

LMU
Lincoln Memorial University
QEP Newsletter

Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success

Dr. Thomas Bragg Receives Faculty Award

Lincoln Memorial University English professor, Dr. Thomas Bragg, was awarded second place for the 2020-21 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$750. One of Dr. Bragg's students nominated him and stated "you could tell that he truly wants every individual student to learn to the best of their ability in his class." The nominator further stated that Dr. Bragg "is an incredible teacher, and has truly helped my academic career."



Dr. Thomas Bragg, English Professor

Faculty, staff and students can nominate instructors for awards. Nominations are reviewed by a committee and scored on a number of factors. One of the reviewers commented that Dr. Bragg's materials were easy to follow and found value in Dr. Bragg's detailed annotated example.

Dr. Bragg was asked a series of questions related to the process of creating transparent materials for the classroom. Below are the questions along with Dr. Bragg's responses and his advice for others:

Q1: *What steps did you take to modify your assignments to align with the Transparent Instruction format?*

Bragg I was already pretty good at writing the tasks parts of assignments. Explaining why and how the task was useful, and specifying how it would be judged--these were not second nature sections for me to write about. I habitually went over purpose and criteria in my class discussions, but I had not been in the habit of writing them down. I had to "distill" my classroom advice about purpose and criteria into easily processed written language.

Q2: *What differences are you seeing in the student homework submissions that you are receiving now as opposed to before using the transparent Purpose/Task/Criteria (PTC) format?*

Bragg The most evident difference is student confidence in discussing and understanding their grading. I am a longtime user of rubrics in grading essays, but by explaining the rubric in the criteria sections of writing assignments, I am helping to focus the student on criteria before he or she turns in the assignment. In other words, I am not grading differently, but students are understanding the grading process earlier in the assignment process. That kind of familiarity and confidence can result in better scores.

Q3 *What was the biggest challenge in this process?*

Bragg Probably composing the purpose sections has been, and is, the most challenging part. Steven Pinker writes about academics suffering from the "curse of knowledge," which he explains as their "inability to imagine what it's like not to know something that they know." I know why professors assign essays; I can speak about it at length for entire class periods easily. It has proven hard to break those reasons down into a few clear sentences on assignments.

Q4: *What advice or words of wisdom would you give to new faculty that are beginning to incorporate transparency into their assignments?*

Bragg My advice to instructors struggling with the QEP process is to practice a bit of empathy in action. You were once one of these students. You once did not know what you do now; you did not know what has now become habitual and familiar. Remember what that was like, and then imagine what additional challenges today's students face that you and I did not have to deal with (like the level of distraction in today's digital world).

Q5: *Any final closing thoughts?*

Bragg The P-T-C process isn't just an additional hurdle, another hoop you have to jump through. Better instructions result in better assignment submissions, and that means better results for both the students and the instructors. (And better essays take less time to grade!)

Faculty teaching classes within the general education program and gateway classes should have two transparent assignments in each of their classes. For more about transparent instruction, contact Dr. Molly Duggan at Molly.Duggan@LMU.net.edu.

Faculty Award Nominations



Do you know a remarkable faculty member that is using transparent instruction in the classroom? If so, we are seeking nominations for faculty with clear Purpose, Tasks and Criteria (PTC) in their syllabi and assignments. We want to recognize and celebrate exemplary faculty initiatives for transparent pedagogy. The 2021-22 Award nomination period is open now and ends on June 30, 2022. Up to six faculty will be recognized in the fall. First prize will receive \$1000, followed by awards of \$750, \$500, and three awards of \$250. The nominations will close on June 30, 2022. Please submit nominations at the following link:



https://lmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2hRZOxF2Psknd8G

Retention Rates Drop

While the QEP has a number of assessment measures, retention rates are some of the statistics that LMU likes to closely follow. According to data from LMU's Office of Institutional Effectiveness, baseline data from the 2018-19 year of first-time, full-time, degree seeking students, freshman to sophomore retention rate, was 77 percent. This variable looks specifically at the freshmen of 2018-19 to returning as a sophomore in 2019-20.

The first year of the QEP was 2019-20. The freshmen rate dropped slightly to 75 percent for the students returning in their sophomore year of 2020-21. The second year of the QEP was 2020-21. The freshmen for this year returning to their sophomore year in 2021-22 rate dropped even further to 69 percent.

On one hand, these statistics are a reason to express concern. We would like to see the retention numbers move upward rather than down. On the other hand, we are aware that the COVID pandemic hit during the middle of our 2020 spring semester and continues to be a factor today. While anecdotally, other institutions have expressed concerns of the COVID impact on retention, the national statistics from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) are not available yet for a comparison.

What does this mean? We need to help our students succeed academically and persist from freshmen to sophomore years. The more we can clearly articulate our expectations in the classroom, the more likely our students will persist and be successful. Providing clear Purpose, Tasks and Criteria can help students understand the assignment and expectations. Working together, we can learn and grow – helping students to graduate.



LinkedIn Learning

The QEP includes both student success outcomes as well as faculty training and development outcomes. While LinkedIn Learning is not a direct assessment measure of the QEP, it can certainly help support and supplement our student success and faculty development initiatives. Erika Eschberger, LMU Instructional Technologist, has created an 8-page guide to help people understand the benefits of LinkedIn Learning and how to access the training sessions.

Thousands of training videos are available for LMU students, faculty and staff to utilize as professional development tools through the My.LMU portal. Some of the topics include Technology, Communication, Teaching, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Development, and Time Management to name just a few. Click <https://bit.ly/3LAMIWA> to access the LinkedIn 8-page guide. Faculty are encouraged to share this resource with students.

Important 2022 Dates

March 2	Late Starting Classes Begin (LNCN-100)
March 16	QEP Steering Committee Meeting
March 20-25	Spring Break
April 10-30	End-of-Semester Student Surveys Available

PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA

By The Numbers . . .

1,810 Number of student surveys returned at the end of Fall 2021.

82 Percentage of students that replied positively in the LMU Undergraduate Satisfaction Survey in fall 2021 to “The Overall Quality of Academic Instruction is Sufficient for Student Achievement.” This was an increase from 72 percent in fall 2020.

75 Percentage of students that thought LMU classes were taught in an organized way in the National Survey of Student Engagement Survey.

63 Percentage of First Generation Student retention rate from freshman to sophomore years for 2020-21 – a drop from 71 % in 2019-20.

2 Number of transparent assignments that should be included in each general education and gateway course to reflect transparent instruction.

Thank you for reading the QEP newsletter. The QEP Office is located in 118 Grant Lee. If there is something you would like added to future newsletters, please email Molly.Duggan@LMU.net.