

Teaching Tips

A forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

Teaching Effectiveness and Beliefs About Ineffective Teaching



Special points of interest:

- The Teaching Tips Newsletter is a publication of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the UWI, Mona.
- The newsletter is published three times during each semester and once during the summer. It provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education and is available online on the CETL page at <http://mona.uwi.edu/cetl> as well as in the office of the CETL.
- If you need additional teaching tips on specific classroom practices, please contact us at cetl@uwimona.edu.jm.

The literature is replete with articles, opinions, research and other content advancing various perspectives on good teaching or excellence in university teaching. In this article, we merely want to identify some of the elements of good teaching or what qualifies as excellence in university teaching. We hope that as university teachers we will be informed, reach into ourselves and reflect on our pedagogical practice in light of these understandings.

This year, the month of November has been designated the month for the celebration of teaching excellence at the UWI, Mona Campus. During this month, we will hold the UWI Guardian Life Premium Teaching Award Ceremony. This highly anticipated event is planned for Thursday, November 24, 2022 at 5:00 pm in the Exhibition Room at the Faculty of Medical Sciences' Teaching and Research Complex. At that time, the UWI Mona Campus will celebrate with the UWI Guardian Life Premium Teaching Awardee for 2022 and runners-up. This is one of the ways the UWI Mona campus rewards excellence in university teaching. But, what is good teaching/excellence in university teaching?

We do not have a commonly agreed-on set of practices considered the elements of good teaching. However, there are qualitative and quantitative research studies on teaching that indicate elements or characteristics of good teaching. Generally, there are those who believe that good teaching is related to student success (Gurung, 2022; Weimer, 2013). The work of Kenneth Feldman stands out. His research on good and effective teaching included his 1988 meta-analysis of 31 studies. In this meta-analysis both teachers and students identified characteristics of good teaching and effective instruction (Feldman, 1988).

Findings from this study indicated that students emphasised the importance of teachers being interesting, having good elocutionary skills, being available, and helpful. On the other hand,, university teachers emphasised being intellectually challenging, motivating students, setting high standards, and encouraging self-initiated learning. Over the years all of these qualities have been considered important if one is to position oneself as a good university teacher.



Dr Aisha Spencer, UWI/Guardian Life Limited Premium Teaching Awardee 2018, receiving her prizes from Mr Eric Hosin, then President of Guardian Life Limited.



The 2016 UWI/Guardian Life Limited Premium Teaching Awardee, Dr Helen Trotman-Edwards (right), accepting her award from Mrs. Alicia Forster, then Vice President, Employee Benefits, Guardian Life Limited.

Bain (2004) provides some important details of good university teaching too. He points out that good teaching is not all about what you see on display in the classroom. From his research, he points out that strong course design is an important hallmark of excellence in university teaching. Further, he underscores the assessment tasks and the teaching and learning activities included in a course as indications of good teaching. These should clearly indicate explicit student learning outcomes. He also made it very clear that student-centred syllabi are important. Similarly, the instructor must be knowledgeable about the content.

This should be supported by the effective use of appropriate instructional methodologies, especially those which call for active and interactive teaching and learning. Then, inclusive teaching practices must be utilised as well.

Gurung (2022) also supported this understanding of the areas that one must focus on if good teaching is to be realised, however, he adds the use of technology. In fact, he has coined an acronym for the elements that make up the core areas of good teaching: "D.A.M.I.T", course design, assessment, instructional methods, inclusive teaching, and technology.

Weimer (2013) notes that teachers, students and administrators when asked to define teaching effectiveness listed the following characteristics: teachers should "cultivate thinking skills, stimulate interest in the subject, and motivate students to learn". However, they did not list these characteristics in the same order. Researchers have also compared the words and phrases used by students in describing effective teaching and ineffective teachers. The top three words used to describe effective teachers or those having the highest student ratings were interesting, approachable and clarity (Weimer 2013). University teachers who have been nominated for teaching awards were described as approachable, present material well, make the subject interesting, helpful and knowledgeable. Of course, it goes without saying that these are qualities that we look to see in those being examined for teaching awards and clearly are generally accepted as elements of good teaching.



Dr. Keren Cumberbatch, 2014 UWI/Guardian Life Limited Premium Teaching Award winner, accepting her award from Mr. Eric Hosin, then President, Guardian Life Limited.

Beliefs About Ineffective Teaching

We do not talk about ineffective teaching enough. What are the root causes of ineffective teaching/poor or bad teaching? Problematic faculty beliefs about teaching and learning in higher education might be a major factor in poor pedagogical practices. In fact, Hativa (2001) discussed several common beliefs associated with ineffective teachers. Ineffective teachers are those who were characterised as getting low student evaluations. This list of the beliefs held by ineffective teachers was compiled from the literature. Here's the list of nine beliefs compiled from Hativa (2001, pp. 67-70):

1. There's nothing to be learned about teaching.
2. I do the teaching but it's not my responsibility whether or not students understand and learn.

3. I maintain my integrity and would not lower/sell myself by decreasing the level of teaching, as some of my colleagues do, to gain popularity or high students' ratings.

4. Students do not have the tools to fully appreciate my teaching at present. However, in future years, when they become professionals and look back, they will realize how much knowledge and understanding they gained from my course.

5. My teaching is good enough; there's no need for me to improve.

6. Teaching cannot be improved—good teachers are born, not made.

7. To teach well, all that is needed is good knowledge of the material.

8. I need to cover most of the course curriculum in class.

9. I use strict lecturing and do not need to change it.

Where do you stand in relation to these beliefs concerning ineffective teaching?

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