

Center for Instructional Development and Research

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Information for People who Teach
at the University of Washington



How do we change the way we teach?

“For thirty years, I lectured to my classes, and then, over several quarters, I made a complete shift to cooperative learning – students learning in groups. How did I make this change? What principles guided me? I had to be willing to be proactive, to take risks. And the unexpected results were fascinating!”

Dean McManus, Professor Emeritus, UW School of Oceanography

Professor Dean McManus, UW School of Oceanography, reflects on some of the lessons he has learned as he has worked to change from a teaching-centered perspective on education to a learning-centered perspective:

CHANGE CAN BEGIN WITH THE COURSE YOU’RE TEACHING NOW.

- Begin by deciding what you want your students to learn, what you want them to be able to do with what they learn, and how you will know what they have learned. These decisions provide the basis for ongoing planning, teaching, assessment, and change.
- The first time through, you can change your teaching practice one day at a time.
 - Assess the impact of changes in your teaching as you go, so that you can make well-informed strategic changes on an ongoing basis.
 - You can change many things during the course, based on student learning and progress, instead of trying to fully plan all the changes before the term begins.

CHANGE IS HARD IN ISOLATION, BUT CAN BE FACILITATED BY CONNECTING WITH COLLEAGUES, RESEARCH, AND RESOURCES ON TEACHING AND LEARNING.

- Talk about your teaching and your students’ learning with other instructors, particularly in your discipline.
 - To benefit from peer review of your results
 - To learn from your peers’ own experiences
 - To identify the teaching and learning challenges that characterize your discipline
- Broaden your understanding by going beyond your own and colleagues’ personal teaching/learning experiences.
 - Consult the literature on teaching/learning research and best practices.
 - Consult with people knowledgeable about teaching and learning across academic disciplines and levels.
- When you have questions about student learning, seek answers from research, consultants, or other resources (as already noted) or by means of your own research.
- When you think you have an answer, talk about it with your peers, for they may raise new questions for you.

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CHANGE INVOLVES TAKING RISKS AND FACING RESISTANCE.

- It is okay to take calculated risks with your teaching practice, for example when you apply a different teaching method or offer students something you think is missing from their education.
 - As with any risk, weigh the costs of change against the likely outcomes (and do the same with the costs and likely outcomes of not changing).
 - Work with colleagues, consultants, and department leaders to help manage the risk and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.
- Respond to resistance by showing how changes address challenges and learning needs that are recognized by peers, students, disciplinary or professional organizations, and the larger community that you serve.

CHANGE BRINGS REWARDS, BOTH EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED.

- Changing to emphasize student learning over faculty teaching demands commitment, imagination, reflection, and hard work, and can return to you great personal and intellectual gratification.
- Changing your teaching practices can bring unanticipated educational benefits in and out of the classroom, particularly in instructor-student interactions.

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

At CIDR we can help you plan, implement, and assess changes in your teaching. We can also help you make connections with other faculty and resources at UW. Call or e-mail to make an appointment with a CIDR consultant.

We are grateful to Professor Dean McManus, UW School of Oceanography, for his contributions to this issue of the *Bulletin*.



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CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to cidr@u.washington.edu, or visit our web site:

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