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

By Zina 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 two recipients of these awards: Professor Eleanor Earl, who received the 2008-2009 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award, and Dr. Sharad Maheshwari, who received the 2009-2010 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award.

Briefly describe your teaching philosophy. What strategies do you use to create a student-focused learning environment? My teaching philosophy embodies the notion that all students have the ability to learn; therefore, it is my job to bring out the very best in them while they are in my classroom. As a result of doing so, they will recognize their potential and be empowered within the classroom and beyond. It is important that my students always know that I am genuinely interested in what they have to say, that I am enthusiastic about the subject matter I am teaching, and that I am available to meet with them during office hours. They should always know that I am interested in talking with them about coursework and their plans for the future.-*Professor Earl*

I can describe my teaching philosophy in one phrase, "student-participation." I like to teach my classes in a way where students have the chance to interact and to participate in the process. That means that there is ample time for classroom discussions and problem solving. I don't like to pack my lectures just with "me." In my classes, technology is an integral part of the process. I design course material around available and pertinent technologies. In my teaching plan, I include from basic technology tools like Microsoft PowerPoint to advanced course-related software tools like Microsoft Project. My teaching plan includes, whenever possible, in-class hands-on

exercises on these technology tools, and course assignments and projects which utilize these tools. The main expectation is that students learn necessary skills to solve real-life business problems. -*Dr. Maheshwari*

How do you recognize creativity and innovation both within and outside of the classroom setting? I have had the pleasure of teaching courses in Cinema Studies and previously, English Literature and Written Composition at Hampton University. Each course has a component that requires students to participate in creative writing activities. They explore poetry, screenwriting, and other forms of creative writing in an effort to unlock their creative potential. The work students generate, in many instances, manages to exceed expectation. Students who have above-average talent generally stand out amongst their classmates. They often are those who visit office hours on a regular basis to receive additional feedback on their work, inquire about internship opportunities, and who want to know more about how I came to be involved simultaneously in academia and the entertainment business. I am also Co-Advisor for the Calliope Literary and Film Society, an organization that is housed within the Department of English. We sponsor many events that are film and literature focused. I meet students who are not necessarily English majors in this organization and often mentor them as well. I believe it is important to share whatever knowledge and connections to the industry I may have with as many HU students as possible. I do not restrict my assistance to English majors. I have placed many non-English majors into internships and will continue to do so.-*Professor Earl*

I am always looking for what new technology tools that can be used in class to either improve learning or improve efficiency of delivery of the course material or both. I look for tools that can easily be used to explain a related concept in the course. I only want to use technology that can enhance and support course material. For example, when I am covering a complicated topic, I like to point toward online sources – like websites, YouTube videos, blogs, etc., where students can get additional information and enhance their understanding.   I like the new Blackboard options to integrate various technology supported material within the BB content. I use Blackboard extensively for distributing the material, announcements, grades, and other class-related items. To me, Blackboard is a great tool to improve the efficiency of course delivery. It helps me to cut classroom management time and gives me more teaching time. To summarize, I am continually looking for technology tools which are easy to use and easy to incorporate into my teaching material and that I can be assured will be available for students to use. I am also willing to invest my time to learn any new skills necessary to incorporate a given tool.-*Dr. Maheshwari*

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

participate in professional conferences, writing contests, and study abroad programs that target specific areas of interest. For example, the Department of English and Cinema Studies program has facilitated a study abroad experience at the world-famous Cannes Film Festival for the last two summers for four students. These students have expressed how very enriching the experience was for them both professionally and personally. Every student, when financially possible, should have a study abroad experience, whether it is for two weeks or as long as a school year. It broadens their horizons and helps them know that they are connected to the entire world; therefore, possibilities are endless. I also think it is important for every student to participate in a service learning project at least once during their matriculation. For example, the Calliope Literary and Film Society has done several service learning projects. One of which involved them conducting a creative writing workshop with troubled youth from the Hampton Roads community. On another occasion, students completed a service learning project in chorus with another colleague's class, Dr. Mabel Khawaja, to complete a mini documentary about a local church in Hampton and its rich history. Another integral component to the professional development of students is internships. I work with my department to help place students into internships. Oftentimes the internships are acquired through personal connections from my work in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, and abroad over the years. Often, I have placed students into internships from other departments, because it is more important that we encourage all HU students to acquire internships that can further their careers, not only those in our given departments. I have placed students into internships with Spike Lee's 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, Hidden Beach Records, Focus Features, Lightyear Entertainment, Embassy Entertainment, Mid-Atlantic Black Film Festival, Universal Pictures, and several other companies. In February 2011, the organization will launch a new mentorship initiative and internship program with the Downing Gross Cultural Center in Newport News. This will be another opportunity to place students into internships locally.-
Professor Earl

I love information technology. It is gratifying to me whenever I am able to find and to learn a new technology tool which can be incorporated in my course material. I am also motivated by the fact that the useful set of technology skills is changing faster every day; hence, I want to learn new technology whenever possible. Not every student recognizes what potential they have. I think one of the tasks of the teacher is to spot that potential in every student. By continually challenging them with different assignments and projects, I try to spot their strengths. They may not appreciate it while in the class, but they will invariably have a sense of achievement when they finish with the course. I keep in touch with some of the former students just to get an idea as to what and how to use the information technology which is changing in business. I try to change if I get the impression that whatever I am doing is not useful. I constantly hear

back (and want to hear back) from the students that part of my class work was very useful in their recent internship or job. To me, it is a testimony that I am helping my students in their professional development.-*Dr. Maheshwari*

What strategies do you use to facilitate reflection, professional learning and enhanced student accomplishment? I encourage students to develop their organizational skills by acquiring and maintaining a daily planner. This helps them organize their assignments, plan social activities, and generally balance their busy schedules more effectively. I have found that many students do not take advantage of the introduction to the planner during University 101; therefore, they need a reminder of how important it can be to their academic success. The daily planner is often coupled with a weekly journal of new ideas for screenplays, poems, or some other creative expression. Often students learn a great deal about themselves based upon some of the musings they write into these journals. I have also found that students really need one-on-one time with their professors. I incorporate one-on-one mandatory conferences throughout the semester so students know there will be accountability. This also means they cannot hide behind other students in the classroom. Instead, they must engage in a one-on-one discussion about the course material. This forces students to be confident, for example, in their interpretation of a piece of literature or analysis of a classic film. I must admit, I did not develop this method on my own. When I completed a portion of my first master's degree in a program held at St. Anne's College at Oxford University, I was taught using the age-old "one-on-one tutor" system of Oxford. This method of learning was completely foreign to me; however, the experience made me a much better student. I believe it is the same for my students when I have the chance to meet with them to discuss their coursework. Finally, offering students contact with professionals who have "real-world" experience in their field of interest is vitally important. Throughout my tenure at Hampton University, I have worked with the Department of English and Cinema Studies program to bring guests from the worlds of literature and film to campus that have hopefully inspired our students. Some of them have included Omar Tyree, Dennis Johnson, Shomi Patwary, Reuben Cannon, Paul Hall, James Bond, III, Charles Whitfield, Bruce George, Louis Reyes Rivera, Tony Rich, Monty Ross, Ray Murphy, Jr, Patrice Johnson, Leila Steinberg, Stu Gardner, Louis 'Buster " Brown, Elvin Ross, and many others. I look forward to continuing this trend in years to come.-*Professor Earl*

It is mostly achieved through the class work, projects, assignments and presentations which utilize skill sets they are supposed to embellish in the course. I don't mind when students complain about my class as demanding in terms of work. (By the way, they do complain all the time that I am being very hard.) I require in some of my classes to review certain basic skill sets prior to the start of class. To ensure that I give a pre-requisite test, and unless they pass that test

(a re-take is allowed), no other grade in the class is given. If they don't pass the pre-requisite skill set test, they fail the class. To me, classroom learning must be emphasized and re-emphasized to make sure that students can utilize some of the skills in the real-world setting without any help or supervision-*Dr. Maheshwari*

Announcements

*Essential Learning, Student Success, and the Currency of U.S. Degrees*

AAC&U Annual Meeting
January 26-29, 2011
San Francisco, California / Hyatt Regency Hotel

What characterizes a global college or university? The 2011 Annual Meeting will showcase examples from institutions that are staking claim to new global positions and creating opportunities for students to find their own global identities by focusing with renewed intensity on aims, learning outcomes and assessments, curriculum designs, and progressively more challenging learning to develop students' global capabilities. **For more information about the annual meeting, please contact: meetings@aacu.org or call AAC&U at (202) 387-3760.**

General Education and Assessment 3.0: Next-Level Practices Now

Network for Academic Renewal Conference
March 3-5, 2011
Chicago, Illinois

Even in challenging financial times, colleges and universities must continue to help students develop the kind of innovative, "big-picture" thinking and creative problem-solving skills that excellent general education programs foster. AAC&U's 2011 conference, **General Education and Assessment 3.0: Next-Level Practices Now** will help campus leaders do this, focusing on innovative and purposeful approaches to designing and financing general education and assessment. Proposals are invited for conference sessions highlighting "next-level" models and practices in general education and assessment that strengthen student learning of essential outcomes. The audience for the 2011 conference includes newcomers to, and veterans of, innovative general education reform and assessments that deepen learning. Faculty, student affairs educators, administrators, students, and others are invited to shape a national dialogue about the value of general education and to demonstrate its impact on student learning in the college years. **For more information, including conference themes, visit the call for proposals at www.aacu.org.**
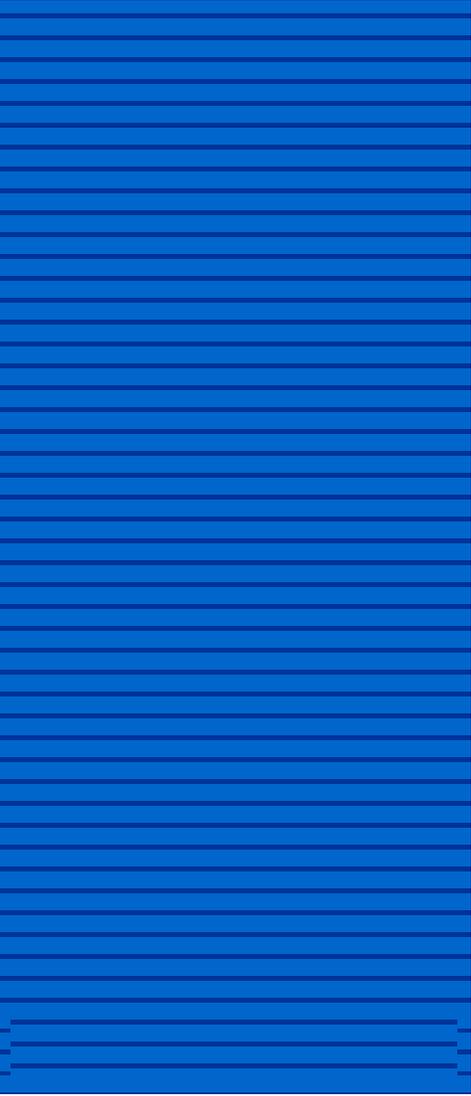
Engaged STEM Learning: From Promising to Pervasive Practices

Network for Academic Renewal Conference
March 24-26, 2011
Miami, Florida

Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL), in partnership with AAC&U, announces the 2011 Network for Academic Renewal conference, *Engaged STEM Learning: From Promising to Pervasive Practices*. This interactive, hands-on conference will help campuses adapt, scale up, and sustain effective practices in STEM teaching and learning. The conference is designed for participants who wish to develop faculty and institutional leadership in STEM reform, broaden student participation and success in STEM fields, better assess engaged STEM learning in both the majors and general education, and connect the revitalization of STEM learning with ongoing campus work in Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). *Engaged STEM Learning: From Promising to Pervasive Practices* will support the efforts of STEM faculty, deans, department chairs, and their colleagues from across campus in making engaged STEM learning more mainstream and pervasive in both general education and STEM majors. **For more information, including conference themes, visit the call for proposals at www.aacu.org.**