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# QEP Newsletter

Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success

### 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

not understand my expectations thoroughly. However, after modifying all the assignments I used, I began to have fewer and fewer questions each semester regarding the completion of assignments.

- Q3 What was the biggest challenge in this process?
- A Preparing transparent assignments is time consuming. We should anticipate the questions from the students and answer those in the annotated example.
- Q4: What advice or words of wisdom would you give to new faculty that are beginning to incorporate transparency into their assignments?
- A Some students complete this type of assignments for the first time and they need to meet our deadlines too. Sometimes, I also look for examples before submitting some documents. Therefore, it is very helpful for the students if they have an annotated example of their final answer to understand the expectations of the assignments.
- Q5: Any final closing thoughts?
- A I am still in the middle of modifying the purpose, task, and criteria of my assignments with the feedback of students. Some classes have different types of assignments (quizzes, presentation, and essay, etc.). So, I add more than two transparent assignments to remove the confusion about the basic requirements of the answer.

Congratulations to Dr. Dharmasena on her achievement and recognition. Faculty teaching within the general education program and gateway classes include two transparent assignments in each of their classes. For more information about transparent instruction, contact Dr. Molly Duggan at <u>Molly.Duggan@LMUnet.edu</u>.



## Freshmen to Sophomore Rates Bouncing Back

Freshman to Sophomore retention rates are clear indicators of future graduation rates. Our baseline data for first-time, full-time, degree seeking students from 2018-19 started at 77 percent. The rates for 2019-20 dropped slightly to 76 percent and then significantly dropped for 2020-21 to 70 percent. We are happy that our rates have returned to 77 percent for the 2021-22 freshmen class – most likely attributable to recovering from our Covid losses.

Similarly, our First Generation students baseline 2018-19 data were at 65 percent. Our rates improved in 2019-20 to 72 percent, but then significantly dropped for 2020-21 freshmen to 65 percent. We are happy that our 2021-22 retention rates have improved to 75 percent. This rate matches our target goal for the QEP!

These rates reflect that each student matters, and each year matters as we work toward our 4-year and 5-year graduation rates. We are happy to see our rates bounce back up in a positive direction! Keep up the great work!

## **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.

#### **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 inperson 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.

### PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA

#### **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:

*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/

### 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.
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.
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 <u>Molly.Duggan@LMUnet.edu</u>.