



Center for Teaching Excellence
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In This Issue

◆ Transitioning from Practice to Academia

Other Useful Links

◆ Interactive Software

◆ Putting Educational Innovation into Practice

In the Next Issue

◆ Pedagogical Issues and Online Teaching

Transitioning from Practice to Academia

**By Professor Wayne Dawkins
Recipient, 2010 Edward L. Hamm, Sr. Distinguished Teaching Award**

Three decades ago, I was persuaded to go to graduate school and study journalism for this reason: After I fulfilled my goal to practice the craft for many years, I would need an advanced degree in order to be eligible to teach it at a college campus. Often during my career at four daily newspapers, co-workers said I could be a good teacher largely because of my calm temperament and passion for educating young people.

The bruising transformation of the media industry in the early 21st century – still in progress by the way – provided the chance to see if I was educator material. In January 2005, my freelance editing contract for an online daily web site was canceled, which left me scrambling for replacement work. A well-traveled journalist colleague/friend recommended me to Hampton University.

At the time, the 3-year-old Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications started its spring semester with three classes that needed adjunct professors. I was tapped to teach two writing lab courses and a lecture class. At the end of the semester, I remained an underemployed freelance journalist.

The Scripps Howard School meanwhile experienced a remarkable turnover of faculty. More than a handful of theorists and industry professionals moved on, leaving Tony Brown, dean, and two assistant professors, Rosalynne Whitaker-Heck and Francis McDonald, in the building.

I interviewed for one of the vacancies. In August while I was at the National Association of Black Journalists convention – as association historian, I was tasked with providing content for our 30th anniversary – I learned that I was hired as an assistant professor. Seven other practitioners were also hired: HU alum, William W. Sutton Jr., Kissette L. Bundy, William C. Leonard, Bonnie Jo Mount, Joy McDonald, and Bonnie Winston. Edward Welch also came on board as a practitioner-turned PhD educator. We could hear haughty sniffs and chatter from the academic establishment. It sounded something like this: Sure, you can practice your craft, but can you *teach* it?

The academic establishment's critique was valid, especially because we were marketed as "New JACs" and thus were juicy targets for ridicule. We "newbies" had to learn pedagogy and method. Effective teaching did not merely mean that journalists assume they could walk into classrooms and only tell "war stories," and regale students with their greatest hits from crime scenes, political conventions or international disaster zones. No, in order to credibly transition from the newsroom to the classroom, the practitioners had to immerse themselves in the campus culture and become part of the university.

For the first year or two, Dean Brown shielded us inexperienced faculty from the rest of the campus. While given cover, we were to drill down and quickly learn teaching routines in order to manage classrooms effectively and to teach students measurable skills.

Colleagues Sutton, Bundy and I were specifically tasked to substantially improve the level of grammatical writing in Scripps Howard's required 100-level media writing courses. After a semester, the dean praised our efforts as "intense 'gatekeepers,'" and curmudgeon Jack White, *Time* magazine legend and a visiting professional here, said in December 2005, "these welcome improvements are largely due to the fact that most of these students have taken JAC 110 from professors Sutton, Bundy and Dawkins, who are all to be congratulated on the fruits of their labors. ... Where there is hard work, there is hope."

Soon, Brown and other Scripps Howard administrators began to mainstream the practitioner faculty in order to perform the other tasks that all professors are expected to conduct in their departments and across campus: Grant writing and government contract assignments, scholarly and creative writing, community service, and student advising and committee work whether within the unit or university-wide.

After one year as a full-time assistant professor, I presented my first "Newsroom to the Classroom" workshop at NABJ-Indianapolis. Dozens of my journalist colleagues were stunned when I said classroom teaching was one-third of the job at most universities. I preached that message again at a syllabus exchange/ online classroom session at NABJ-Philadelphia in August. Again, I could see the jaws drop out in the audience.

In order to transition effectively from the professional practice industry to the classroom, newcomers must take advantage of in-house training. The sessions at the fall and spring Faculty Institutes are valuable and effective. Each semester, I synthesize what I learn into my teaching method. Each year I'm not the professor that I was the year before. Hampton has trained me to make better use of digital technology and I have learned a wide range of strategies in order to connect with savvy 18- to 22-year old students who are now known as "digital natives."

What have I brought to the campus table as a professional of practice?

In my advanced reporting & writing, and news editing classes, I initiated weekly news meetings, in which students must search Sunday newspapers and bring back stories that are rated based upon seven core news values: impact,

immediacy, proximity, prominence, novelty, conflict and emotions. Students have traveled with me to special events, whether it was Governor Tim Kaine's inauguration in Williamsburg, or the *State of the Black Union* forum at Hampton University's Convocation Center during the Jamestown 400 celebration in 2007.

I've been an evangelistic advocate who touts the eternal relevance of print media. Supporting evidence? A 2009 New York Times Sunday fashion extra magazine [featuring Rosario Dawson and teased as the "stimulus edition"], and a tear sheet from a spring 2006 Washington Post that shows a beaming Robin Givhan being congratulated for winning a Pulitzer Prize for her enterprising writing that linked politics with fashion. I pull out these paper props and more to challenge some students' assumptions that print writing means the medium must be boring.

I am having fun and receiving great satisfaction from teaching young people, and learning much from them. That mentor who three decades ago pressed me to go to graduate school at the start of my journalism career was right; I needed to prepare to teach in the future.

Hampton University provided the opportunity.



Professor Wayne Dawkins worked as a daily newspaper journalist for nearly 23 years. He was an associate editor of the *Daily Press* of Newport News from 1998-2003 and served as managing editor of BlackAmericanWeb.com from September 2003 to January 2005. Professor Dawkins was an adjunct professor at the Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications during the Spring 2005 semester, before joining the full-time faculty in the fall of that year.

Announcements

Registration is Now Open for AAC&U's 2012 Annual Meeting,

“SHARED FUTURES / DIFFICULT CHOICES:

Reclaiming a Democratic Vision for College Learning, Global Engagement, and Success”

January 25-28, 2012

Washington, DC

Highlights of AAC&U's 2012 Annual Meeting—SHARED FUTURES / DIFFICULT CHOICES: Reclaiming a Democratic Vision for College Learning, Global Engagement, and Success—are now online. Registration is also available online at www.aacu.org, with an "early bird" deadline of **November 21, 2011**.

The meeting will be held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, DC.

Arts & Humanities: Toward a Flourishing State?

November 3-5, 2011

Providence, Rhode Island

Arts & Humanities: Toward a Flourishing State? will explore current realities and possible futures of the arts and humanities. The conference will situate the arts and humanities both in relation to each other and within the broader context of other disciplines and fields, within liberal education as a whole. Addressing big questions about the future of the United States as a democracy, the conference will emphasize the vitality and importance of the arts and humanities and ask how that vitality might be sustained and how the arts and humanities might evolve in the future.

Campus educators, administrators, students, and community partners are invited to join with colleagues to consider anew the many ways in which the arts and humanities contribute to and reflect the history and culture of our nation and our connections to a vibrant global society.

At a moment fraught with division along political, cultural, and economic lines, the conference intends both to explore difficult questions and to entertain hope.