

QEP Newsletter

Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success

Dr. Kevin Cooper – Recognized for Teaching Effectiveness & Student Support

Lincoln Memorial University Assistant Professor of Physics, Dr. Kevin Cooper, was awarded first place for the 2022-23 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$1,000. Dr. Cooper was nominated by a student who wrote a lengthy nomination essay professing the work of Dr. Cooper and his supportive style of teaching and advocacy. This student said, “He takes the time to thoroughly review and provide feedback on sample assignments, highlighting both the strengths and areas for improvement.” The student further stated, “These annotated examples serve as invaluable learning resources that help us understand the expectations and standards of the assignments and enables us to improve our own work.”

Dr. Cooper has worked at LMU for ten years. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from Morehead State University. He earned both his Master’s degree and his Doctorate degree in

Physics from Ohio University. Nominations are reviewed by a committee of faculty and scored on a number of variables based on the nomination as well as the transparent assignments.



Dr. Kevin Cooper, Assistant Professor of Physics

Dr. Cooper was asked questions related to his process of creating transparent materials for the classroom. His responses along with the questions are below:

Q 1: *What steps did you take to modify your assignments to align with the Transparent Instruction format?*

A: The main modification was formatting the assignments such that they fit the Procedure/Task/Criteria structure that is being used throughout the University in those courses implementing the Transparent Instruction program.

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: From my perspective and my courses I don't know that I am seeing much of a difference in the actual substance of the submissions. Rather, students seem to generally have responded by having less anxiety and uncertainty in many of their assignments from their courses. This is a more subjective result and harder to accurately quantify, but I think that it does lead to a greater overall satisfaction with their courses and thus an overall benefit to their educational experience.

Q3: What was the biggest challenge in this process?

A: I wouldn't call the process of adopting the Transparent Instruction format particularly challenging, and that is also one of its benefits from the faculty side of the initiative. The goal was to clearly state, to the students, the reasons for assignments, how to do the assignments, and how the assignments will be assessed. In essence, I think this is what we strive to do when assigning work to the students in our courses. The Transparent Instruction process gives a framework to help instructors think through their assignments to help make them as clear as possible while also giving the students a uniform format across their courses to access that information. Keeping the Purpose in mind while constructing our courses is less challenging than trying to fill the semester with various activities that hopefully will lead to the desired outcome.

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

A: I would encourage new faculty to consider their assignments from a backwards design perspective. Consider the larger understanding or learning goals that their course is intended to convey and then consider what assignments would lead students to develop that understanding. This gives insight into what activities/assignments would be useful to students and leads directly to its Purpose in the context of the course. The Task and Criteria will naturally follow and can be constructed or explained in light of the larger view of the goals of the course.

Q5: Any final closing thoughts?

A: I would like to say that teaching is a profession that has the advantage of being able to try to improve on a fairly regular basis. We can try to make an improvement to our courses or assignments and quickly see the result. If it is favorable, we can continue to work along that path. If not, we can change it the next time we teach the course. This really is a nice aspect of this type of pursuit.

I think it is also important to note that one of the greatest aspects of working at LMU is the congenial nature of the students. We really do have a good-natured group of students that make it enjoyable to teach our courses.

Congratulations to Dr. Cooper on your faculty teaching award. LMU faculty that teach courses 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 Molly.Duggan@LMU.net.



New Faculty Training

Each semester, faculty who are new to teaching General Education or Gateway classes are asked to participate in QEP training. The session includes information on our specific QEP, “Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success.” Training sessions cover topics such as the transparent instruction framework of Purpose, Tasks, and Criteria as well as the importance of an annotated example. Accreditation information is shared as well as detailed information regarding our regional accreditor, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), assessment measures, and information specific to our LMU student demographics.

In the fall 2023 semester, we had seven new faculty complete the training. Participants take a pre- and post-training survey. The post survey scores were higher and showed a statistical difference in mean survey scores between the pre- and post-training surveys indicating that faculty learned from the sessions. We are happy to see that the training sessions are making a difference for faculty.

ETS Proficiency Profile Exams

LMU undergraduate students typically take the ETS Proficiency Profile Exams during the semester in which they are taking the CIVX-300 course. This is an exam that helps us to look at trends in our students’ scores in areas such as critical thinking, reading, writing, mathematics, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. We are able to compare our scores with that of the national mean. This exam allows us to also assess students’ performance in CIVX-300, assess general education, and serve as a measure of student achievement.

The ETS Proficiency Profile Exam is also one of our external measures for the QEP. Our target goal is to achieve at least a rolling average above the 60th national percentile by year five. Our scores for the spring 2023 semester were 89% which brought our cumulative rolling average to 83.9%. We are happy that our students are achieving such high scores at LMU. Starting in the fall 2023 semester, the test will be delivered by Territorium. We have been advised that there will be the same number of questions and that the data collection will be comparable to the past.

PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA

Student Survey Numbers Increased

At the beginning and end of each semester, undergraduate students receive a short 10-question survey to evaluate the level of transparency with their general education and gateway classes. At the beginning of the fall 2023 semester, we received 1,585 surveys. This was an increase from the past six deployments of surveys.

Consistently, the statement with the highest score was the “Assignments are connected to course goals.” On a five-point Likert scale, the response was 4.463 toward “strongly agree.” This has been the highest statement consistently for all eighteen consecutive survey deployments.

The statement with the lowest score for the past seventeen survey deployments has been, “This class is incorporating my interests”. For this statement to be the lowest, it seemed reasonable because we recognize some students are taking classes that are part of the general education program or are a prerequisite for another class, and that they are would not normally choose to take some of these classes on their own. For the first time, the lowest score statement was “This class will prepare me to work in the global environment” with a response score of 3.941 toward “a great deal.” The “interest” question response was just slightly higher with 3.945. It seems that students rate the global benefits lower – although, still higher than a “3” for “neutral.”

Important 2023 Dates

Oct. 18	QEP Steering Committee Meeting
Nov. 12-Dec. 2	End-of-Semester Surveys
Nov. 22-24	Thanksgiving – No Classes
Dec. 3-8	Final Exams
Dec. 9	Commencement

Important 2024 Dates

Jan. 8, 2024	Spring 2024 Classes Begin
Jan 10-27	Early Student Surveys
Jan. 15	MLK Day – No classes
March 25-29	Spring break – No classes
April 14-27	End-of-Semester Surveys

By The Numbers . . .

1,585	Student surveys returned at the beginning of fall 2023 – compared to only 959 at the end of spring 2023 – an increase of 626 surveys!
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4.159	Average score from student surveys at the beginning of fall 2023 – based on a 5-point rubric – an increase from the end of spring 2023 which was 4.037.
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2	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.