

## **Introductory Comment**

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The *Journal of Research and Practice in College Teaching* (JRPCT) is a gem that illuminates the very best scholarship on teaching and learning in American and global higher education. Published by the Academy of Fellows for Teaching and Learning (AFTL), the University of Cincinnati's leading faculty organization of distinguished scholars and teachers (appointed by the Board of Trustees), the journal is driven by a steadfast commitment to scholarly inquiry and empirical research. It reflects a passion for teaching excellence, engaged instruction, and concern for the well-being and success of students from all walks of life. Since its inception in 2016, the journal has served as a vehicle for championing the AFTL's founding vision:

Through its activities, the AFTL is expected to significantly influence the present and future directions of higher education at UC, and at the State and national levels. It will recognize faculty who have made significant and extended contributions to excellence in scholarly teaching as well as in the scholarship of teaching and learning. And it will create a culture that promotes pedagogical innovation, experimentation, assessment, and scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Bryan, Wayne Hall, and Carl Huether, "The Academy of Fellows for Teaching and Learning, Its Origins and Future Directions. Discuss." *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching* 1, no. 1 (2016), 4, <https://journals.uc.edu/index.php/jrpct/article/view/629/593>.

Like colleagues elsewhere, University of Cincinnati faculty members engage with the academy and their disciplines through myriad avenues of scholarly and professional activity. Only the JRPCT, however, represents the totality of our campus and makes visible the investment of our leading faculty in promoting and sustaining the scholarship of teaching and learning. Despite the variety of tasks and obligations faculty members routinely shoulder, it would be hard to overstate the emphasis our organization places on the journal as a paramount priority. From communication with authors, to the process of peer review, to the preparation of essays for publication – namely, the heavy lifting required to sustain a top-flight scholarly journal – all administrative and production functions are sustained by an editorial board comprised of volunteer AFTL members. That the journal has in a short period garnered widespread recognition and acclaim is a tribute to the editorial leadership of Dr. Ruth Benander and other devoted AFTL colleagues. It is also a testament to the University of Cincinnati's perch as a first-tier comprehensive research university with an internationally recognized commitment to the success of undergraduate and graduate student education.

The JRPCT is a driving force for the promotion of self-reflection, innovation, and interconnection among faculty from a range of disciplines. Through its pages, the AFTL seeks to open pathways that actively engage colleagues at UC and other colleges and universities in Ohio, the nation, and the world, as well as to contribute to a broader interdisciplinary conversation about the challenges of teaching and learning in today's increasingly interconnected global arena of higher education. Indeed, a survey of the journal's past issues reveals a broad cross-section of interests, questions, and studies concerning the multifaceted and interlocking dimensions of life inside and outside of the

classroom. Consider, for example, the following list of sample JRPCT articles recently published by contributors from diverse college and university environments:

- “Adapt and Change: Stories of Moving from Face to Face Teaching to Online Teaching”
- “Analysis of Student Communication Strategies in an Undergraduate, Cross-Disciplinary, Collaborative Course”
- “Extending the Walls of Our Classrooms with Online Informal Learning Environments”
- “Intentional Pedagogy”
- “Grieving the Death of the Lecture”
- “Memory and Study Abroad: What Sticks?”
- “The Merits of Adding Field Trips to College Courses”
- “Slicing and Dicing: Using Video Editing Software to Teach Film”
- “Student Learning Assistants and Giving Up ‘Professor Power’”
- “Willingness to Innovate”

As the foregoing evocative titles suggest, scholar-teachers in different environments and even different parts of the world face common concerns about how to increase their effectiveness and how to create successful and meaningful academic experiences for their students. To this end, the JRPCT provides a singular forum for University of Cincinnati faculty as well as colleagues in the forefront of innovative teaching elsewhere, including (most recently) Athabasca University, Bradley University, Catawba College, Eastern Mennonite University, Illinois State University, University of Alaska, St. John’s College, Kaplan International College, Kent State University, Kenya Institute of Curriculum

Development (Nairobi, Kenya), Monash University (Melbourne, Australia), Park University, Providence College, RMIT University (Melbourne, Australia), Sultan Qaboos University (Muscat, Oman), St. Cloud State University, Swinburne University of Technology (Melbourne, Australia), Tarleton State University, Tennessee Technological University, University of Arizona, University of Calgary, University of Illinois-Chicago, University of Reading, University of South Alabama, University of Tasmania (Hobart, Australia), University of Toronto, University of Toronto-Mississauga, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, and Western Michigan University.

At the University of Cincinnati, I encounter students from all walks of life including many who are the first members of their family to attend college. Among the biggest challenges I face as a teacher are (a) supporting students whose academic skills are weak, (b) sustaining a vigorous classroom environment despite the uneven level of the class as a whole, and (c) finding ways to engage “bored” students enrolled in a history class only because it satisfies a General Education requirement. There is no silver bullet for these complex situations. Sometimes the solutions are structural (coordinating active learning in small teams and groups, providing opportunities for student independence and choice, creating extra-classroom mechanisms to support student learning); other times, it is a matter of personal chemistry (building teacher-student relationships that focus on individual needs). Often, the answer lies in a combination of efforts. Time and again, when faced with puzzling classroom dynamics, I have found the JRPCT to be a wellspring of generative and productive ideas, models, and strategies that help me to rethink and recalibrate my own teaching practice.

The philosopher John Dewey famously described the academy as an intellectual, ethical, and moral investment in reason, modernity, and the future of humanity.<sup>2</sup> As scholars and teachers, we strive to make our classrooms incubators for personal growth, where intellectual engagement and creative possibility is affirmed, nurtured, and supported. We further seek to build up colleges and universities as living laboratories that foster democratic values and open doors to advancement and opportunity for all our students. The JRPCT represents the best of the University of Cincinnati – world-class intellectual capital, a deep commitment to innovative pathways of learning, and a capacious communal sensibility – and we are proud to engage colleagues worldwide about the scholarship of teaching and learning. It is a privilege to offer this word of greeting to readers at home and abroad. We invite you to join the conversation about how together we can ensure the vitality and impact of higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> James J. Carpenter, “‘The Development of a More Intelligent Citizenship’: John Dewey and the Social Studies,” *Education and Culture* 22, no. 2 (2006): 31-42.