Focus on Faculty

As a highlight of this month’s newsletter, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) would like to share an interview with Dr. Ashok Hegde about his thoughts and experiences with teaching and learning. Dr. Hegde is a William Harvey Endowed Professor for Biomedical Science here at Georgia College in the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences.

You are an established neuroscientist. What about neuroscience interests you?

Neuroscience is the final frontier in biology, perhaps in all of science. There is much that is known about the nervous system but there is also much that is unknown. Understanding how the brain works is also important for finding treatment (and possibly cures) for diseases and disorders of the brain. I find the human brain endlessly fascinating.

How were you inspired to become a teacher?

I didn’t set out to be a professor early in my career as I was focused on training to be a scientist and did my Ph.D. in cancer research. When I came to the United States from India, to do my post-doctoral research in neuroscience at Columbia University Medical School in New York, I volunteered to teach neuroanatomy to medical students. This was a bit audacious because I had no background in neuroanatomy and no formal education in neuroscience. I went to the Course Director one month before the beginning of the semester and asked him if I could teach neuroanatomy. This was my plan for forcing myself to learn the subject. He said ‘yes’ and gave me a copy of the neuroanatomy textbook he had written. I read the book from cover to cover. I also read up on not just how to teach but the psychology of teaching. I taught a small group of 20 medical students. I used teaching techniques to make the students feel that I was with them rather than being an aloof instructor. I also remembered everyone’s name. The students loved my approach and gave top ratings for my teaching. Altogether, I taught at Columbia Medical School for three years. This experience got me excited about teaching.

Describe your philosophy of teaching and learning.

I firmly believe that learning should be fun and not drudgery. I try to make the subject that I am teaching interesting to me so it will naturally be interesting to students. After I discovered the validity of this approach at Columbia Medical School, I continued it when I taught graduate students and medical students as a faculty member at Wake Forest Medical School. I am using a similar approach at Georgia College. I like to engage and challenge students and make them active learners. I am a lifelong learner and so I am always on the lookout for innovative ways to improve the learning experience for my students.

What are classroom practices you use to enhance student learning? What do you hope to achieve through these practices?

I try to make my lectures as interactive as possible. I use technology to engage the students and assess comprehension during the lecture. For example, I use Poll Everywhere to ask questions directly from PowerPoint which the students can answer using their cell phone. Using Poll Everywhere I ask multiple-choice questions that are relevant to the subject matter and the questions are based on prior knowledge of the students. This helps me in understanding the students' comprehension level and helps them to assess their own understanding. I also use whiteboards and flip charts to make the lectures more engaging. I have found that students are more engaged when they are actively involved in the learning process.
questions and open-ended questions to discover what points are least clear to the students. I also use this tool to allow students to submit their conclusions after group discussion. I use low-tech methods such as a two-pen exercise in which the students first use blue pens to write from memory about topics printed on paper and then use red pens while consulting the course materials to see what points they missed. In my pre-med seminar course, Seminar in Medical Culture, the format is entirely based on active learning. I don’t give lectures. Instead, the students engage in discussion, clinical case studies and so on.

I want my students to understand the “why” and the “how” of a given subject (for example, brain cell function or human physiology), not just the “what” part. I would like them to understand the concepts and apply the knowledge they acquire with agility. While some memorization is necessary, they should not approach the subject with the intent to memorize everything blindly. I want my students to learn to think and develop metacognitive skills (i.e. know their thinking process). I want my students to learn how to learn so that these skills will be transferrable to learning any subject.

How do you approach transitioning from face-to-face instruction to remote instruction?

My transition to remote instruction has been smooth. That is because I have been using D2L extensively for my courses ever since I joined GCSU, not just for uploading lectures but for assignments, quizzes, tests, and exams. Instead of lectures, I am making short (5- to 6-minute) videos using Kaltura Capture. Each video corresponds to a short segment of my classroom lecture. I looked for ways to make the videos interactive and found options in Kaltura to do just that. I have been adding a couple of multiple-choice questions in each video for students to test their comprehension.

For my pre-med seminar, I use live video conferencing through WebEx. With this approach, the students can do several things they were doing in class previously. But I do miss sitting among the students in the conference room, and they miss that, too.

Where do you think teaching and learning are headed in the next five years?

I think the changes will come in the way online lessons are delivered. We are likely to see the use of virtual reality to simulate classrooms and to engage students more effectively.

While it is easy to be enamored with technology, new technology is only beneficial if it delivers better teaching and better learning. After the transition to online instruction this semester, one thing became abundantly clear to me: campus-based teaching and learning are hard to replace. Because my students in the Pre-Med Mentoring Program interact with me closely, they freely discuss with me issues affecting them. They miss being on campus, miss doing research and they miss hanging out with their peers. So, I think that we as an institution should continue to strengthen what we are good at, which is giving students individual attention, mentoring them for undergraduate research and preparing them for the real world.

CTL Teaching Tips

During this difficult time while we are all shifting responsibilities and business as usual is no longer “business as usual”, it is important to remember that our students may be frightened and anxious. To help relieve these anxieties, below are some tips that instructors can use to maintain a connected virtual presence for their students.

Create a communication plan – Identify what steps you will take to communicate with your students and when. Regular communications about the course and your expectations will be helpful. If you need to make changes to the syllabus, due dates, assignments, readings, etc., communicate to the students what you are doing and why. Use daily e-mails and/or announcements available in GeorgiaVIEW to provide these updates to students so they can readily access them. Weekly updates using the Announcement tool will keep them updated on what to expect for that week. You
can even format the announcement to address each student by name. (Enter {firstname} where the salutation would be).

**Provide virtual office hours** – Students will still feel the need to be able to talk with you. Let them know that you will be available online, either in e-mail or through a communication service, such as Zoom or WebEx. If you have signed up for WebEx, you have a personal room and you can launch the application and open it so that anybody who has the link can join you. Or, you can set up appointments and plan to meet during specific dates/times. This will allow students who have questions and need a face-to-face meeting to connect virtually.

**Provide a Q&A space in the LMS** – You can use the Discussion Board to create an open Topic where students can ask and answer questions. As an instructor, this would allow you to answer questions publicly so that others can benefit from your responses.

**Utilize any of the online communication tools** – Georgia College provides access and support to several communication platforms that can help instructors communicate with students remotely but increase the feeling of “being there.” They include WebEx, GeorgiaVIEW Chat, Discussion Boards, GeorgiaVIEW Video Note, My Media (Kaltura), Google Hangouts Meet, and Microsoft Team. Visiting with students in real-time will help lessen their anxiety and increase that sense of connection.

**Provide video feedback on assignments** – Using resources such as GeorgiaVIEW Video Note can provide students with more of a personal touch. Video Note allows instructors to record up to 30 minutes of video, which will allow students to see and hear the instructor talk about the assignment.

**Create short videos throughout the course** – Short 3- to 5-minute videos can be used to welcome students to the class, provide an overview of the course, explain how to conduct an assignment, describe the grading procedures, or anything else related to a course. Videos do not need to be perfect; in fact, if you share a little bit of your personality as you would in the classroom, they will be more readily consumed than if they come across as cold and sterile. Be mindful of providing digital access to all of our students, especially those with limited internet or bandwidth. Kaltura does a great job of providing transcriptions for your video. If you can, be sure to check the transcript to ensure accuracy.

As this can be an overwhelming time for many, help your students process what this means to them. Without changing assignment structures, perhaps, you can change the topic of assignments to allow them to reflect on current events and the impact on their lives. Share with them your thoughts about what is happening and how you are approaching your next steps. Be sure to provide resources and support; however, recognize that you are not expected to be counselors to your students. More qualified staff are available here at Georgia College.

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**Webinar - Maximize Formative Learning Opportunities with Turnitin Feedback Studio**

**April 21, 12 Noon**

Join Autumn Ottenad and Larissa Wright-Elson for a deep dive on how to use the Feedback Studio as a formative educational tool to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, self-correct before final submission, and take ownership of their work.

**Register for the Maximize Formative Learning Opportunities with Turnitin Feedback Studio Webinar!**

**GeorgiaVIEW Webinar**

The online environment can often add an extra layer that separates the student from learning even more than in a traditional classroom. This presentation will focus on how by bringing in short, contemplative (or mindful) exercises at the beginning of each module...we are providing a way for participants to reconnect back to the material, but also, modeling contemplative practices for them to use with their [students].

**Register for the Present, Calm, and Ready to Learn Webinar!**

**GC Journeys Info Sessions and Workshops**

Last chance to earn the GC Journeys Guide designation for the spring semester! This final info session will be conducted online by Dr. Cofer and Dr. Alby. To register for the online info session, please contact Dr. Alby at cynthia.alby@gcsu.edu.

To register for the GC Journeys Workshops, please see below.

**Register for a GC Journeys Workshop**

Questions? Email journeys@gcsu.edu
College. Remember, this is not the time to be perfect; it is a time to support our students as they work with us to make the transition to remote instruction.

For assistance on using any of these techniques, please be sure to reach out to the Center for Teaching and Learning by e-mail at ctl@gcsu.edu, phone at (478) 445-2520, visit the Center for Teaching & Learning Faculty Resources course in GeorgiaVIEW, or stop by our GC Keeps Teaching website for additional resources.

**CTL Tech Tip**

“Our research - in which we have called for researchers and educators to pay greater attention to students’ learning experiences and understand the value of collaborating with students - positions the learners at the center of education, allowing...us to find ways to learn from them...Learning what is and isn’t working for students is invaluable, but it is especially important as courses are being developed rapidly, iteratively, and under pressure. While colleagues at institutions of higher education have been and will be asking their own students for feedback, we have sought to provide another way to learn how this transition is going for students overall...[through]...scraping public social media data.” Read more at [What (Some) Students Are Saying about the Switch to Remote Teaching and Learning](#).

**News from IT**

Greetings! Congratulations on getting your courses online in such a short timeframe! We would like to remind you that we are posting several tips to help you stay informed while working remotely. These tips include information on how to keep yourself safe from Zoombombers, how to access the new eduroam wireless network, WebEx and Teams tips, as well as links to other IT informational pages. “IT Tips” is available as a tab within the Unify portal.

If there is anything else we can do to make your transition smoother, please reach out to the Serve help desk, and a member of our team will contact you. Thank you for all you are doing and stay safe!

**News from the Library**

The Library is currently working with GALILEO to provide trial access to several new databases. Visit their [current trial databases](#) or view the [complete list of databases](#) subscribed to by the Library.

If you have suggestions for additional trials, please email allison.reuter@gcsu.edu and lamonica.sanford@gcsu.edu. Use ‘Suggestions for Trial Databases’ as your subject line.