

QEP Newsletter

Transparent Instruction in General Education and Gateway Courses for Student Success

Dr. Thomas Shell Receives 16 Award Nominations – Clinches Second Place

Assistant Professor of Chemistry, Dr. Thomas Shell, was awarded second place for the 2022-23 Quality Enhancement Plan Outstanding Teaching Award and received \$750. Dr. Shell was nominated by 16 different students/faculty representing four different classes – many of them writing lengthy exposés of why he is so deserving of recognition. Several students described Dr. Shell as “the best professor” or as their “favorite.” They described that he “created a safe space for his students” and was “always available to answer questions.”

Dr. Shell has been at LMU since fall 2021. He received bachelor degrees in chemistry and biology from the University of Richmond. He earned his Ph.D in Organic Chemistry from Emory 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. Thomas Shell, Assistant Professor of Chemistry

Dr. Shell was asked questions related to his process of creating transparent materials for the classroom. The questions and his responses are below:

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

A: The assignments for my lecture courses are quizzes and exams. I am more thoughtful about what questions I ask students and why I am asking students those questions. This means that I write all of the quiz and exam questions that I use rather than just taking them from a test bank. In addition, I think about how the questions help students develop their understanding of the material. I provide 3-5 practice quizzes and 2-3 practice exams that are the same format as the quizzes and exams that I use for

assessment. I provide students with detailed answer keys, so they know how to solve the problems I am asking them to solve. I view these detailed answer keys as the primary means by which I am clear about the task that students will be expected to complete for assessments. I view students completing the practice quizzes and practice exams to prepare for the quizzes and exams as doing the homework for the course. I also provide students with videos of people solving example problems that are similar to the problems that they will be asked to perform on the quizzes and the exams. In addition, I have a review session before every exam for students to be able to ask me about concepts from the practice exams that they did not fully understand. Because I view the practice quizzes and practice exams as homework preparation for the quizzes and exams, I am very thoughtful about what questions I put on the practice quizzes and practice exams to develop their understanding of the material to be well-prepared for the quizzes and exams. I feel that if am expecting the student to invest their time in completing the practice quizzes and practice exams I should be thoughtful about making sure that the time they spend working those problems will be useful for them being successful on the quiz or exam that I plan to give them. In addition, I feel that providing students with practice quizzes and practice exams that are the same format as the quizzes and exams used for assessment helps a lot of students with the anxiety that they have about taking an exam.

For the quizzes, I think about the purpose of the questions that I am asking, which I include on all of the quizzes. This is sometimes specific to the course, but I try to connect the purpose to relevance outside of class when possible. I do include the tasks for answering the questions. The task aspect of Transparent Instruction is why I provide students with detailed answers keys to the practice quizzes and practice exams. Students can see how the questions for the quizzes and exams are solved properly; therefore, they know clearly what their task will be when they take the quizzes and exams for assessment. I include grading criteria on practice quizzes and practice exams as well as the quizzes and exams used for assessment so that students know how the quizzes and exams will be graded before they take them.

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 have taught for several years at a few different institutions before joining the faculty at LMU. During those years I remember many times being incredibly frustrated because students did not perform on exams as well as I thought they should. A few years ago, it finally occurred to me that students did not perform as well on exams as I would like them to because they did not know what to expect on exams and because I was not clear what my expectations were. In addition, I did not clearly show them how to perform the tasks of the exams that I was using as an assessment. I showed them how to solve problems in class, but that is very different from what a student is experiencing when they are handed an exam with problems that will be used to assess their knowledge of the material. Therefore, I decided to start writing practice exams with detailed answer keys that I provided to students before the exam. In hindsight, it seems crazy to me that I used to expect students to perform well on exams without providing them any guidance for my expectations or guidance on how to complete the tasks of the exam properly. People do not become good at any task unless they clearly know what their task is and they have practiced that task.

When I arrived at LMU and heard about Transparent Instruction, it was wonderful because I didn't know other educators were thinking in a similar way as I was about being more transparent to students about how to be successful in courses. I was really excited to discover that the faculty of LMU had already embraced concepts I was thinking about in my own teaching and that there was a named coined for it. Therefore, since joining LMU I have tried to embrace the Transparent Instruction approach to teaching my courses. Because of being a faculty member at LMU which supports Transparent Instruction, I am working harder to be transparent by providing much more material for students to prepare for assessments and I am much more thoughtful about being transparent in my instruction. I now

think about how I can use transparent instruction to encourage growth in understanding of the course material.

Since I have more fully embraced Transparent Instruction due to joining LMU and learning more about how other educators think and approach this instructional practice, I have experienced dramatic differences in teaching and learning. The students are much better prepared for quizzes and exams. This has led to students being better able to demonstrate their understanding of the material than I experienced before I started using Transparent Instruction. This has resulted in students having much greater satisfaction in their educational experience because they feel like they were provided with a fair opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of course material in an environment where the expectations were made clear to them before the assessment of knowledge started. That has made my career much more satisfying and enjoyable because I can see that I am making a difference in how these students think about chemistry and how they think about their own academic abilities. I teach general chemistry and organic chemistry, which are courses that many students have a significant amount of anxiety about taking. Since embracing Transparent Instruction, I know that students are much less anxious about taking these courses, which makes the learning experience better for them and the teaching experience more enjoyable for me.

Q3: What was the biggest challenge in this process?

A: The biggest challenge has been the amount of time it takes me to write questions for practice quizzes and practice exams that will encourage growth in the understanding of the material by students. In addition, it is time consuming to write clear, detailed answer keys for practice quizzes and practice exams that demonstrate to the students how to complete the tasks that they will be asked to perform on the quizzes and exams that are used for assessment. However, the amount of time I invest in doing these tasks is incredibly rewarded by the improved demonstration of knowledge that I see with students as well as the improved satisfaction of students with their educational experience.

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

A: Think about how you would have liked to have been treated as an undergraduate student rather than what your actual experience as an undergraduate student may have been. Wouldn't you have performed better in your classes and been less stressed if your college professors were clear about what they expected from you? Most professors talk about how when they were college students that they had no idea what their professors would expect from them on assessments. There is no reason why it needs be that way just because that was what most of our experiences were. After evolving to the concepts of transparent instruction, it seems strange to me that at one point in my career I was opaque about what I wanted students to demonstrate an understanding of and then I was somehow surprised when they struggled to show significant knowledge of the material.

Q5: Any final closing thoughts?

A: Transparent Instruction has drastically improved the ability of my students to demonstrate their knowledge of the course material. This has enhanced their educational growth and increased their satisfaction with their educational experience. These results have greatly increased my career satisfaction. Therefore, while it does require effort and thoughtfulness to be transparent in instructional practices, the outcomes make it worth the time investment.

Congratulations to Dr. Shell 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.



2023-24 Outstanding Faculty Award Nominations

Nominations are now open for outstanding faculty using transparent instruction in the classroom. Do you know of a colleague who you think should be recognized? 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 2023-24 Award nomination period is open now and ends on May 31, 2024. This is the last semester for these awards. Up to seven faculty will be recognized in the fall. First prize will receive \$1000, followed by awards of \$750, \$500, and three awards of \$250. A seventh award was created to recognize faculty that may be using transparent instruction in classes beyond the QEP. Please submit nominations at the following link:



https://lmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cwQsNGQD9a1Tt8a

LMU Student Opinion Survey

One of the many assessment measures for our QEP is that of the LMU Student Opinion survey. While the survey covers a wide variety of topics, the question of focus for our QEP is related to the quality of the academic instruction. The question asks students their level of “satisfaction.” Our lofty target goal was set to get at least 90 percent of students to be “somewhat satisfied,” “satisfied,” or “very satisfied.”

For the fall 2023 semester we saw a large increase of responses. In fall 2022 we collected 1,120 surveys compared to 1,541 for fall 2023 – an increase of over 400 surveys! Ritchie Bradley, Coordinator of Academic Operations, facilitates the distribution for many of the campus surveys. When asked about the increase in survey responses Bradley stated, “This was the outcome we were hoping for when we designed the new system. Students are able to easily access their evaluations in one location in Canvas and don’t have to sort through course-by-course to find the evaluations. This saves them time and helps to reduce survey fatigue while allowing LMU to better understand how students feel about the quality of their academic instruction.”

We dropped from 77.32 percent in fall 2022 responses to 73.7 percent in fall 2023. While we would prefer to have our satisfaction increase, we are not surprised because of the increase in student surveys returned. In total, our response for fall 2023 was higher than our initial baseline data from spring 2019 of 71.49 percent. We are pleased that our final survey satisfaction level was higher than our baseline survey satisfaction.

PURPOSE ~ TASKS ~ CRITERIA



Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI)

The QEP (and LMU) uses data collection to monitor our progress toward meeting our targets for student success and retention initiatives. The Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) is a national survey that we use to collect satisfaction levels from our students regarding all kinds of student service areas. Not only do we collect our students' responses, but we can then compare our data with those of our peer institutions across the country. According to RNL, over 1,900 campus and nonprofits work with them each year. They have a history of partnering with over 3,000 institutions.

The SSI will send an email to LMU undergraduate students – all levels - with a link to take the survey. This is not a survey that students can access through Canvas like our other QEP surveys and the course evaluations. Please encourage students to take the survey. On average, it should take students 15-20 minutes to complete the survey. This information is valuable for the QEP but also for many student service areas across campus. The Institutional Effectiveness Office may also use this data in assessment and accreditation reports. Information collected can help LMU determine areas of need to help improve retention and graduation rates.

SSI surveys will deploy on Monday, February 26, and close on Friday, April 5, 2024. Reminder emails will be sent to students who do not complete the survey.

If you have questions regarding the deployment of the SSI, please contact Ritchie Bradley, Coordinator of Academic Operations at Richard.Bradley@LMU.net. Ritchie works closely with our survey partners to be sure that they are administered in the best format possible.

WDF & Course Completion Data

At the end of each semester, Dr. Carl Larsen, Senior Director of Assessment & State Authorization in the Institutional Effectiveness Office, runs reports of the QEP courses. One report includes a list of courses that have a 10 percent or higher rate of students who did not complete the class with a W, D, or F. For the fall 2023 semester, there were 30 courses on the list. This was a drop from 36 courses that were on the spring 2023 report.

When examining all sections of all the QEP courses for the QEP Course Completion rates, we recorded 89 percent for fall 2023. This completion rate was identical to the spring 2023 semester rate. The baseline rate from fall 2018 was only 86 percent.

Important 2024 Dates

Feb 26 - April 5	Ruffalo Noel Levitz SSI Surveys
March 20	QEP Steering Committee Meeting
March 25-29	Spring break – No classes
April 14-27	End-of-Semester Surveys
April 29-May 30	Final Exams
May 31	Faculty Award Nominations. Close

By The Numbers . . .

2,279

Student surveys returned at the end of fall 2023 – an increase of nearly 700 from the beginning of the semester!

4.019

Average score from student surveys at the end of fall 2023 – based on a 5-point rubric.

2

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.edu.