize those responses that you may have come to regret later for their consequences.

Briefly describe a scene in which you were mad, sad, or scared with students, peers, or supervisors and expressed yourself in an intemperate manner.

Match that scene with one of the four character strengths of TEMPERANCE and how you might have responded differently.

- *Humility & Modesty*

- *Forgiveness & Mercy*

- *Discretion & Prudence*

- *Self-Control & Self-Regulation*
Humility & Modesty

With *Humility & Modesty*, we communicate genuine self-assessments of strengths and limitations, valuing multiple perspectives and potential outcomes.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What is my genuine appraisal of my expertise in the subject matter that I teach and in how well I teach it?

In what types of situation(s) or with what type(s) of person do I tend to overstate my expertise or accomplishments? To what end(s)?

What reactions do I typically receive from others in situations when they do not know my background or levels of expertise and accomplishment?

About what should I be profoundly humble in not knowing or not being able to do, or in not being able to effectively respond to a particular type of person or a specific situation?

How effectively do I listen to and respond to legitimate compliments?
**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Humility & Modesty**

“The failure to meet appreciation with gratitude stemmed from the sense that I didn’t deserve praise, wasn’t really good enough. My other shortcomings came from a simple lack of expertise. When I look back on it now, I’m amazed that my fellow Ph.D.s and I were let loose in the classroom with virtually no preparation for what we would encounter in a human sense. If nothing else, I wish I had been warned about what an ego-battering enterprise teaching can be. Teaching, by its very nature, exposes the self to myriad forms of criticism and rejection, as well as to emulation and flattery and love. Day after day, teachers are up there, on display. No matter how good they are, it’s impossible not to get shot down. If only I’d known, if only someone I respected had talked to me honestly about teaching, I might have been saved from a lot of pain.”


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“We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act toward each other, toward their environment, with compassion, understanding, and fairness. But our attempts to increase the amount of love and justice in the world are never simple, never unambiguous. What we think are democratic, respectful ways of treating people can be experienced by them as oppressive and constraining. One of the hardest things teachers have to learn is that the sincerity of their intentions does not guarantee the purity of their practice. The cultural, psychological, and political complexities of learning and the ways in which power complicates all human relationships (including those between students and teachers) mean that teaching can never be innocent.

Critically reflective teachers will make sure that they find some way of regularly seeing what they do through students’ eyes.”

Forgiveness & Mercy

With *Forgiveness and Mercy*, we diminish anger with empathy; sustain and renew relationships despite setbacks that derive from others’ shortcomings or mistakes.

**Stimulus Reflections**

What student/peer/supervisor attitudes or behaviors make my blood boil?

With what type(s) of situation(s) or person(s) do I feel trapped or with few degrees of freedom for how to respond?

What is my calculus for balancing mercy with justice in conflicted interactions or situations?

What constrains my impulse to forgive or be merciful when I must respond to harmful ignorance, to verbal disdain or abuse, to outright hostility, or to an unjust accusation?

How have others responded when I offered a forgiving or merciful overture? What was my emotional satisfaction in doing so, regardless of the other person’s short or long-term response?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Forgiveness & Mercy

“My teaching is based on empathy: trying to understand another person’s feelings and thoughts without losing sight of the differences between self and other. Making a difference in a student’s life means respecting difference... Empathic teaching leads to empathic learning: students becoming more sensitive to and connected with their classmates’ lives. Empathic teaching also leads to empathic learning for the educator: teacher and student learn more about each other in this relational paradigm. Empathy also leads to the possibility of forgiveness – and self-forgiveness. I can’t imagine a better way for teachers to make a difference in their students’ lives than by helping them to become more empathic and (self-) forgiving, especially in an age when these two qualities are underappreciated.”


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“Folk wisdom holds that middle age brings to each of us the face we deserve. So too for careers, some of which are happily attractive and some sadly disillusioning at their midpoints. While few of us seriously believe that angelic faces reflect faultless lives, we may accept the career notion less critically. If we dismiss the career failures of our unhappiest colleagues as deserved, we may needlessly doom others to repeat their experiences... careers gone awry merit patient inquiries into their turning points. Such an inquiry could include... a deeper appreciation of the costs of ignoring the problem of disillusioned faculty at midcareer. And it might address the matter of whether the most entrenched of unproductive and oppositional colleagues can be redirected to happier careers and faces. Notions about the hopelessness of ‘deadwood’ make up a significantly misleading part of academic folklore.”

Robert Boice (1993), Primal origins and later correctives for midcareer disillusionment, p. 33.

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The quality of mercy is not strain’d
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless’d;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes... 
It is an attribute of God himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice (IV, 1)
Discretion & Prudence

With Discretion & Prudence, we take care in daily choices; promote measured balance and harmony in the pursuit of intended goals.

Stimulus Reflections

What is my typical emotional response – mad, glad, sad, scared -- to unanticipated conflicts?

In what type(s) of situation(s) or with what types of person(s) do I have the most difficulty sustaining my initial and/or more positive responses?

What are my “go-to” strategies for clear and authentic responses as I try to balance long-term outcomes with the short-term demands to take action?

In resolving professional conflicts with students, colleagues, and supervisors, when and why am I timid versus prudent, indecisive versus cautious, and non-communicative versus discrete?

What are the most effective pathways that restore the balance and harmony in my life?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Discretion & Prudence

“In a national study of higher education faculty, Braxton and Bayer (1999) asked their sample to rate 126 different behaviors that violated commonly accepted standards for teaching, and then two levels of sanction for engaging in those behaviors. Their data suggested seven clusters of inviolable norms: condescending negativism, inattentive planning, moral turpitude, particularistic grading, personal disregard, uncommunicated course details, and uncooperative cynicism.

When these clusters were compared across institutional types and disciplines, only two were identified by all groups of faculty as inappropriate: moral turpitude and authoritarian classrooms. Demographic characteristics of the respondents did not make a difference in what they felt was inappropriate behavior. The final conclusion by the authors was that there were four values that seemed to undergird the judgments of the participants: respect for students as individuals, equal consideration for all students, an obligation to prepare for teaching, and an obligation to participate in the governance and life of the institution.”


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“The power to move, excite, exploit, anger, incite, dominate, inspire, oppress, engage, destroy, hurt, terrify, and/or transform. To teach is to have power. What this means on a day to day basis, week after week, semester after semester, is what concerns me. My power as the professor and the students’ power to inhibit, liberate, censor, move, inspire, criticize, cheer, attack, resist, resent, reproach, enliven, and affirm me year after year.”

Jyl Lynn Felman (2001), Never a Dull Moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance, p.192.
Self-Control & Self-Regulation

With Self-Control & Self-Regulation, we manage initial reactions to consider and implement disciplined responses, especially in difficult, “no-win” classroom and professional situations.

Stimulus Reflections

In my vocation as a teacher, what have I learned are my low and high thresholds for:

- Pride
- Anger
- Sadness and disappointment
- Collegial community and intimacy
- Need for recognition and reward
- Fatigue?

What intellectual or emotional boundaries and situations are most difficult for me to navigate?

What cues have I learned to know when “things are out of control”?

What methods do I use to evaluate alternative responses to conflicted situations or persons?

To whom or to what do I turn most often to appreciate the importance of what I do and to get back in touch with a “big picture”?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Self-Control & Self-Regulation

“The rejection of authority is as basic and as long established as the assertion of authority. Jesus, Oedipus, King Lear—the world’s history, myth and story endlessly chronicle rebellion and offer the means by which one may develop a wiser understanding of the phenomenon. The rejection of authority which makes teaching difficult is heightened by students’ resistance to the particulars of learning. In any roomful of students, the degree of resistance will vary greatly. With some students, resistance is certain to be intense. Though learning is pleasurable, the work of learning -- concentration, repetition, and application -- naturally arouses resistance. Overcoming that resistance has always been central to the teacher’s job.”

Kenneth E. Eble (1972), Professors as Teachers, p. 171.

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“For the professor committed to emotions as a pedagogical tool, the expression of anger in the feminist classroom is the most difficult to navigate. Anger, in this particularized environment, has three relevant dimensions: that of the students toward their professor, the students’ anger with each other; and finally, the least examined, the anger of the professor toward the students. . . . I am still somewhat surprised when I find myself, at the end of the day, angry with the whole class, a group of students, or one or two in particular. (The actual incidents triggering my anger are irrelevant.) When this happens, I begin asking myself the same questions I ask the students when they tell me that they’re angry with me. On occasion, I have chosen to address the class directly, not to yell or take out my anger on them, but to discuss the fact that I am angry and to articulate the reasons why. This strategy has been the most effective; my vulnerability is once again exposed, and my humanness affirmed. I am not just another professor pulling rank . . .”

Jyl Lynn Felman (2001), Never a Dull Moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance, pp. 41-42.
Synopsis

During my formative years in the 1950s, morality was well-defined as avoiding evil rather than doing good. Such an emphasis comes and goes in contemporary culture fostered by the media’s scrutiny of flagrant public violations and the righteous exhortations made from political podiums and pastors’ pulpits.

Several years ago, I used the virtues and character strengths as an organizing template for a lower-division undergraduate course on ethics and moral values. My end of the semester students’ evaluations asserted: “too much emphasis on sainthood and not enough on sinfulness.” The next year I included several slim volumes from a New York Public Library series of lectures on the 7 Deadly Sins. I chose lust, anger, and greed for students to read about, and that semester’s evaluations improved significantly!

There are data from three random samples drawn in 2008 from 655,000 profiles of American respondents to the VIA Signature Strengths Survey (Mayerson, 2008).

- Among people’s top five signature strengths, those for the virtue of TEMPERANCE were NOT among those highly valued: forgiveness (17%), prudence (9%), modesty (9%) and self-regulation (4%).
- 73% of individuals had at least one character strength from WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE whereas 33% had one from TEMPERANCE in their top five, the lowest percentage among all six virtues.

What about for teachers? I’ve taught ethics courses to doctoral students and a host of interdisciplinary courses on related topics to undergraduates. Preparing for these courses, I was struck by how many of the formal ethical codes and standards from professional groups and learned societies stressed the “Thou Shalt Nots” much more than aspirational principles. Many were first drafted or significantly revised, however, during a period in American higher education when the “lecherous professor” or “profs scam” became household terms. Headline exposés turned egregious case studies into a public perception that such behaviors were business as usual in academe.

I try to sustain an emphasis on the positive motivational qualities of TEMPERANCE’S character strengths, finding the Dalai Lama’s (1999) teachings to be persuasive. He suggested that to achieve wisdom or to be humane and compassionate, we first must discern our impulses and our well-worn intemperate responses. With such insight from reflected experience, we then must practice the disciplined tasks of being humble, forgiving, prudent, and self-regulating.

Good strategies for teachers! And we have plenty of lab work to practice every semester, too.
COURAGE

COURAGE is practiced using emotional character strengths to accomplish goals despite external or internal obstacles.

For the virtue of WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE, we use intellectual character strengths and acquired skills for lifelong learning. For TEMPERANCE, the locus of activity shifts to the will. For COURAGE, we embrace a centuries-old tradition that it is in an individual’s heart where we may find both feeling and thought. There we may discover our spirit, mind, disposition, and even our truest nature because there ought to be no false dichotomy between head and heart.

“Cor”/-age” means matters of the heart. As teachers, have our hearts grown stronger with age? Do we come to know our “core” better, with more practice?

Like the muscle at the center of our physical bodies, this virtue needs exercise every single day, in small ways, to gather the strength for a day when great COURAGE may be summoned. We look into the face of things feared—differences, conflict, criticism, commitment, change, boredom—and try not to turn away. We try not to retreat to safer, inauthentic ground.

The exemplars of COURAGE throughout history were those who understood the need to bear witness. To stand up for something. To stand strong for others. Bravely. Persistently. In contemporary life, they are every community’s “first responders,” keeping us safe by sustaining their daily duties in educational, health, public safety, and social service settings with skill and perseverance.

Teachers bare an honest self with their authentic voices of integrity. They foster in their students a similar ethos. They take the time to listen through the noise that conflict may bring. They expect and respect differences until, in their social environments, differences come to mean less than more.

With emotional and intellectual strength, we endure patiently and do the heavy lifting. We persist and do so with a zest that inspires enthusiasm in others with whom we work. We become identified as reliable advocates because we demonstrate the wherewithal to “hang in there.” Nobel laureates only get recognized after long years of doing their work with quiet grace and steadfast COURAGE.

In recent years, too often we have seen the fruits of a violent society invade places of learning at all levels of education. We mourned the loss of academic colleagues and their students. Faculty COURAGE at such moments was an unanticipated source of abiding respect and admiration. Such episodes may motivate us to do ordinary things extraordinarily well.
The Four Character Strengths of COURAGE

With Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty, we declare clear principles and values; present oneself sincerely and act genuinely, modeling how this quality is essential for trusting relationships.

With Bravery & Valor, we act with conviction, despite risks and dangers; to “bear witness”.

With Persistence & Perseverance, we sustain efforts despite obstacles, boredom, or frustration, and without apparent rewards; find pleasure in completing tasks.

With Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest, we show a passion for teaching, learning, and deliberate practices for well-being; demonstrate a focused sense of priorities.
Four Character Strengths of COURAGE: Critical Incidents Exercise IV

In the Critical Incidents Exercise III, we focused on understanding how we may (not) temper our emotional responses to highly charged situations. In the Critical Incidents Exercises IV & V, we discover that COURAGE requires responses that unite head and heart. Acts of COURAGE build on the cognitive discipline from WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE and the emotional discipline gained from practicing the character strengths of TEMPERANCE.

Imagine this classroom scene.

For several days, you have been exploring emotionally charged topics that “hit close to home” with your students. Beyond the intellectual subject matter, the real-life applications draw on their ethnicities, class differences, gender, political ideologies, secular vs. sacred values, and remain “hot-buttons” for traditional humanities, science, social science, or creative arts course material. Individuals bring their passionate, experiential histories to the front burner.

Imagine a scene when students become increasingly ardent in sharing their narratives. Identify a specific topic or perspective most germane to your regular teaching assignments. On this particular day, tensions escalate among three students. Vulgar words are exchanged. Others in class verbally start to draw up sides. One student jumps up from a desk and the chair clatters down to the floor. It is the sound of something about to happen.

“So, Professor, just where do YOU stand?” a voice snarls.

WORKSHEET

Briefly describe how you would/hope to respond in this situation, drawing on the following two character strengths.

- Bravery & Valor

- Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty
Four Character Strengths of COURAGE: Critical Incidents Exercise V

In the Critical Incidents Exercise III, we focused on understanding how we may temper our emotional responses to highly charged situations. In the Critical Incidents Exercise IV & V, we discover that COURAGE requires responses that unite head and heart. Acts of courage build on the cognitive discipline from WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE and the emotional discipline gained from practicing the character strengths of TEMPERANCE.

Imagine the following situation.

You arrive at the mid-way point in a semester, teaching courses that your department chairperson assigned you—again—that are required, lower-division, and to which students perennially arrive with poor academic preparation, low motivation, and limited critical thinking and writing skills.

No matter how hard you try, no matter what innovative pedagogical strategies you deploy, no matter how much feedback and encouragement you provide--nothing seems to be working. No one is responding. Attendance dwindles. Scores on examinations decline.

WORKSHEET

Briefly describe how you would/hope to respond in this situation, drawing on the following two character strengths.

- Persistence & Perseverance
- Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest
**Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty**

With *Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty*, we declare clear principles and values; present oneself sincerely and act genuinely, modeling how this quality is essential for trusting relationships.

**Stimulus Reflections**

Being “authentic” is: *genuine, deserving of respect, real, spontaneous but predictable, coming from the stated source and unvarnished.* How do I respond in this way (or not) to students and colleagues?

What single principle about teaching and single principle about learning do I stand by – across diverse students, situational contexts, and years in academic life?

About what do I have the most difficulty telling the truth to my students or to my colleagues?

To “assess” is defined as: *to sit down next to someone and to appraise the value of something.* Authentic assessment is truth telling about students’ or colleagues’ performance that can be applied directly to their lives. How do I accomplish this principled approach to feedback?

“Integrity” means: *an undivided state, uncorrupted and sound, whole and without compromise.* To live undivided at the personal level means to go against the professional grain, the inexorable flow of the status quo. When and how do I push back against situations, individuals and environments that divide me?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Authenticity, Integrity, & Honesty

“I know by now that students regard me as their teacher, not their best friend, and I can accept this at my age. I want them to see me thinking, considering, reconsidering, doubting, remaking myself in their presence. I want them to benefit from the fact that I have thought a good deal more about literature than they have. I also believe I can teach them something about how to live their lives: openly, with a freedom of mind and spirit, a willingness to question assumptions and reformulate notions. If anything, I think of myself as presenting to students an alternate vision, another way of living in a dangerous world…”

Jay Parini (2005), The Art of Teaching, p. 52.

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“So I come back again and again to the need for teachers to speak out as witnesses to what they see each day before their eyes, whether they do this only in the most restrained and quiet ways at school-wide gatherings or meetings in the districts where they work or in bolder voices at the larger education conferences and in the education journals and the mainstream media. “Witnessing” is a familiar term among clergy of progressive and compassionate denominations. As I’ve said to you before, I think it ought to be the privilege, and obligation, of our teachers too.”

Jonathan Kozol (2007), Letters to a Young Teacher, pp. 193-94.
Bravery & Valor

With *Bravery & Valor*, we act with conviction, despite great risks and dangers; to “bear witness.”

Stimulus Reflections

What has been my experience of danger or risk in a classroom or educational setting? A hostile student? An unpredictable and ill-tempered colleague or administrator? What have I feared most in such interactions?

How do I balance maintaining my patience that things will work themselves out, a faith in developmental change over time and avoiding conflict, versus acting with conviction on my legitimate anger about injustice or moral corruption?

What would be the greatest loss that I could experience by not acting bravely in my relationships with students, peers, or supervisors?

What is the sound of my “voice” that emerges in conflict situations? Taking place in one-to-one interactions? Or in larger group forums?

With whom and how do I debrief after navigating a lightning-storm situation? What do I let myself feel? Think? What lingers most often?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Bravery & Valor

“...the academy is not simply a set of administrative, curricular, and pedagogical practices; it is also the people who have been captured and rewarded by those practices...while it is certainly true that changing administrative, curricular, and pedagogical practices may alter the experience of higher education for those who enter the system in the future, such changes are unlikely to be seen as desirable by those already resident in the system. And because those already in the system will tolerate only incremental adjustments to their working conditions, the struggle between those who seek to reform the system and those resistant to such change almost naturally gives birth to a rhetorical world where endless calumny gets heaped on those whom the system rewarded in the past—they are lazy, old, ignorant, behind the times, immoral, angry, bitter—and unrestricted praise gets laid at the feet of those about to enter the system—they are honest, hard-working, the best and the brightest, dedicated, patient, thoughtful, sincere.”

Richard E. Miller (1998), As If Learning Mattered, p. 201.

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“If the classroom is going to be a stage, then all the performers must understand the nature of the risk involved. This means that teaching on the edge is edgy. The rewards of a good performance are almost always internal, not external. To desire otherwise is to misunderstand. To perform week after week is to walk out on the edge and know that you will neither fail nor fall. The key is to recognize that you are an intellectually, dramatically, totally committed trapeze artist possessing a rare and unique talent that is not quantifiable. That walking out on the academic tight rope, balanced precariously between the institutional status quo and the unrecognizable future, you will know that the ground beneath you will not break your bones, severing your spinal cord at the base of your neck. I trust that I will not end up paralyzed for the rest of my academic life. If I fall, I will float to the ground with a graceful ease, I know, because I have fallen and the students have risen to catch me.”

Jyl Lynn Felman (2001), Never a Dull Moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance, p. 15.
Persistence & Perseverance

With Persistence & Perseverance, we sustain effort despite obstacles, boredom, or frustration, and without apparent rewards; find pleasure in completing tasks.

Stimulus Reflections

What are the core values that sustain my teaching strategies? How do I systematically review their continuing strengths and need for improvement?

Who are the types of students and what are the tasks that cause me trouble “hanging in there”?

What elixirs for monotony and repetitive routine have I discovered that work (or not)?

What are the roots and fruits of my being careless from time to time?

How do I communicate to students the difference between rote activity and repeated activity that is reflective and reinforcing, and establishes a legitimate hope for future accomplishment?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Persistence & Perseverance

“Teachers often cannot tell what their influence has been. Monitoring change and growth in students is difficult since it emerges so unevenly, unpredictably, haltingly. It takes time to become familiar enough with students to interpret their individual actions as indicating different needs, desires, or involvement in the subject matter. It takes just as long to learn how to respond appropriately. Often the growth that teachers impel does not manifest itself until much later, perhaps not until the student has moved on to another grade level, or even beyond formal education. Good teachers never become comfortable with the doubts and uncertainties their practice engenders, but they do come to realize that the tensions are not the only part of the vocation, but may sometimes be the best part. It takes courage and faith in the future to persist in such an essentially uncertain occupation. But faith and courage alone are not enough. We must be constantly reflecting on our responses and their consequences. Inquiry is never complete. Since every student is unique, teachers must constantly inquire into what will work with this student in this class today. Those who continue to answer the calling to teach realize that it is precisely because we never know for certain that we have gotten it right, and because every class every year poses its unique challenges, that teaching is a worthy lifelong calling in which we can appease our expansive need to be needed, thereby fulfilling our own potential.

Still, it is sometimes good when the day ends or the summer comes.”


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“Fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals. As a college professor, I've seen this as one lesson so many kids ignore, always to their detriment: you've got to get the fundamentals down, because otherwise the fancy stuff is not going to work.”

Randy Pausch (2008), *The Last Lecture*, p. 36.
**Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest**

With *Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest*, we show a passion for teaching, learning and deliberate practices for well-being; demonstrate a focused sense of priorities.

**Stimulus Reflections**

How do I set my priorities for an academic year, and what calculus do I use to evaluate or recalibrate their importance and rank order as time goes on?

What is never hard to “get up for”? What is always hard to “get up for”?

What is the most difficult to balance between my professional and personal life? What have been my successes in doing so? And failures?

What bores me? What has been my response when--what I do, what I say, who I am, or how I am perceived--seems stuck in a rut and has lost its power of stimulation and positive reinforcement?

How do I differentiate between fatigue that I can overcome and a burn-out that suggests I’ve gone past my capacity for rugged self-reliance?
Food for Thought: Enthusiasm, Vitality, & Zest

“There is a great deal of confusion concerning teaching at the university level. Labeling it “teaching” and those who do it “teachers” is part of the problem. To teach implies a transfer of information, and that is not the main purpose of higher education. In fact, those who teach in universities are called “professors,” because their primary function is to profess an intellectual discipline. The most relevant meaning of the act of professing is the Middle English connotation of being bound by a vow or the even older Latin one that refers to one’s faith in, or expressing allegiance to, some idea or goal.

Thus, at least originally and ideally, an effective university teacher is one who believes in what he or she does to the point of identifying with it. This view does not simply reflect a quaint historical or etymological curiosity. It continues to represent the most important contribution that teachers at a university can make to the education of their students. Higher education succeeds or fails in terms of motivation, not cognitive transfer of information. It succeeds if it instills in students a willingness to pursue knowledge for its own sake; it fails if students learn simply in order to get a degree. The best way to get students to believe that it makes sense to pursue knowledge is to believe in it oneself. Thus, an effective professor is one who is intrinsically motivated to learn, because it is he or she who will have the best chance to educate others.”


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Mrs. Louis Agassiz described her husband, paleontologist and distinguished educator, this way:

“Teaching was a passion with him, and his power over his pupils might be measured by his own enthusiasm. He was intellectually, as well as socially, a democrat in the best sense. He delighted to scatter broadcast the highest results of thought and research and to adapt them even to the youngest and most uninformed minds. In his later American travels he would talk of glacial phenomena to the driver of a country stagecoach among the mountains or to some workman, splitting rock at the roadside, with as much earnestness as if he had been discussing problems with a brother geologist; he would take the common fisherman into his scientific confidence, telling the intimate secrets of fish culture or fish embryology, till the man in his turn grew enthusiastic and began to pour out information from the stores of his own rough and untaught habits of observation. Agassiz’s general faith in the susceptibility of the popular intelligence, however untaught, to the highest truths of nature was contagious . . .”

Quoted in Kenneth Eble (1972), Professors as Teachers, p. 48.
Synopsis

One of the research programs in Positive Psychology has been on the concept of “grit.” Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) defined it as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 1087). Duckworth explored how native talent (e.g., IQ, athletic skills) versus effort accounts for desirable outcomes. Whether her samples were elementary school children, West Point cadets, or Teach for America volunteers, she found “grit” to be a powerful predictor of their successes.

The four Character Strengths of COURAGE
- Bravery & valor
- Authenticity, integrity, honesty
- Persistence & perseverance
- Enthusiasm, vitality, & zest

challenge us to know where we stand and to what and to whom we commit our sustained excellence. The connection to “grit” seems evident.

COURAGE is the fifth and last virtue in our progression from Thinking About Learning to Learning About Teaching. It is a progression from the semester tasks of designing a syllabus, tending to students’ many cognitive and emotional responses, managing our classrooms and their interpersonal critical incidents, and communicating periodic and cumulative assessments of our students’ performances. The character strengths of COURAGE sustain our capacity to do all of these tasks well.

Too often we understate the courage required to return each academic year to this challenging profession. Too often we may push aside or mute the courage required to be authentic in a particular institution or with a particular set of departmental colleagues. When we persist and persevere in doing so, when we marshal renewed zest and enthusiasm, we sustain an integrity that becomes self-renewing.

The Pulitzer Prize winning author, Jonathan Larson, created gritty characters in his play, Rent. Each of them came to define a year in their lives as being courageous for 525,600 minutes. COURAGE challenges us as teachers to demonstrate its character strengths for such an accumulation of minutes. Doing it again and again and again--but always better--requires grit.

In the next and final section on TRANSCENDENCE, we will explore how a broader perspective on all those minutes makes the struggle in each one so important.

Henry Adams wrote: "A teacher affects eternity; he can never know where his influence stops."

COURAGE keeps us coming back.

TRANSCENDENCE will prompt us to keep inquiring AND appreciating – Why?
Module Four: Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching

In Module Four, we focus on **TRANSCENDENCE** and its emphasis on probing the deeper meanings of our learning and teaching.

We will use some of the character strengths stimulus reflections to synthesize our understandings of the other virtues, as well.

These evaluation and synthesis activities become the platform on which to build our strategic plan for sustainable renewal.

“Completing the circle,” “coming round to where we ought to be,” “seeing things again for the very first time”--these are common encouragements from sources as disparate as Native American stories, a Shaker hymn, and a T. S. Eliot verse. As a lifelong amateur golfer, I have always found the Old Course at St. Andrew’s, Scotland, to symbolize our arduous and enjoyable journeys out and back home. As teachers, we participate in a unique rhythm for going out and returning again. The American academic year BEGINS anew in a fall season marked everywhere else as a time to be FINISHING, whether in foliage or in finances. Then, we start a second half to our academic year as all around us make their resolutions to launch a brand new calendar of events and activities. Are faculty members a cycle ahead of the general population or always one-step behind?

Although many may think of the academic life as a tad off-kilter, we find sustainable renewal in similar ways as others do. We plan our learning outcomes and the means to achieve them at the start of each year and its halfway semester change. We encounter predictable and anticipated challenges, as well as those that test our mettle and push us into uncharted territory. After surviving, and even thriving, through yet another year, the summer transition (perhaps with a non-teaching respite) offers us time to consider all our episodes and evaluate their recurring patterns.

This final section of reflective exercises is designed to consolidate your contemplations about episodes, and to place them into some larger context of meanings. Sustainable renewal requires being able to learn continually from our teaching, to edit the anthology of our stories from the preceding year(s), and to outline the script for yet another year.

In Module Four, we have a dual agenda. First, you will define and assess **TRANSCENDENCE**’s five character strengths, and consider Stimulus Reflections. Second, you will find that some of the Stimulus Reflections will ask you to synthesize your understandings of all the other virtues and character strengths into a workable strategy for sustained renewal.

The final section in this last module is a Strategic Planning Checklist for continuing renewal in your academic career and future years of learning and teaching.
**TRANSCENDENCE**

*TRANSCENDENCE* is experienced with character strengths that forge connections to a larger universe and its meanings.

In *The Little Prince*, Antoine de St. Exupery (2000) echoed Blaise Pascal’s observation that what is most important is often invisible to the eyes. We must search with our heads and our hearts. The prince’s wise fox taught him that it is because of the time we waste on the roses in our lives that they feel most important.

The Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock’s research strategy to learn about the genetic properties of corn was to listen patiently and to get a feel for the organism. This seemingly eccentric methodology reflects a timeless truth that learning is about making connections. Teaching is building bridges from what we know to new places that neither student nor faculty member yet fully understands.

*TRANSCENDENCE* may be experienced when we make time to listen and to be open to new revelations and insights about ourselves, our peers, our students, and the ways we connect to them. We may discover startling and fresh ideas just by seeing the old for the first time in a new way. The character strengths for this virtue will be our new lens. Consider, for example:

- Students discover the *beauty in excellence* and develop incredible self-awareness before our eyes *every* semester. We are in *awe* when they do. It often remains a *mystery* how and why they do.
- We are *grateful* for the privilege to be part of their communities of truth and to be invited as their guide through its sometimes labyrinthine ways. We benefit from colleagues who lend their compasses when ours get stuck on a false north and we get lost, at times.
- Relentless optimists are always editing the narratives of their teaching and finding *hope* in both small and large changes made by those with whom we learn. A pessimistic perspective is very important in crisis situations because it appraises the dangers with more clarity. Nevertheless, it is the courage derived from *optimism* that motivates us into more robust individual and collective futures.
- With *humility and modesty*, we acknowledge that limitations are part and parcel of the human condition, but it is with *humor and playfulness* that we enrich our learning via them.
- The secular and sacred sages had an abiding *faith* in the power to learn, that such pursuits have *meaning and purpose*, and enliven our *spirit* and those with whom we share the journey.
The Five Character Strengths of Transcendence

With *Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder*, we recognize and take pleasure in others’ and one’s own talents and creativity, and especially in the splendid discoveries of students.

With *Gratitude*, we are thankful for the grace of both profound and simple gifts from learning and teaching.

With *Hope & Optimism*, we respond to successes and adversities with an open-minded perspective tempered by humility and wisdom; expect the best and work to achieve it.

With *Humor & Playfulness*, we approach life with a playful recognition of incongruities and circumstances beyond our control.

With *Spirituality, Faith & Purpose*, we foster inquiry about higher purposes and meanings; enable students to genuinely grapple with mystery and what is sacred in their life experiences.
Five Character Strengths of TRANSCENDENCE: Sustained Renewal

The syllabus is a document by which we build bridges from our philosophical assumptions about teaching and learning to the students’ task-oriented requirements for a particular course. As we explored in the two syllabi exercises for the virtues of WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE and JUSTICE, we try to construct ideal scripts for our courses that incorporate character strengths like curiosity, critical thinking, teamwork, and fairness.

In the critical incidents exercises, we examined how these ideal scripts don’t always match up with the mundane phenomenology of daily experiences. Via HUMANITY, JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE, and COURAGE, and their respective character strengths, we addressed the challenges of “full-contact” teaching and learning.

After the semester is done, we are left to consider what really happened? To what do I attribute the joys, fatigue, and perplexing people and situations of the previous year(s)? Making the mundane into the sublime via some exalted notions about our profession and its significance may balance off all the curmudgeonly cynical stories shared at a final faculty meeting. Yet such seems more like reverie and catharsis than renewal.

The experience of TRANSCENDENCE comes from being able to make connections that last. How do we review our anthology of this year’s stories for the definable character strengths that may generalize into the future? How do we connect one story to another to form a continuing narrative that is holistic and sustainable?
TRANSCENDENCE EXERCISE

For this exercise, compose a brief description of ONE memorable episode that you can connect to each of the five character strengths for TRANSCENDENCE. You may have used the character strength to respond in the moment to the episode, OR you can now put a label on how you responded via the character strength definition, OR you now recognize that there remains some unfinished business in how you responded and think about that episode.

- **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder:** recognize and take pleasure in the talents and creativity of others and oneself, but especially in the splendid discoveries made by our students. **Describe one memorable episode that connects to this character strength.**

- **Gratitude:** appreciate and respond to the grace of profound and simple gifts found in teaching and learning. **Describe one memorable episode that connects to this character strength.**

- **Hope & Optimism:** respond to successes and adversities with an open-minded perspective tempered by humility and wisdom; expecting the best and working to achieve it. **Describe one memorable episode that connects to this character strength.**

- **Humor & Playfulness:** approach life with a playful recognition of incongruities and circumstances beyond our control. **Describe one memorable episode that connects to this character strength.**

- **Spirituality, Faith, & Purpose:** foster learning environments where inquiry about higher purposes and meanings enable students to grapple with existential concerns and develop a richer narrative. **Describe one memorable episode that you can connect to this character strength.**
Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder

With Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder, we recognize and take pleasure in others’ and one’s own talents and creativity, and especially in the splendid discoveries made by students.

**Stimulus Reflections**

How do I appreciate the many acts of COURAGE demonstrated by my students who return to school each year in the face of so many adversities, lack of emotional or economic support, and sheer fatigue or flagging motivation?

What truly surprised me about last year’s teaching moments? What mystery’s meaning was as yet unrevealed and still keeps me thinking?

Having always focused on the excellence of knowledge, how could I infuse my classes next year with more beauty as a quality of excellence as well?

Am I able to sustain paradox in my life by a sense of wonder?

For what do I still hunger to learn more?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Awe, & Wonder

“I never thought of myself as a scientist, at least not in the way scientists are conventionally portrayed to the public: solitary, disheveled figures working late, bending over bubbling beakers, with calculators in the pockets of their lab coats, oblivious to their surroundings. Of course that probably is exactly what I looked like as a molecular biology graduate student at Harvard in the 1970s, but inside my head I was exploring a world most people never have a chance to see. I was a naturalist of the nucleus, on a trail of detection that was as exciting as anything I had ever encountered. My childhood in a family of artists had prepared me for a different obsession, but this new world, opened up by an inspiring high school teacher, was even more compelling. She showed us how awesome was nature in its detail, beautiful and unpredictable. And I was hardly solitary. I felt I was swimming in a broad stream with all the other biologists who had worked before me and the ones who will come after. The history of science is not a history of humans, but of human discoveries, measured not against each other, but against nature itself. That was what gave me strength during the times when the going got rough later on. The promise of a truth that would stand up to Nature’s scrutiny made the hard work and endless obstacles of no particular consequence to me.”


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“Scientists do what writers do. They also live with an active interiority, only the ongoing speculation in their heads is about relations in the physical world rather than the psychological one. The natural biologist walks through a city park, across a suburban lawn, past an opening shopping mall, and is half-consciously wondering: Why two leaves instead of three? Why pink flowers instead of white. Why does the plant turn this way instead of that way? Such rumination goes on without end in a scientist’s mind, a continuous accompaniment to the rhythm of daily life. Whatever a scientist is doing—reading, cooking, talking, playing—science thoughts are always there at the edge of the mind. They are the way the world is taken in; all that is seen is filtered through an ever-present scientific musing. It is from inside this continuity of thought and perception that the scientist, like the writer, received the crucial flash of insight out of which a piece of work is conceived and executed. And the scientist (again like the writer) is grateful when the insight comes, because the insight is the necessary catalyst through which the abstract will be made concrete, intuition be given language, language provide specificity, and real work go forward. . . . Listen to a scientist talk about her work; watch her face as she speaks; the dullest of them is transformed as she recalls what the work does for her. I once asked a medical researcher how she became a scientist. Through a childhood love of mathematics, she said, and began to speak of the great beauty of mathematical order and regularity. She explained that in math there were what mathematicians called subroutines, that each of these subroutines analyzed an equation with more perception than the last, took you deeper and deeper into the problem, made you feel you were penetrating to the center of a mystery, going layer after layer into reality. As she spoke, the researcher’s ordinarily placid face became radiant. I say that it was the thought of solving the problem that so excited her. It was thinking about thinking that made her glow.”

Vivian Gornick (2009), Women in Science: Then and Now, pp. 28-29; 52-53.
Gratitude

With Gratitude, we are thankful for the grace of both simple and profound gifts from learning and teaching.

Stimulus Reflections

How can I express my gratitude more directly for HUMANITY’S tending and befriending acts offered me by my students and colleagues, gracing both my good and bad days in academic life?

What do I understand as “grace”? What is the most profound, yet simple gift I received last academic year?

What inhibits me most from saying “Thank you”?

From whom have I learned much? When and how have I told them so?

In the communities of truth I try to construct, how can I foster the expression of gratitude more spontaneously and easily?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Gratitude

“My notion of the ideal teacher is that of . . . the teacher as lead student. I wish I had understood from the beginning that I was, at heart, a perpetual student: amazed before the world’s variety and unworded beauty and frustratingly contradictory nature. As student and teacher in one skin, I work at unraveling the many strands of this world, putting into words its silent beauty, and attempting to resolve its contradictions. Success, in these terms, is always a kind of failure as well, and demands a fresh start, a willingness to ask the fundamental questions in an innocent way, a need to set the whole dialectic in motion once again.”


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“What we see in Socrates is not a developed philosophy but an engaged receptivity, an active listening. If there is anything resembling a method here it is his attempt to raise insights in his students of which he himself was incapable. In other words, Socrates’ originality consists in his ability to originate in others what he could not originate in himself.

We know we have met such a teacher when we come away amazed not at what the teacher was thinking but at what we are thinking. We will forget what the teacher is saying because we are listening to a source deeper than the teachings themselves. A great teacher exposes the source, then steps back. Great teachings have all the qualities of *samsara*. They pass away. As soon as we hear them they are gone and we are listening to what follows. That is why we need to remember nothing of what Socrates actually taught.

For that reason, no subject matter is privileged over another. All studies in which the origins of thought point beyond themselves to deeper origins are sacred studies. Those we call teachers may or may not be teachers. Those around whom surprising thinking emerges are teachers.”


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“. . . a community held together not only by our personal powers of thought and feeling but also by the power of ‘the grace of great things’ . . . When we are at our best, it is because the grace of great things has evoked from us the virtues that give educational community its finest form: . . . diversity . . . ambiguity . . . creative conflict . . . honesty . . . humility . . . freedom . . .”

Hope & Optimism

With *Hope & Optimism*, we respond to successes and adversities with an open-minded perspective tempered by humility and wisdom; expect the best and work to achieve it.

Stimulus Reflections

Hope springs from environments of **JUSTICE** – fair and safe places where others can be trusted and unanticipated things are learned. Do I create spaces in my classes where hope flourishes?

Do I see my personal and professional future as a teacher as a hopeful and unlimited horizon? Or as a road traversed over and over with the negative consequences of all too frequent setbacks?

Do others characterize me as being "unrealistic" or "naïve" when facing daunting challenges? Why (not)?

To what past narratives do I still cling? How do they keep me "stuck" in what I do, in how I see and respond to students and to my colleagues?

Do colleagues see me as a hopeful and optimistic agent of responsible change? Why (not)?
**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Hope & Optimism**

“I have had a number of conversations with old teaching friends, people whose careers are as long as mine and who continue to teach with energy and love for their students. A few of them have expressed a loss of hope, a sense that our society is undoing much of the work they do, that the defunding of public education is symptomatic of the abandonment of the children of the poor. They worry that an effective and creative education is no longer a route to a decent job and life, and they express dismay at the cynicism of many of their students.

They are not wrong. It is not easy to teach at a time when society as a whole does not honor its young and when the young, understanding this, show no respect for the adult world. However, there is no more important time to teach well, and to reach the sources of hope in one’s own life in order to project that hope to one’s students.

For me, the source of hope lies in teaching itself, hard work requiring ingenuity, patience, and a focus on what is effective with children. At its core, it is not mechanical or technological. I have always thought of myself as a teacher the way other people think of themselves as gardeners, painters, composers, mathematicians, and poets. I am a craftsperson of learning, working to refine what I do with young people to the point where it is both free and structured, spontaneous and disciplined, innovative and classical, fun and very difficult.”


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“Teaching is an act of hope for a better future. The rewards of teaching are neither ostentatious nor obvious--they are often internal, invisible, and of the moment. But paradoxically, they can be deeper, more lasting, and less illusory than the cut of your clothes or the size of your home. The rewards of teaching might include watching a youngster make a connection and come alive to a particular literacy, discipline, or way of thinking, or seeing another child begin to care about something or someone in a way that he never cared before, or observing a kid become a person of values because you treated her as a valuable person. There is a particularly powerful satisfaction in caring in a time of carelessness, and of thinking for yourself in a time of thoughtlessness. The reward of teaching is knowing that your life makes a difference.”

Humor & Playfulness

With *Humor & Playfulness*, we approach life with a playful recognition of incongruities and circumstances beyond our control.

Stimulus Reflections

How do I recognize my own limitations in moments that call for **TEMPERANCE**, and learn from my students’ curiosity or fascination with what they do not yet know how to do well?

What does it mean to “screw up” as a teacher? How have I taken responsibility on such occasions without losing my perspective on past and future accomplishments?

How often do people laugh out loud (LOL) in my classes? With whom? About what? Why?

Does my work ethic balance or constrict my capacity to play?

On what and with whom do I find profound gratification in just “wasting time”?
**FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Humor & Playfulness**

“Since teaching is so verbal, opportunities for verbal humor are always present. Anecdotal humor arises naturally from the necessary use of examples and illustrations. Self-disparaging humor particularly reaches student audiences because much of learning is solemn, professors often are pompous, and colleges presume to embrace a *higher* learning. Like many other forms of humor, the teacher’s self-disparagement acknowledges the students’ own difficulties, anxieties, and shortcomings. If a teacher doesn’t enter the classroom with a quickness of mind, an eye for the incongruous, an ear for wit, a store of varied experience, and a spontaneous delight in the ridiculous, he or she may need a gag more than a gag-writer. So don’t expect any further advice from me about how to be a genuinely humorous teacher. Use humor if you can, but only if you can do it well.”


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“Yeats’ speculation, ‘How can we know the dancer from the dance?’ seems to me the most appropriate metaphor for understanding the nature of the semester and one’s role as a teacher within this context, for although the points of access to knowledge are multitudinous, in the traditional undergraduate experience the main entry point to formal learning is still the university course, and the professor has the sole responsibility for the composition, choreography, staging, and performance of this very complex dance. With the metaphor as the guiding principle, Yeats’ paradoxical question requires of the teacher not just an ability to perform (a question sometimes addressed by teaching manuals to the exclusion of all other considerations), but rather the capacity to determine both performance *and* content, dancing and dance, and to hold them in a balance which borders on artistry...”

The components of the semester can be likened to the parts of the dance performance, with the melody equal to the subject matter, the staging to the classroom, the mode to the distinctive academic style of the professor, and the dancers to those who participate in the class: students and teacher. Timing, pace, theme, and variation—all the formal components of musical score and its performance—might well be applied to the semester: just as the successful composition rests first on an intelligible direction to the music and studied variations within its movements, and then on the felicitous performance by the dancers, so too the semester has its own direction and rhythm which largely determine the final learning of a subject. Thus the teacher is transformed from presenter of wisdom to dancer and composer, responsible for the music and for the way in which the dancers all work their art.”

Spirituality, Faith, & Purpose

With *Spirituality, Faith, & Purpose*, we foster inquiry about higher purposes and meanings; enable students to genuinely grapple with mystery and what is sacred in their lives.

**Stimulus Reflections**

How do my students affirm my faith in **WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE** and the power of teaching and learning?

Is my teaching an end-in-itself?

What are the connections I make between all that I have taught and learned? What would be the primary theme of my anthology of teaching stories?

Why do I continue to teach? Why do my students continue to learn?

What do I still yearn to add to my life's narrative, before my last class will have been taught?
FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Spirituality, Faith, & Purpose

Mexican painter Jose Orozco encouraged his close friend Kahlil Gibran during a time of loss of faith in his creative powers.

“Hombre, don’t regret that your latest work is different from your early work. I find it good--in fact, wonderful--that you change. It would indeed be a calamity if you did not. Who knows--your new work may be even better than your old. Give it time. You are not the sole judge of its worth. Meanwhile, be happy that you are still young enough to grow--that you are not an ossified academician. To stagnate even at a good point is living death for the artist!”


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“So much of the scholarship of teaching and learning is motivated by a spirit of faithfulness; such work expresses a deeply professional commitment to the role of professor as teacher, mentor, steward, and public servant. There are four kinds of fidelity to consider:

- to the integrity of the discipline or field of study;
- to the learning of students one is committed to teach and to serve;
- to the society, polity, community, and institution within which one works; and
- to the teacher’s own identity and sense of self as scholar, teacher, valued colleague, or friend.

The commitments listed here are not random. They remind us of the deeper meanings associated with the role of professor and professional. The primary meaning of “profess” is to profess one’s faith, one’s commitment, and one’s life to service. A “professional” is someone who directs her intellectual and practical accomplishments to the service of her society and community. A member of a learned profession dedicates his understanding and skill to making complex judgments in the interests of his clients.

. . . the scholarship of teaching reflects a convergence of disciplinary, moral, communal, and personal motives. . . The community expects no less from us; and we expect no less from ourselves.”

Lee S. Shulman (2000), Inventing the Future, pp. 95-96; 98.
Synopsis

We have come full circle.

“To transcend” is to appreciate the extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary. Like a bricoleur, we create ourselves anew by making connections among all the different artifacts and impulses that characterize our lives as teachers. We add new stories each year to our anthologies of teaching and learning. We edit the old stories based on new meanings we discover and integrate them into our longer narratives. We sustain ourselves and keep doing that which we love.

- **Above all else, why do I continue to teach?**
- **For what do I still yearn to add to my life’s narrative, before my last class will have been taught?**

The last two stimulus probes are indeed meta-questions. Perhaps one final exercise might be to gather together the six virtues and the 24 character strengths that we examined:

- **Compose a brief obituary, using specific virtues and the character strengths as your descriptors. What would you want it to say?**
- **What must you begin to do tomorrow in order to fill in whatever gaps remain?**

I finish with two FOOD FOR THOUGHT reflections.

“Is the scholar-teacher model still viable? Can the model itself be renewed? There is little doubt in my mind that it is still a valid concept and an important ideal to keep before us. Of course, individual faculty members will always emphasize teaching and scholarship in varying degrees, but is there really any doubt that a faculty member ought to be both teacher and scholar—at least in the broad sense.

In his Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer concludes the description of the Clerk of Oxford with the words, ‘and gladly would he learn and gladly teach.’ Can a faculty member really be a good teacher unless he continues to take seriously (and gladly) his own learning—his scholarly development? For awhile, perhaps, but not indefinitely, no. One college president (an experienced faculty member himself) described the following scenario of many older faculty: ‘They start out being popular with students; they depend on students for their “teaching rewards.” But they are engaged in no sustained research or intellectual growth. Soon students turn to other faculty, as younger, more active persons arrive on the campus. The more senior, nonproductive faculty lose enthusiasm for their work, become frustrated, and struggle cheerlessly through their teaching assignments.’

The assumption is not being made that good scholarship automatically produces good teaching. Some faculty do support this assumption, but most are unwilling to do so because they have seen too many examples of outstanding scholars who have not responded to changes among students or recognized their own weakness in teaching and communicating their knowledge.

The model of the teacher-scholar may be gone forever in certain types of higher educational institutions—where teaching or scholarship is so heavily emphasized to the detriment of the other—but surely in those places where it has been traditionally revered, especially the
undergraduate liberal arts programs of our colleges and universities, we cannot and must not let this important model be lost.”


***

“Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject.”

Strategic Planning Checklist

You have completed the four Modules:

- Core Virtues
- Thinking About Learning
- Learning About Teaching and
- Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching.

There are several strategies to integrate this learning into your continuing academic life.

To Consolidate Your Initial Learning

- Reflect on the definitions of the 24 character strengths applied to teaching and generate a list of those about which you’d like to read and reflect more.

- Take the free VIA Signature Strengths Survey at Martin Seligman’s University of Pennsylvania website or take the enhanced interpretive profile for a modest fee to learn about your strengths priorities.
  - Values in Action Signature Strengths Survey (see Appendix A) Seligman’s U Penn Authentic Happiness Website
  - Values in Action Institute on Character (see Appendix A) Values in Action (VIA) Institute on Character

- Discuss with a faculty colleague in your home department the significant ideas you learned during a workshop or after the self-directed readings you completed.

- Encourage another faculty member to download this material from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Society for the Teaching of Psychology: E-Books) for a copy of these exercises and continue to discuss new learning about virtues and character strengths.
To Deepen Your Understanding Via Applied Practices

- Begin thinking about your next semester's syllabi using the material on character strengths from **Wisdom & Knowledge** and **Humanity**.

- Initiate a reading and study group in your home department as part of faculty/graduate student development activities. Stimulus Reflections on the character strengths from **Justice, Temperance, and Courage** will be ideal discussion prompts.

- Review the Teacher Behaviors Checklist (see Appendix B) and integrate these specific behaviors with your learning about the core virtues and character strengths (see Appendix C). Arrange for a colleague to evaluate your teaching on this instrument, early in the semester and during a later-in-the-semester class period of your choosing.

- If you are a psychology faculty member or from another discipline that may not have yet defined their consensus goals for undergraduate education, review the [Undergraduate Outcomes in Psychology: Guidelines](#) described in Appendix D on Resources in the Teaching of Psychology.

- Consider enhancing your next post-semester evaluation of teaching within the framework of the character strengths of **Transcendence**.

- Drop me a note at [thomas.mcgovern@asu.edu](mailto:thomas.mcgovern@asu.edu) to share your ideas and episodes.
References

A second reference list can be found after Appendix D for resources specific to psychology.


Davis, Stephen F., & Buskist, William (Eds.). (2002). *The teaching of psychology: Essays in honor of


Appendix A: Resources on the Values In Action (VIA) Signature Strengths Survey

The VIA Signature Strengths Survey can be taken at the Authentic Happiness Website that Martin Seligman and his associates maintain at the University of Pennsylvania.

The 240-item Values in Action (VIA) Signature Strengths Survey is available online at this website, and free of charge, after you complete a brief registration questionnaire. Completing the survey takes approximately 30 minutes.

Print-outs with your prioritized 24 Character Strengths can be obtained here. After completing the survey, you will automatically receive your TOP 5 signature strength priorities; make sure to scroll down the page that lists these 5, and request the print-out available for all 24 of your character strengths priorities.

Other personality measures related to these constructs are available at this site. Test/re-test options are also available in order for you to map the changes in your responses over time. I've used the data from my own test/re-test priorities to teach students about psychometrics and reliability and validity issues.

The VALUES IN ACTION INSTITUTE ON CHARACTER Values in Action Institute on Character sponsors a website that will enable you to examine the continuing research, classification and current definitions of strengths, practitioner and educational exercises, and a blog. A personally interpretive profile can be obtained after taking the VIA Signature Strengths Survey, for a modest fee, at this site, as well.

In a series of published studies, William Buskist and his colleagues investigated “master teachers”. Their research goal was to identify distinct behavioral characteristics with which teachers at any level or degree of sophistication could improve their effectiveness. They examined survey responses and reflections of award-winning teachers. Students described qualities of their most respected instructors and evaluated differences between their ideal teachers and those typically encountered in their undergraduate experiences. Faculty members at liberal arts colleges, universities, and community colleges rank ordered these qualities.

Eight qualities were endorsed consistently:

- Approachable
- Creative and interesting
- Encouraging and caring
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible and open-minded
- Knowledgeable
- Respectful
- Sets realistic expectations and is fair.

They constructed a 24-item behavioral checklist instrument with items that can be matched to the six core virtues (See Appendix C, as well), adding further specificity to those qualities.
TEACHER BEHAVIORS CHECKLIST ©
Keeley, Smith, & Buskist (2006)

**Accessible** (Posts office hours, gives out phone number and e-mail information)

**Approachable/Personable** (Smiles, greets students, initiates conversations, invites questions, responds respectfully to student comments)

**Authoritative** (Establishes clear course rules; maintains classroom order; speaks in a loud, strong voice)

**Confident** (Speaks clearly, makes eye contact, and answers questions correctly)

**Creative and Interesting** (Experiments with teaching methods; uses technological devices to support and enhance lectures; uses interesting, relevant, and personal examples; not monotone)

**Effective Communicator** (Speaks clearly/loudly; uses precise English; gives clear, compelling examples)

**Encourages and Cares for Students** (Provides praise for good student work, helps students who need it, offers bonus points and extra credit, and knows student names)

**Enthusiastic About Teaching and About Topic** (Smiles during class, prepares interesting class activities, uses gestures and expressions of emotion to emphasize important points, and arrives on time for class)

**Establishes Daily and Academic Term Goals** (Prepares/follows the syllabus and has goals for each class)

**Flexible/Open-Minded** (Changes calendar or course events when necessary, will meet at hours outside of office hours, pays attention to students when they state their opinions, accepts criticism from others, and allows students to do make-up work when appropriate)

**Good Listener** (Doesn’t interrupt students while they are talking, maintains eye contact, and asks questions about points that students are making)

**Happy/Positive Attitude/Humorous** (Tells jokes and funny stories, laughs with students)

**Humble** (Admits mistakes, never brags, and doesn’t take credit for others’ successes)

**Knowledgeable About Subject Matter** (Easily answers students’ questions, does not read straight from the book or notes, and uses clear and understandable examples)

**Prepared** (Brings necessary materials to class, is never late for class, and provides outlines of class discussion)

**Presents Current Information** (Relates topic to current, real-life situations; uses recent videos, magazines, and newspapers to demonstrate points; talks about current topics; and uses new or recent texts)
Professional (Dresses nicely [neat and clean shoes, slacks, blouses, dresses, shirts, ties] and no profanity)

Promotes Class Discussion (Asks controversial or challenging questions during class, gives points for class participation, and involves students in group activities during class)

Promotes Critical Thinking/Intellectually Stimulating (Asks thoughtful questions during class, uses essay questions on tests and quizzes, assigns homework, and holds group discussions/activities)

Provides Constructive Feedback (Writes comments on returned work, answers students’ questions, and gives advice on test-taking)

Punctual /Manages Class Time (Arrives to class on time/early, dismisses class on time, presents relevant materials in class, leaves time for questions, keeps appointments, and returns work in a timely way)

Rapport (Makes class laugh through jokes and funny stories, initiates and maintains class discussions, knows student names, and interacts with students before and after class)

Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading (Covers material to be tested during class, writes relevant test questions, does not overload students with reading, teaches at an appropriate level for the majority of students in the course, and curves grades when appropriate)

Respectful (Does not humiliate or embarrass students in class, is polite to students [says thank you and please, etc.], does not interrupt students while they are talking, and does not talk down to students)

Sensitive and Persistent (Makes sure students understand material before moving to new material, holds extra study sessions, repeats information when necessary, and asks questions to check student understanding)

Strives to Be a Better Teacher (Requests feedback on his/her teaching ability from students, continues learning [attends workshops, etc. on teaching], and uses new teaching methods)

Technologically Competent (Knows how to use a computer, knows how to use e-mail with students, knows how to use overheads during class, and has a Web page for classes)

Understanding (Accepts legitimate excuses for missing class or coursework, is available before/after class to answer questions, doesn’t lose temper at students, and takes extra time to discuss difficult concepts)
Appendix C: Teacher Behaviors
Organized by Core Virtues

WISDOM & KNOWLEDGE

• **Creative and Interesting** (Experiments with teaching methods; uses technological devices to support and enhance lectures; uses interesting, relevant, and personal examples; not monotone)

• **Flexible/Open-Minded** (Changes calendar or course events when necessary, will meet at hours outside of office hours, pays attention to students when they state their opinions, accepts criticism from others, and allows students to do make-up work when appropriate)

• **Knowledgeable About Subject Matter** (Easily answers students’ questions, does not read straight from the book or notes, and uses clear and understandable examples)

• **Presents Current Information** (Relates topic to current, real-life situations; uses recent videos, magazines, and newspapers to demonstrate points; talks about current topics; and uses new or recent texts)

• **Promotes Critical Thinking/Intellectually Stimulating** (Asks thoughtful questions during class, uses essay questions on tests and quizzes, assigns homework, and holds group discussions/activities)

• **Strives to Be a Better Teacher** (Requests feedback on his/her teaching ability from students, continues learning [attends workshops, etc. on teaching], and uses new teaching methods)

• **Technologically Competent** (Knows how to use a computer, knows how to use e-mail with students, knows how to use overheads during class, and has a Web page for classes)

JUSTICE

• **Authoritative** (Establishes clear course rules; maintains classroom order; speaks in a loud, strong voice)

• **Confident** (Speaks clearly, makes eye contact, and answers questions correctly)

• **Establishes Daily and Academic Term Goals** (Prepares/follows the syllabus and has goals for each class)

• **Prepared** (Brings necessary materials to class, is never late for class, and provides outlines of class discussion)

• **Promotes Class Discussion** (Asks controversial or challenging questions during class, gives points for class participation, and involves students in group activities during class)

• **Realistic Expectations of Students/Fair Testing and Grading** (Covers material to be tested during class, writes relevant test questions, does not overload students with reading, teaches at an appropriate level for the majority of students in the course, and curves grades when appropriate)

TEMPERANCE

• **Humble** (Admits mistakes, never brags, and doesn’t take credit for others’ successes)

• **Professional** (Dresses nicely [neat and clean shoes, slacks, blouses, dresses, shirts, ties] and no profanity)
• **Punctual / Manages Class Time** (Arrives to class on time/early, dismisses class on time, presents relevant materials in class, leaves time for questions, keeps appointments, and returns work in a timely way)

• **Respectful** (Does not humiliate or embarrass students in class, is polite to students [says thank you and please, etc.], doesn’t interrupt students while talking, and doesn’t talk down to students)

• **Understanding** (Accepts legitimate excuses for missing class or coursework, is available before/after class to answer questions, doesn’t lose temper at students, and takes extra time to discuss difficult concepts)

**COURAGE**

• **Enthusiastic About Teaching and About Topic** (Smiles during class, prepares interesting class activities, uses gestures and expressions of emotion to emphasize important points, and arrives on time for class)

• **Sensitive and Persistent** (Makes sure students understand material before moving to new material, holds extra study sessions, repeats information when necessary, and asks questions to check student understanding)

**HUMANITY**

• **Accessible** (Posts office hours, gives out phone number and e-mail information)

• **Approachable/Personable** (Smiles, greets students, initiates conversations, invites questions, responds respectfully to student comments)

• **Effective Communicator** (Speaks clearly/loudly; uses precise English; gives clear, compelling examples)

• **Encourages and Cares for Students** (Provides praise for good student work, helps students who need it, offers bonus points and extra credit, and knows student names)

• **Good Listener** (Doesn’t interrupt students while they are talking, maintains eye contact, and asks questions about points that students are making)

• **Provides Constructive Feedback** (Writes comments on returned work, answers students’ questions, and gives advice on test-taking)

• **Rapport** (Makes class laugh through jokes and funny stories, initiates and maintains class discussions, knows student names, and interacts with students before and after class)

**TRANSCENDENCE**

• **Happy/Positive Attitude/Humorous** (Tells jokes and funny stories, laughs with students)
Appendix D: Integrating Resources from the Teaching Of Psychology

It is helpful to begin with a broad-brush-stroke review of the plethora of reading materials available to sample or to explore with a more focused scholar-teacher agenda, as you broaden and deepen your understanding of learning and teaching.

Since its inception in the late nineteenth century as one of the academic disciplines in the liberal arts and sciences, psychology developed a tradition for reflecting on the outcomes and pedagogy most apt for an undergraduate curriculum. The journal, Teaching of Psychology, is now a well-recognized forum (appreciated in all of higher education scholarly circles) for refereed articles on a broad array of topics about teaching and learning.

The St. Mary’s Conference held in Maryland in 1991 and sponsored by the American Psychological Association (APA), brought together faculty who taught in high schools, community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and universities. It was the first time that different levels of education, women, and people of color had been represented at such a national conference. St. Mary’s was a catalyst for the Psychology Partnerships Project (Andreoli-Mathie & Ernst, 1999) and both spawned a cornucopia of experts’ guidelines for various facets of undergraduate education. In chronological order:

- The Teaching of Psychology: Essays in Honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie and Charles L. Brewer (Davis & Buskist, 2002);
- Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (APA, 2003);
- A Rubric for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing Scientific Inquiry in Psychology (Halonen et al., 2003);
- Toward an Inclusive Psychology: Infusing the Introductory Psychology Textbook With Diversity Content (Trimble, Stevenson, & Worrell, 2003);
- Measuring Up: Educational Assessment Challenges and Practices for Psychology (Dunn, Mehrotra, & Halonen, 2004);
- Best Practices for Teaching Introduction to Psychology (Dunn & Chew, 2005);
- National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula (APA, 2005);
- Handbook of the Teaching of Psychology (Buskist & Davis, 2006);
- APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (APA, 2007);
- Quality Benchmarks in Undergraduate Psychology Programs (Dunn, McCarthy, Baker, Halonen, & Hill, 2007);
- Teaching, Learning, and Assessing in a Developmentally Coherent Curriculum (APA, 2008);
- Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology (APA, 2011).

If you construe your role to be a sage on the stage, being knowledgeable is valued above all else. Yet, the landscape in higher education has changed and psychologists now understand student learning in multiple and complex ways (see McGovern & Brewer, 2003, 2005, in press, for historical reviews). In a summary chapter from the St. Mary’s Conference on undergraduate education in psychology, McGovern (1993) proposed this interactive set of questions:

- What kind of outcomes can be achieved with
In 2008, the APA sponsored the most recent gathering of faculty members at the University of Puget Sound. Like the earlier St. Mary's Conference, study groups, organized around critical topics, yielded a scholarly and pragmatic handbook: *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline* (Halpern, 2010). The nine chapters included:

- Psychologically literate citizens (McGovern et al., 2010)
- Toward a scientist-educator model of teaching psychology (Bernstein et al., 2010)
- The undergraduate psychology curriculum: Call for a core (Dunn et al., 2010)
- Psychology students today and tomorrow (Littleford et al., 2010)
- When and where people learn from psychological science: The sun never sets (Ewing et al., 2010)
- A contextual approach to teaching: Bridging methods, goals, and outcomes (Chew et al., 2010)
- Teaching and learning in a digital world (Millis et al., 2010)
- Promising principles for translating psychological science into teaching and learning (Worrell et al., 2010)
- Desired outcomes of an undergraduate education in psychology from developmental, student, and societal perspectives (Landrum et al., 2010).

The Steering Committee, chaired by Diane Halpern, updated the St. Mary's Conference summary statement that was endorsed by the APA Council of Representatives (see McGovern & Reich, 1996), in a tenth chapter: Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology (Halpern et al., 2010). After association-wide review and critical comment, the APA Council of Representatives endorsed their summary statement in *Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education* (2011).

The concept of a psychologically literate citizen was the catalyst for a recently published work that brought together faculty from the Puget Sound Conference and from around the world to evaluate its curricular, global, and integrative applications: *The Psychologically Literate Citizen: Foundations and Global Perspectives* (Cranney & Dunn, 2011). Based on the numerous international, national, and regional symposia and workshops since the Puget Sound conference, this concept of a psychologically literate citizen holds much promise and is worthy of continuing attention as a comprehensive liberal arts and disciplinary outcome for undergraduate psychology curricula.

**Strategic Study Guide**

Let me now describe a strategic study guide from the psychology resources, and organized around the three themes in this book:

- Thinking about Learning
- Learning about Teaching
- Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching.

My goal is to integrate the material on the virtues, character strengths, and teaching tasks associated with each. Review again the section on *Practicing the Core Virtues via the Character*
**Strengths** in Module One on the *Core Virtues*. These strategies can be woven into the Strategic Plan Activities Checklist with which we concluded Module Four.

The APA has only endorsed national policies on undergraduate education in the discipline since the Quality Principles from the St. Mary’s Conference. Their stance has been to charge task forces or to gather larger, representative groups of faculty to articulate blue ribbon recommendations for best practices. The discipline has consistently fostered individual programs and departments to create their own, local responses to national guidelines, basing specific degree requirements, and assessment and curricular strategies, on different institutional missions and the diverse faculty and advising staff that implement them (see McGovern et al., 1991).

As you work through these various lists and recommendations, keep in mind that you belong to a longer and larger community of scholar-teachers that can inform your particular efforts at creating a quality course.

**THINKING about LEARNING**

**Undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes**

The APA Council of Representatives endorsed specific student learning outcomes for the undergraduate degree: *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major* (2007): [APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Major](#). Their recommended list of 10 goals included:

**I. Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent with the Science and Application of Psychology**

**Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology**
Students will demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology.

**Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology**
Students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology, including research design, data analysis, and interpretation.

**Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology**
Students will respect and use critical and creative thinking, skeptical inquiry, and, when possible, the scientific approach to solve problems related to behavior and mental processes.

**Goal 4: Application of Psychology**
Students will understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues.

**Goal 5: Values in Psychology**
Students will be able to weigh empirical evidence, tolerate ambiguity, act ethically, and reflect other values that are the underpinnings of psychology as a science.

**II. Knowledge, Skills, and Values Consistent with Liberal Arts Education that are further developed in Psychology**

**Goal 6: Information and Technological Literacy**

~ 121 ~
Students will demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes.

**Goal 7: Communication Skills**
Students will be able to communicate effectively in a variety of formats and for various purposes.

**Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness**
Students will recognize, understand, and respect the complexity of sociocultural and international diversity.

**Goal 9: Personal Development**
Students will develop insight into their own and others’ behavior and mental processes and apply effective strategies for self-management and self-improvement.

**Goal 10: Career Planning and Development**
Students will emerge from the major with realistic ideas about how to implement their psychological knowledge, skills, and values in occupational pursuits in a variety of settings.

Fifty-two specific learning outcomes were identified for these 10 goals. The *Guidelines* do not recommend specific academic courses. Instead, the *Guidelines* describe four content domains in which undergraduate psychology majors should demonstrate knowledge and understanding: biological bases of behavior and mental processes, learning and cognition, developmental changes across the lifespan, and sociocultural factors.

**Rubrics & Benchmarks for Undergraduate Program Excellence**

From the Puget Sound Conference and resulting handbook, Bernstein et al. (2010) highlighted five dimensions of a scientist-educator's inquiry into learning: conceptualizing learning processes and setting goals, learning about teaching, designing learning activities and measures to assess them, delivering instruction and assessing learning outcomes, and reflecting publically on the achievement of those goals and receiving feedback from local and national peers. They, too, fashioned a quality matrix. Their components included explicit course and learning activity goals, preparation strategies, pedagogical methods, gathered evidence, reflective practices, and communication to others about the success and limitation of all the components. Expertise levels ranged from entry into teaching, to basic skill level, to a professional level of competence, to an advanced mastery level. They concluded that:

> The scientist-educator model suggests that excellence in the teaching portion of an academic position includes scientific inquiry into successful learning and that inquiry should be based on analysis of systematic evidence . . . . [E]xcellence is found in the reflective use of evidence to advance the practice of teaching and learning. (pp. 42-43)

Dunn et al. (2010) and Landrum et al. (2010) offered an up-to-date history and recommendations via their chapters on curriculum and student learning outcomes for the University of Puget Sound National Conference on Undergraduate Psychology (Halpern, 2010).

Let’s take this inquiry back into the evidence summarized in earlier reports. Participants from the Psychology Partnerships Project (see Halonen et al., 2003) proposed a rubric for learning, teaching, and assessing scientific inquiry in psychology. Their matrix included eight domains and skill areas
identified in the curricular and outcomes assessment literature: description, conceptualization, problem solving, ethical reasoning, scientific values and attitudes, communication, collaboration, and self-assessment. For all eight domains, they defined students’ expected achievements for five proficiency levels: before training, after a basic introductory course, development through the major field requirements, integration at an advanced undergraduate stage of degree completion, and at a professional graduate stage and beyond. Use of such a rubric by faculty and students will move programs beyond basic assessment approaches.

Reliability on authentic assessment can shift the emphasis away from high-stakes, standardized testing that primarily examines factual content and knowledge in a traditional, sometimes artificial manner toward the development of performance assessment strategies that clearly reflect skills applied to practical problems. . . . Such a shift places responsibility for progress clearly in the realm of the cooperative interaction between teacher and student. (p. 205)

Dunn et al. (2007) broadened Halonen et al.’s focus to include those dimensions evaluated in the traditional academic program review required by many institutions and often embedded in regional accreditation association processes. Acknowledging the kaleidoscope of perspectives generated by any discussion of what constitutes quality, these authors synthesized 20 years of research on best practices in undergraduate education. Their eight domains included: curriculum, assessment, student learning outcomes, program resources, student development, faculty characteristics, program climate, and administrative support. Based on their experiences as scholar-teachers and program reviewers, they identified four levels of performance criteria: underdeveloped, developing, effective, and distinguished. The matrix, with cells for each domain by level of performance, includes quality benchmarks for an undergraduate psychology program.

Various calls to advance program quality, assess learning outcomes, and focus on student development at all types of undergraduate institutions are coalescing. . . . We believe that these benchmarks provide clear evidence of performance and can be applied across disciplines. More idealistically, we place the program benchmarks within the scholarship of teaching. We hope that the critical examination of performance attributes along the proposed continuum—from underdeveloped to distinguished—will serve as a catalyst for pedagogical improvements. (p. 668)

Quality Principles & Virtues

Adopting the strategy of the St. Mary’s Conference that a cogent statement of Quality Principles has catalytic effects on disciplinary policy makers, as well as public relations value for community stakeholders and university administrators, the steering committee for the Puget Sound Conference identified five (Halpern et al., 2010, pp. 161-173; 2011 Quality Principles) that were endorsed by the APA Council of Representatives.

1. Students are responsible for monitoring and enhancing their own learning.
2. Faculty strive to become scientist-educators who are knowledgeable about and use the principles of the science of learning.
3. Psychology departments and programs create a coherent curriculum.
4. Academic administrators support & encourage quality practices in teaching & learning.
5. Policy makers and the general public understand why psychological literacy is necessary for informed citizens and an effective workforce.
These five principles “are designed for creating a world-class educational system that provides students with the workplace skills needed in this information age; a solid academic background that prepares them for advanced study in a wide range of fields; and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will enhance their personal lives” (p. 163).

The study groups at the University of Puget Sound national conference produced a new blueprint for the future of the psychology discipline. As a participant and group leader at the conference, I was struck by how many of the issues important to academic psychologists could be integrated with the virtues and character strengths (see McGovern, 2006; 2011b; McGovern & Miller, 2008). A chapter on “psychologically literate citizens” (McGovern et al., 2010) as a desired learning outcome for all students taking psychology courses led easily to my chapter on “virtues and character strengths of psychologically literate faculty” (McGovern, 2011a).

In the coming years, I envision that the six virtues and 24 character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) may become synergistic with our efforts to educate and to be lifelong learners and global, psychologically literate citizens. The Psychologically Literate Citizen: Foundations and Global Perspectives (Cranney & Dunn, 2011) organized 23 thought-provoking chapters on topics that will serve that end for many years to come.

LEARNING about TEACHING

An efficient way to focus your study on learning about teaching is to zero-in on a target set of questions about which you want to gather information, and then begin by exploring the resources available from the APA Education Directorate Office of Precollege and Undergraduate Education. At that site, you will find a comprehensive chart with active links to every task force report and quality recommendations that the APA has sponsored.

Undergraduate Resources Table. The table of contents for the Directorate includes resources organized around all levels of education (e.g., high school, community college, undergraduate education, etc.). You will find both faculty and student resource links to helpful materials.

An important and often-consulted link at the Office of Precollege and Undergraduate Education Site is the revised Assessment CyberGuide. This is a very informative document and grew out of the critical work begun by Jane Halonen and her colleagues at the Psychology Partnerships Project in the early 2000s (see Measuring Up: Educational Assessment Challenges and Practices for Psychology: Dunn, Mehrotra, & Halonen, 2004) and continued through the decade.

Most of these materials were the fruits of psychology faculty member projects inspired by the APA’s Society for the Teaching of Psychology and its Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology. At both of these sites, you will find invaluable resources and pragmatic models to renew and to refine your efforts at learning and teaching.

The E-Book series, of which this very text is a representative, can be found at: http://teachpsych.org/ebooks/index.php

SUSTAINABLE RENEWAL for LEARNING and TEACHING

The Association for Psychological Science, APS, in conjunction with the APA’s Society for the Teaching of Psychology has been a consistent advocate in behalf of faculty development, and in particular, undergraduate teaching. I vividly recall how a group of us active in undergraduate...
research and teaching and contributors to the national agenda on those topics were recruited in 1989 as charter fellows of the APS to insure this continuing commitment. The APS sponsors the Annual Teaching Institute at its national meetings and was the original host in 2009 and 2010 for my work on the exercises in this book.

One of the themes in sustainable renewal and specifically for **TRANSCENDENCE** and its six character strengths—appreciation of excellence and beauty, gratitude, sense of humor, hope and optimism, and spirituality, faith and sense of purpose—is to find like-minded storytellers who want to not only talk about their research but to explore values and experiences in their teaching.

Go to the APS website and click on **Psychology Links**. There you will find a comprehensive list of US Psychological Societies and Organizations, International Societies and Organizations, US Government Agencies, Federal Policies, and other sites of interest.

As should be obvious from the prior section on *Learning about Teaching*, you will also find kindred spirits who are deeply committed to the scholarship of learning and teaching at the Society for Teaching of Psychology. An important consideration is that STP memberships and all of its resources do NOT require APA membership (with the Ph.D. as a pre-requisite). The Society is very welcoming to those teaching at all levels of education and across the disciplines. Both national conferences in 1991 and 2008 had diverse representatives from higher education constituencies (e.g., Association of American Colleges and Universities) as full participants.

This handbook is one such example of how the quality resources developed over a century by scholar-teachers in the discipline of psychology can inform, illuminate, and renew faculty across the disciplines.

**Psychology Resource References**

*A transdisciplinary reference list can be found at the end of Module 4 on Sustainable Renewal for Learning and Teaching. Sources for the Food for Thought quotes that complement the 24 character strengths are to be found in that reference list.*

*The following is discipline-specific, but many are nevertheless informative for interested, transdisciplinary faculty.*


Psychology, 30, 196-208.


