

# QEP Newsletter

*Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success*

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## Dr. Muthu Dharmasena Receives Faculty Award

Lincoln Memorial University Assistant Professor of Biology, Dr. Muthu Dharmasena, was awarded first place for the 2021-2022 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$1000. Dr. Dharmasena was nominated by two different students in BIOL-230 for an essay assignment. One of the students described her professor as “by far, the most helpful and in-depth professor” and also commented “Dr. Dharmasena was very involved in her class with emails and office hours”. The second student commented that the assignment instructions were clear and understandable.



**Dr. Muthu Dharmasena, Biology 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. Dharmasena’s nomination represented “truly exemplary assignments that embody the Transparent Instruction Framework.”

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

- Q1:** *What steps did you take to modify your assignments to align with the Transparent Instruction format?*  
**A** Fortunately, transparent materials were introduced at the very beginning of my career at LMU. The first semester was difficult for me. During the first semester, I realized that it is not easy to convey the messages I want my students to have. After attending the QEP workshops, I grasped the idea of transparent materials. I modified the selected assignments by providing more transparent instructions with annotated examples. That was more helpful for students to organize their answers and understand the flow of the answer with less confusion.
- 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?*  
**A** I worked only one semester without providing transparent syllabi and assignments. When I was annotating the answers for those selected assignments, I realized that my very first batch of students did



# Faculty Training

As new faculty join LMU and work with the general education and the gateway classes, faculty participate in a QEP training session. The training highlights the role of assessment, and the importance of transparency in faculty syllabi and assignments.

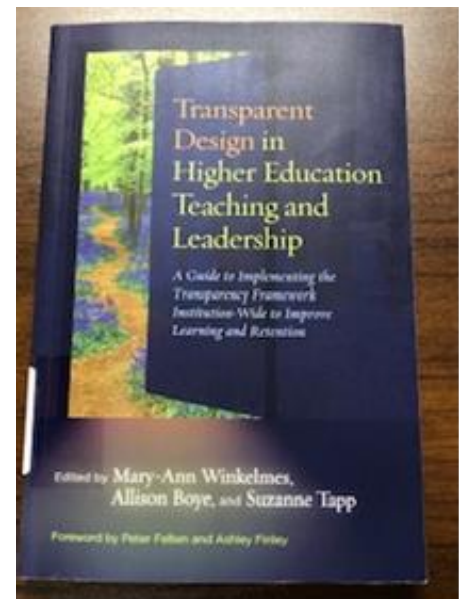
Since the start of our QEP in 2019, 151 faculty have completed the training sessions. Fall 2022 added nine new faculty. Faculty completed a pre-training and post-training survey. Based on the results of this semester, our mean scores data indicated a positive statistical difference as a result of training. We are happy to hear that faculty have benefited from learning about the Transparent Instruction Framework and are even incorporating it in upper-level classes.

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## Transparency Resource Book

The LMU Carnegie Vincent Library on the Harrogate Tennessee campus offers resources for faculty, staff, students, and community members. While the shift over the years has moved from in-person material requests to electronic requests, they still offer a wide variety of support services. If the library does not have a book or journal on hand, they may be able to get it from one of the partner libraries.

One book that they do have is “Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership, A Guide to Implementing the Transparency Framework Institution-Wide to Improve Learning and Retention” (2019). The book is authored by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, Allison Boye, and Suzanne Tapp. Dr. Winkelmes is the founder and principal investigator of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education project (TILT Higher Ed).



This can be a great resource for any faculty member that wants to learn more about our QEP which uses the Transparent Instruction Framework. The book starts with an introduction and highlights the initial research and explains the three main components of Purpose, Task, and Criteria. The evidence-based framework highlights the importance of communication between students and instructors with equity and accessibility in mind. This first section of the book explores the components of the Transparency Framework and how to use it in class. The focus of the framework is to make small changes that can have profound benefits for both the students and the instructors.

The second section of the book explores using the Transparency Framework on a larger scale. Faculty development workshops, webinars, learning communities, conferences, and other ways of adding the framework on a campus-wide or system-wide scale or options are discussed. Interdisciplinary uses for the framework are also examined.

The third section of the book examines uses of Transparent Instruction at institutions across the globe. These institutions share their path and lessons learned. Examples include University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), Washington State Community and Technical College (CTC), California State University (CSU), the Indiana system, and the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). Each implementation reveals lessons learned and demonstrates the potential successes with varying structural changes.

This book offers history, real institutional examples, and support for faculty. Each institution's application and path is unique. This book provides a nice starting point for anyone interested in learning more about the Transparency Framework.

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## PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA

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### Important 2022 Dates

Oct. 10	Late Starting Classes Begin (LNCN-100-C0 & D0)
Oct. 26	QEP Steering Committee Meeting
Nov. 14 – Dec. 3	End-of-Semester Student Surveys Available
Nov. 23-25	Thanksgiving Holiday Break
Dec. 5 – 9	Final Exams
Dec. 10	Commencement

### Important 2023 Dates

Jan. 9	Classes Begin
Jan. 11-28	Beginning-of-Semester Student Surveys Available
Feb. 13	Lincoln Day/Founders Day
Feb. 27 – Mar. 3	Midterms
Mar. 20 – 24	Spring Break
April 7	Good Friday – No Classes – Offices Closed
April 17-29	End-of-Semester Student Surveys Available
May 1-5	Final Exams
May 6	Commencement

# Questions for Students

Dr. Mary-Ann Winkelmes, the Founder, Director, and Principal Investigator of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education project (TILT Higher Ed), presented a webinar in September through the W. W. Norton & Company. The webinar was free and titled “Transparent Instruction: What, Why, and How?”. Dr. Winkelmes gave an overview of the transparent framework and provided handouts. The biggest take-away, however, was that she encouraged participants to give to students a flier that they could in turn give to faculty. The following is taken directly from her handout:

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*Before you begin working on an assignment or class activity, ask the instructor to help you understand the following. (Bring this document to frame the conversation.)*

## **Purpose**

- Skills you’ll practice by doing this assignment
- Content knowledge you’ll gain from doing this assignment
- How you can use these in your life beyond the context of this course, in and beyond college

## **Task**

- What to do
- How to do it (Is there a recommended process? Is the process intentionally unclear? What roadblocks or mistakes should you avoid?)

## **Criteria**

- Checklist. (Are you on the right track? How will you know you’re doing what’s expected? How will you know you’re doing high quality work?)
- Examples of real-world work in this field. What’s good or lacking about these examples? Use the checklist to identify the successful parts

*<https://tilthighered.com/>*

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## By The Numbers . . .

1,212

Number of student surveys returned at the end of spring 2022 – an increase of 374 from the beginning of spring.

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4.348

Average score from student surveys at the end of spring 2022 – an increase of 0.133 from the end of fall 2021 semester.

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

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*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](mailto:Molly.Duggan@LMU.net).*