Teaching Matters and Assessment Center (TMAC)
Dr. William FitzGerald, Director | Erin Miller, Graduate Assistant

Director's Note

Greetings to my fellow teachers! I write this introductory note for our first of three Teaching Matters newsletters this semester while on sabbatical. I appreciate the break, and I hope while away to complete my book on the history of the famous Serenity Prayer.

Thanks to the efforts of my assistant, Erin Miller, Teaching Matters will continue to share items of interest through the newsletter and a range of brown-bag get-togethers where faculty and TAs can discuss pedagogy (see offerings below).

Here, I draw your attention, in particular, to the first of our short pieces on grading. I think it's also an opportune moment to revisit our practices, expectations, and unexamined assumptions about grading lest we become too settled on matters of consequence to effective teaching and the success of our students. Are we too strict? too easy? too arbitrary? Are there other models of assessment out there that might better advance our goals? Have we tried something new that works for us? Indeed, if you send us some responses, we will share a few profiles in grading in our March newsletter.

For me, it's back to the writing desk. I wish you a great Spring 2020!

In the News

Grades: Higher Standards = Smarter Students?
In an article published on Education Week, Madeline Will describes a study that finds higher standards of grading correlates to students scoring better on standardized tests. The students of teachers with higher grading standards, on average, scored 16.9 percent higher than students of teachers with "easy" grading standards. As much as the article advocates for higher grading standards, the author also takes a detour into alternatives to grading, such as standards-

based grading and competency-based learning. For further insight into how to conceptualize grades, check out Belinda Chiu's "Reimagining Education: Grading the Grades." This might be a good article to check out to discuss grading practices with your students. Let us know how it goes!

Coronavirus and Fake News
The coronavirus is a global outbreak that is growing increasingly concerning every day. With the fear surrounding public health and increasingly difficult-to-control diseases, it's not surprising that the news we encounter surrounding the coronavirus is varied and contradictory. In "News literacy lessons: How damaging fake news is spreading about China's virus outbreak," Valerie Strauss analyzes conspiracy theories published as news and explains how dangerous spreading false information is, especially during a public health crisis. For reputable information about the coronavirus, check out the WHO and the CDC. Although it may seem like second-nature to us, students often struggle to identify accurate information online. Talking about the coronavirus might be a timely opportunity to discuss information literacy and best research practices with students.

Uncommon Data – Innovative Research Methods
In a recent blog post on Inside Higher Ed, Deidre Faye Jackson praises a group of grad students for rescuing a "long-standing academic relic from imminent destruction." That relic? The University of Virginia Library's entire card catalogue, which consists of over four million cards. The grad students state their interest in preserving the card catalogue is to hold onto a piece of the institution's history, pointing out that access to this "low-tech" information for research purposes might yield different results than "high-tech" research methods. This kind of first-hand engagement with data is invaluable to researchers. Another unique way we can collect uncommon data is by conducting a case study on an individual. In his article, Christopher Rusev makes a case for the case study of one, noting the benefits of working with one individual over a period of time to collect data that would otherwise be difficult to gather in a test group. These are only two examples of uncommon data collection. If you're interested in learning about more innovative research methods, join our upcoming workshop! Details below.

Laptops in the Classroom
Laptops in the classroom can be a polarizing issue. Some professors encourage laptop usage, some feel irked by it, and some ban laptop usage outright. The professors who establish policies banning laptops report improved student attention, according to these testimonies on FutureEd. Susan Dynarski writes in favor of a laptop-free classroom,

citing students' improved attention in class and retention of course material once laptops were removed. In an article defending laptop use, Lauren Margulieux points out that laptops are not the problem – the problem is students don't always know how to use laptops as effective learning tools. For more about the ongoing debate of technology in the classroom, check out NPR's "Laptops And Phones In The Classroom: Yea, Nay Or A Third Way?"

TMAC Workshop Calendar

Tuesday, February 25, 2020 *12:45 – 1:45, faculty lounge*	**Teaching Research Methods and Information Literacy**
Tuesday, March 10, 2020 *12:45 – 1:45, faculty lounge*	**TMAC Tip Jar**
Wednesday, April 1, 2020 *11:30 – 12:30, faculty lounge*	**Classroom Dynamics – Flipped Classrooms and Classroom Management**
Wednesday April 15, 2020 *11:30 – 12:30, faculty lounge*	**TMAC Tip Jar**

If you have specific pedagogical interests you would like to explore with TMAC, please email us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu.

For additional resources, visit tmac.camden.rutgers.edu, or write us at teaching.matters@camden.rutgers.edu