



Center for Teaching Excellence Hampton University Teaching Matters

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An Interview with the 2008 Edward L. Hamm Distinguished Teaching Award Recipients

By Zina T. McGee

Each year, Hampton University honors and recognizes outstanding faculty who serve as models of excellence for their profession and exemplary mentors for their students. This month, I had the pleasure of interviewing the recent recipients of the Hamm Award: Dr. Edmund Moses N. Ndip, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, School of Science and Dr. Esther H. Condon, Professor, Department of Graduate Nursing Education, School of Nursing.

Briefly describe your teaching philosophy. What strategies do you use to create a student-focused learning environment?

My philosophy of teaching and learning begins with the belief that education should transform and that teachers and students create the conditions for transformation to occur. The transformation that I am speaking about involves a change in knowledge, values, and attitudes that paves the way for growth in both student and teacher. I believe that, at its heart, education is about the emancipation of the self toward a more rewarding and effective way of living in the world. Teachers and students share the responsibility for transformation so each must be equally engaged in efforts to teach and to learn. Students and teachers learn from each other, and what the teacher learns from students contributes to the transformation of the teacher toward being a better teacher and students learn to be better learners. The works of Paulo Friere and Feminist theory have been very influential in shaping my philosophy. One strategy that I use to create a student-focused learning environment is a participative style of student-teacher and student-peer interaction in the classroom. This does not mean that “anything goes” or that the teacher and student are equal in knowledge and experience. Rather, it means that the teacher creates conditions that promote the student’s best contribution to the teaching-learning process. Listening to what students say is an important aspect of gaining the trust of students and their engagement in the process. The student needs to know that the teacher is committed to the student’s growth and progress and will show patience and respect as the student acquires new knowledge, values and behaviors.--- **Dr. Esther Condon**

There are three things that I pay attention to when I teach: (1) information delivery; (2) learning styles of the students in the course; and (3) the ability of the students to apply the information including taking tests on the material covered. To this end, it is not only important for me to facilitate their learning, but to also challenge them. Most of the courses I teach require competence in mathematics. Overcoming this perceived difficulty is one of the things I focus on at the very beginning. I impress on the students that excellence is not achieved overnight. The success of any one student depends on how much the student and the educator invest in the process. A student-focused learning environment is in my opinion synonymous with effective teaching. Our chemistry curriculum is no doubt challenging. Students come to us with varying degrees of preparation and varied learning styles. I use assessment to

guide improvements in the instructional process. In this regard, I have employed a variety of instructional strategies over the years. These include peer (student) led problem solving, use of computational science, portfolios, and group projects. I maintain a “democratic” classroom. I use personal reflections, input from colleagues (internal as well as external), and staying current on best practices to help my efforts in sustaining this environment.---**Dr. Edmund Ndip**

How do you recognize creativity and innovation both within and outside of the classroom setting?

When students put information together in new ways, it indicates creativity. When they challenge ideas and convention, I see innovation at work. Students hope to experience creativity in the classroom and I try to honor that by co-creating a teaching-learning environment that promotes it. One of my former professors wrote that creativity is often facilitated by playfulness and taking the risk of looking foolish. I know I’ve done that! I really enjoy humor in the classroom. It often happens that a new idea emerges from bringing together concepts that seem unrelated and refining the idea until it begins to make sense. I’ve tried some of these exercises in class, and students have really enjoyed the experience of being creative. Creating and accepting ambiguity often leads to a more creative response and further inquiry. One practical application is clustering or mind mapping that encourages students to trust their intuition as a source of knowledge.---**Dr. Esther Condon**

I use a variety of approaches. First, I make every effort to determine what really excites each of my students in the context of what is being covered in class. One of the essential competencies in one of my courses (CHE 401/402) is the ability to apply course information to other disciplines. There are three activities that I have used in this regard – peer-led problem solving sessions, course assignments – solving problems using computational science / chemistry methods, and term projects based on real world problems (relevance to society). Giving purpose to projects makes them more powerful and meaningful. Time permitting, each student or group of students makes a short presentation in class on their problem / project.---**Dr. Edmund Ndip**

In what ways do you stimulate self-growth and professional development among your students?

Often, students seek role models to guide their growth and development so I share with students some of the self-development activities that I undertake and how these activities provide satisfaction and professional growth for me. In turn, they begin to talk about what they are doing professionally. I find that encouraging students to take the next step in their careers is an important way to stimulate growth and professional development. Letting students know about professional opportunities such as funding for education or joining professional organizations can provide direction and options for growth. Students consult faculty for advice about developing their careers and for letters of recommendation for admission to graduate study, for teaching or practice positions. I feel that it is important to accept the responsibility for providing ideas, encouragement and recommendations for students.---**Dr. Esther Condon**

The central theme in Hampton University’s mission statement is “an education for life.” In CHE 401/402, students are evaluated not only on grades earned on tests, quizzes and exams, but also on points earned by participating in extracurricular activities – Red Cross Blood Drive, AIDS Awareness, Seminars, bringing to class information on some new source that facilitates learning course material, and volunteering in class to solve a problem when others are afraid to fail. I have over the years served as a research mentor to high school, undergraduate and graduate chemistry majors. Often, the work carried out by students has either resulted in published abstracts or has been presented at professional organization meetings. On other occasions, I have either recommended or led a team of students or have been accompanied by a student (s) to some professional development conference. I frequently participate in professional development activities. I always communicate the need for self-growth and professional development to my students by sharing,

through informal discussions, my personal experiences.---**Dr. Edmund Ndip**

What strategies do you use to facilitate reflection, professional learning and enhanced student accomplishment?

Becoming a good practitioner of nursing requires the capacity for reflection or a willingness to revisit and evaluate one's thoughts, feelings, and actions to gain insight. Story telling and writing personal narratives, for example, writing one's philosophy of nursing practice, are ways that I use to facilitate reflection. The more insightful the student becomes, the more successful he or she tends to be. Knowledge gained through reflection can provide direction for change. I try to promote reflection by having students do self-evaluation in a course and assigning themselves a grade based on course evaluation criteria. Peer evaluation is another strategy that I use to provide students with something to reflect upon. Giving helpful balanced and specific feedback can promote reflection. I am a believer in the power of the arts to promote reflection and insight and sometimes use film for this. When people can participate vicariously in situations, they can develop knowledge and experience. Exposure to diverse opinions such as might occur in a discussion or debate, can promote reflection on one's knowledge, values, and behavior. Being a reflective teacher gives students an opportunity to appreciate reflection as an important process for developing insight and personal growth. I sometimes begin a class with, "since we met last week, I've been thinking more about what Polly said." Something this simple communicates the need for continual thinking and the realization that reflection is required for any worthwhile result. To me, professional learning includes what the student must know to be able to practice a profession. I facilitate that by insisting that students show continuous improvement in applying what they learn. At the same time, I believe that "who appears at the bedside" is also a function of how the arts and humanities have influenced the practitioner. I believe that a well-integrated education that includes integration of ethics, esthetics, personal, and empirical knowledge provides the best opportunity for enhanced student accomplishment. I have taken students to museums and asked them to integrate what they have learned there with what is being taught in a course. For example, In a course that addresses the topic of physical disability, an exhibit of the paintings of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec provided a good example of the individual who is socially marginalized because of personal characteristics. For professionals to be successful, they must be able to sustain their capacity for empathy; I try to find ways to provide for this. That's why you'll sometimes hear music as you pass by my classroom.---**Dr.**

Esther Condon

The classroom is a place for sharing ideas either formal or informal. Although technology is essential to the learning process, the most effective strategy in assisting a student to achieve is a demonstrated concern for the student's well being. A student is not a "statistic." Every student in each of my classes is somebody. I have in my own way always made every effort to find out what motivates each of my students. This expression of concern for the person works wonders. I couple this concern with my personal experiences. Additionally, whenever possible, students are encouraged to present and some have published abstracts of their work on campus as well as at conferences and professional journals. Several of my mentees have presented/published abstracts of their work at the Virginia Academy of Science Annual Meetings, School of Science Annual Research Symposium, Southern School in Computational Chemistry and Materials Science, and Conference on Current Trends in Computational Chemistry. I am very grateful to our students (past and present), my colleagues, and the administration for the recognition. To be recognized, one has to have demonstrated expertise and competence in the execution of their duties. I strive to be that example to our students everyday.---**Dr. Edmund Ndip**