

TEACHING EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION

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# TEACHING EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by Marshall Gregory

*Butler University*

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To Val, the one and only, the everything  
and  
To Wayne Booth, my teacher, mentor, co-author,  
pal, and much loved and much missed friend

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## PREFACE

In the first chapter of this book, Marshall Gregory remarks that “The worst thing that can ever happen to any student is that he or she merely becomes old, not different.” Although Gregory has undergraduates in mind, the idea of plodding through one’s days unaltered is a similarly mournful prospect for teachers in higher education, who are, as Gregory observes, often dropped into college and university classrooms with scant guidance in the mysterious process of turning the daily task of education into a meaningful and rewarding lifelong endeavor. For Gregory, each new class of students spurred change and growth in him as a teacher. Committed to the development of his pedagogy throughout his career, he subjected both his broad philosophical views on education and his specific instructional tactics to rigorous and ceaseless assessment, regarding his role in the college classroom as an opportunity for continual revitalization. As readers will discern from this book, his thoughts on teaching evolved over the decades as he read widely within the field of higher education and taught pedagogy seminars to faculty across the country. He pursued new adventures in pedagogy even at personal risk, including his decision, discussed in Chapter 5, to hazard mortal injury to his professorial dignity by enrolling in an undergraduate acting class because he felt his approach to reading poetry aloud had plateaued.

Indeed, when he was first diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer, Gregory was still an active full-time faculty member of the English Department at Butler University, teaching a diverse range of courses and accepting a variety of speaking engagements and seminar opportunities. This book represents his last manuscript, completed several months before his death on December 30, 2012. As both Gregory’s daughter and an English professor myself, it has been my pleasure to edit and prepare the manuscript for final publication. Aside from minor polishing and streamlining, this version of the book is very close to my father’s original manuscript.

I would like to add, however, a few observations about the book’s parameters that Gregory did not have the chance to make explicit

before it went to press. First, this book focuses on college classrooms in the United States. While readers in other countries will surely find points of connection, Gregory's comments about students' cultural positioning and the economic imperatives currently driving the administration of higher education are tied specifically to an American context. Next, Gregory derives much of his thinking about teaching from the smaller discussion or lecture-discussion classes he taught over the course of his career. Many of his observations are relevant regardless of the size of the classroom, including his insistence that acquiring course content is not the culmination of the education process or his call for all teachers to develop their own individual philosophies of teaching. But some of the specific pedagogical dynamics he discusses obviously manifest in different forms in large lecture classes, and the book leaves it to the individual reader to apply Gregory's theories about education to his or her specific classroom setting. Finally and similarly, this book concentrates on education that happens in real time and face to face, leaving implicit the application of its primary arguments to digital media and online learning. Gregory's mission is to help teachers develop the foundations of their pedagogy, developing an approach to teaching that should be flexible, wide-ranging, and thoughtful enough ultimately to apply to any kind of classroom space, including a virtual one. As he remarks in his final chapter, "The power of technological tools should never be underestimated, but, in classrooms, technology should never be viewed by teachers or students as some kind of educational or pedagogical imperative. A tool is only as useful as the wisdom of its user." The book seeks to make teachers wiser by developing pedagogical principles that go all the way down, an approach that will help individual instructors determine for themselves how best to approach new media or virtual classroom spaces.

My father's commitment to higher education never wavered, and he shared his exploration of and interest in the art of good teaching with faculty and students from multiple disciplines over the course of four decades. This book is not only evidence of a vibrant professional life but also a fitting conclusion to a career built around the classroom and the capacity of such a career to shape, guide, and change both its students and its teachers.

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There are many people whose ideas, help, encouragement, and support have gone into the writing of this book. The contributions of these individuals may be invisible to everyone else, but I know who they are and what I owe them. I can name only a few, but to these few my appreciation is permanent and heartfelt.

Laura Bornholdt chose me as the recipient of a Lilly Endowment Open Faculty Fellowship in 1980, and she also chose me as the national director of the Lilly Endowment's Post-Doctoral Teaching Awards Program in 1983. Both of these opportunities allowed me to begin putting together as arguments and analysis (rather than mere anecdotes) many of the intuitions and unsorted experiences about education and pedagogy that, till then, had laid logjammed in the back of my mind. As I visited the fellows on the post-doc program to talk with them about their teaching problems and projects, I also had the opportunity for persistent discourse with some of the best minds on pedagogy that America has produced: William Perry of Harvard, Don Brown of the University of Michigan, Claude Mathis of Northwestern, Irwin Hyatt of Emory University, and others of their ilk. It was a rich education.

Wayne Booth, my teacher, mentor, co-author, and friend, was a constant inspiration to me in all matters both personal and intellectual in his writings, in our informal conversations that ranged from profoundly serious to downright silly, and in our work together.

Robert McCauley, my philosopher friend, has favored me with an unbroken stream of discourse for more than three decades, a discourse that has enriched my mind, educated my intellect, and encouraged my efforts to do this work to the best of my ability. As one of the directors of the Center for Teaching and Curriculum at Emory who supported my long run of teaching seminars at Emory, Bob has been instrumental in providing me with a venue for testing and enriching my ideas in intense discourse with scores of faculty members at Emory who signed up for my seminars spring after spring. Other directors of the CTC at Emory who kept my seminars going include Walter Reed,

the founding visionary of CTC who initiated the seminar program in the first place; Patrick Allitt; and Laurie Patton, now dean of liberal arts at Duke University.

President Bannister of Butler University configured my work load such that I could split my time between teaching student courses and directing regularly scheduled faculty pedagogy seminars (as well as seminars for professional staff on “the idea of the university”) at my home institution.

I need to acknowledge the extent to which raising my two brilliant daughters, Melissa and Holly, persistently prompted me to reflect on teaching: on teaching aims, strategies, and tactics. All parents are teachers, and all teachers’ relationships with students are, at times, quasi-parental. The interactions with my daughters during their youth prompted a million reflections on how teaching and parenting are both different and similar, and helped me become a better teacher.

I owe an acknowledgment of gratitude to Ms. Emelia Abbe, an undergraduate English major at Butler University and my office assistant, who made many helpful comments and suggestions on most of the chapters in this book. I also owe an acknowledgment to Ms. Monica Behney, also an office assistant, and, finally, to, Dr. Melissa Gregory, who offered me ever-smart and helpful insights along the way.

Finally, there is a 45-year-long string of students whose needs, interests, questions, and infinitely interesting particularity have kept me thinking about teaching on a day-in and day-out basis ever since I first appeared grass green before my first class in the late 1960s at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

To all of these persons both named and unnamed, I remain forever indebted.

Some of this book’s content was published initially as journal articles, and I owe a debt of gratitude to those journals for permission to reuse this material. None of the original articles are simply reprinted here. All have undergone extensive revision as I continued to deepen my thinking about various topics in the book, but, still, it is appropriate to acknowledge the original sources.

- The content of Chapter 2 has never previously been published, but was originally prepared as a lecture (in a series of lectures) that I gave at the University of Toledo in the early 2000s.
- Some of the content of Chapter 4 originally appeared in *The Journal of Cognitive Affective Learning* 1.1 (2004): 2–10.

- Some of the content of Chapter 5 originally appeared in *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 6.2 (2006): 209–225. Copyright 2006 Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder.
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- Some of the content of Chapter 7 originally appeared in “How to Become the Teacher Who Makes the Difference—An Anti-Romantic Theory of Pedagogy: Principles, not Personalities.” (in *The Ones We Remember: Scholars Describe the Teacher Who Made a Difference*. Vol. 6 of the book series *Adolescence and Education*, ed. Frank Pajares and Tim Urdan (InfoAge Publishers, 2008), 205–226).
- Some of the content of Chapter 9 originally appeared in *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 1.1 (2001): 69–89. Copyright 2001 Duke University Press. All rights reserved. Republished by permission of the copyright holder.

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