



SPOTLIGHT



Excellence in Higher Ed 2022

In 2022, Pearson established the **Excellence in Higher Ed Awards** to recognize the exceptional work of faculty in higher education. We appreciate the faculty who continue to evolve and find modern solutions for today's teaching challenges. These educators were chosen from over 200 nominated faculty nationwide for their significant impact on students, peers, and others.



Diversity, equity, and inclusion

As chair of admissions for 15 years, Emily Simpson has been very intentional about reviewing their syllabi, creating clinical cases, and making sure they are representative of the diversity of not only the students they have entering the program, but the clients they are going to encounter as occupational therapists.

*“A main goal is to welcome people into our profession, students into an environment, that can be really intimidating and make it as accessible as possible. **Just valuing the diversity and complexity of humans, period.** I mean, it makes teaching and learning more interesting, it makes our clinical practice more relevant, and ultimately it results in us being able to do more within our profession to meet the needs of our clients. It’s everything to me.”*

Having a diverse group of students is a pleasure for Dr. Elizabeth Dulemba. She acknowledges there are different ways students absorb information, and as an instructor, it is one’s responsibility to meet students where they are. “I have every different kind of student you can imagine and that’s one of the things I really love. They bring in

all sorts of different perspectives that make my job more exciting. Every student is like a Rubik’s Cube. It’s my job to figure out how each brain best absorbs the information that I am trying to relay.” With her students she focuses on inclusion, often having open conversations with them about how to make people feel seen.

*“I try to give them the tools they’ll need to **navigate our diverse and complicated world.**”*

Furthermore, she is mindful of the materials she shares with her students saying, “I refuse to use a book that has very little diverse representation, or that represents a misogynistic view of women, or where age ranges are poorly depicted. In some of the traditional reference books you won’t see wheelchairs or people of color. I will not require a book that that is going to solidify inherent patriarchy or doesn’t reflect the diversity of my students.”



Advice

A consensus amongst the instructors is that students need to feel heard, acknowledged, and validated. Students need a safe space where they can be imperfect, and where the instructor is approachable. Rachel Bailey fosters this engagement with her students through optional surveys for online students, and note cards handed out the first day for face-to-face students, where she asks them

questions regarding their lived experiences, what's burdening them, acknowledging they have a life outside of school. She stresses that it is of the utmost importance to not only ask them these questions but do something with the information they divulge so they feel heard and understood.

*“I think the most important thing we can do as educators is humanize ourselves and part of that is being authentic. We need to also acknowledge that **everybody is coming into this learning space with different lived experience, different barriers, and different needs. That is really critical.**”*

Listening to your students about their lived experiences, but also listening to your students about how the course itself is going and the materials they are using is important, according to Yoelvis Rodriguez. He finds that it's crucial to find a platform that supports both the instructor and the students equally. “If you're working with a book or platform because it's easier for you but the students aren't doing their work, that's not worth it. The opposite is also true, if the students are overwhelmed with too much, very intense, or dense course materials that are not user friendly, that's not going to work either. So, listen to your students. That is my best advice because I do it myself.”

There are many factors that are contributing to a mental health crisis for students, such as the widespread use of social media and most recently, the pandemic, so Elizabeth suggests

instructors take time to be there for their students, give them grace, and your attention. “It's really about trying to strengthen them again because I think everybody got their legs swiped out from under them during the pandemic. They're not standing up strong yet. We still need to do something for them.” Rachel Bailey also sees this struggle for students and to proactively help them she gives her students one mental health day per semester where students can let her know they are taking the day off to take care of themselves with no questions asked.

Courseware specific, Christine Minor would recommend starting slow with a new adoption. Do not incorporate everything at once, but because they are so customizable, instead add one small new thing each semester as “it's much easier to build the platform you want your students to have for support.” In addition, she feels that taking advantage of every opportunity to grow is essential for being an effective instructor, so listen to your colleagues, learn from webinars, take in all the professional development you can because that will make you a better instructor for your students.



Learner outcomes

Giving students the opportunity to demonstrate what they are learning in a way that resonates with their own learning style is important to Emily. Creating universal design principles such as time and a half to complete exams and flexible due dates has led to improved student outcomes, and students have been vocal about how much they appreciate the ability to be flexible in their learning through mid and final course evaluations, in addition to other anonymous

sources. “Students have been able to display their understanding of the material in a way that is better suited to them individually and I see growth in a way that I hadn’t necessarily seen before. I see students are more confident going into their clinical field work.

When using Mastering Biology, students are getting more feedback that is immediate, therefore they get more chances for formative assessment.

“Because I use Mastering Biology, **students have a lot more opportunities to practice and opportunities to practice increases their success.** The more they practice, the better they perform.”

Christine saw this success almost immediately after the adoption of Mastering Biology, “I saw an improvement of 5 to 10 points on the next exam for every one of my students and I was sold. That was it.” In addition, she feels it changes how they study as there are a variety of resources they can use to tap into their preferred learning style, including the audio option that helps busy students multitask, ensuring they get their reading completed.

With the adoption of Pearson products, Yoelvis saw an increase in the activities students were completing. This engagement with the materials translated to an increase in their grades.

“You see better grades because the platform is easy, the activities are not too complicated, and students are actually doing the activities. **There is a freedom the platform offers them.**”

Change over time as an educator



Historically, institutions have been blind to the needs of applicants, students, and for their profession, clients, according to Emily. They have approached needs from the perspective of privilege. She has seen that change over the recent years due to raised awareness in society, which has impacted how faculty have approached inclusivity and understanding of diversity. “This younger generation is telling us they’ve had enough of us and our inability to make space for them, so they are going to challenge us to do something about it. That has been a big change, the students using their voice and courage to make a difference.”

Christine is a lifelong educator, and teaching has always been her passion ever since she was a child setting up and teaching her stuffed animals. She has been at Clemson for 25 years now and the biggest change she has noted is the rise of technology. When she initially started teaching, she didn’t even have a computer in her office, and now she is effectively using Mastering Biology to successfully teach her students. “I try to stay at the forefront of incorporating technology into

the class and I am always looking for anything that is going to enhance student experience and anything that will make it more efficient for me to interact with those students so I can give them not only what they need, but also support their growth because technology allows me time to interact with them as individuals.”

Moving from teaching in his home country of Cuba to the United States was a big challenge for Yoelvis, as the education system is very different. He finds education in the United States to be much more student focused and he has adopted this approach. Instead of being the authoritative figure standing at the head of the class, he listens to his students and acknowledges they have stuff going on in their lives outside of school that may be impacting their performance.



Affordability

Accuracy of the content she is using to teach her students is important to Christine. She appreciates that quality publisher materials have been reviewed and therefore there are less corrections that need to be made. But in an effort to consider affordability, she did research and incorporate some open educational resources (OER) into her courses; however, she but came across so many errors that she found they were not the right fit for her courses.

While Yoelvis does agree that researching and implementing OERs is an important consideration for any course, he has not yet found anything that works for him or his students. “I know many people are using OERs and materials that are free or very cheap. I am okay with it as long as you’re using quality

materials, but I haven’t found anything that I really like for EAP that is free.” Though he has not found any OERs that work for EAP, he has worked with his Pearson rep to create bundles for his students, as 95% of his students receive financial aid.



Pearson Products

The resources that Mastering provides are really useful for Christine as an instructor. In particular, as it can be hard and time consuming to come up with the data on her own, she appreciates the graphing feature. Not only does it follow actual data scientists have generated to draw conclusions from, but it allows students to analyze and graph that data. In addition, she admits there are days where instructors are “drawing on nothing, so the ancillary materials that are provided by the publishers support us.”

Prior to their adoption of Pearson products, the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at Miami Dade College – West Campus and Yoelvis, were using several different resources. They found that the products were not academically rigorous enough, were technologically difficult, and were not aligned with what they wanted for their institution and students. After researching other options, they chose to exclusively adopt Pearson products. “MyEnglishLab is very user friendly, very easy to use, and the content aligns perfectly with the competencies and the content in the books. It has a little bit of everything from pronunciation to grammar to writing. It was a perfect fit for our program here.”

Nominated by their own peers, our 2022 Excellence in Higher Education winners were chosen out of over 200 faculty nationwide for their hard work and commitment to higher education. Congratulations 2022 winners!

“Teaching is highly personal, and technology **allows me to focus on the individual students and to know them better**. That’s probably the most powerful thing about technology, it’s giving me the space to treat my students as humans.” – Christine Minor



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