

# Helping Students Learn through Meaningful Feedback and Well Designed Assignments

CETL Workshop

2/5/19

Brian Smentkowski and Doug Habib

# Assumptions

- We want our students to learn and to thrive
- Our teaching is important to this effort
- Feedback is an important part of teaching *and learning*.
- It allows us:
  - To exchange error for truth,
  - To see where and why mistakes were made and how to correct them (and the thought processes that caused them),
  - To foster intellectual and academic growth,
  - To help our students succeed and progress in class, and in the curriculum, AND
  - It establishes trust with our students and meets a reasonable expectation of us.

# Actions

- Let's think about all of this as a loop:
- Good assignments give our students an opportunity to “show what they know”.
- Feedback enhances their understanding of their knowledge –what they know, what they don't, and what to do about it -- so that they can advance confidently and competently.
- We need to give students an opportunity to do something with our feedback.
  - Slapping a letter on a paper doesn't help very much, but neither do comments that do not provide a roadmap to, or opportunity for, improvement. *This is how students learn.*

# Implications

- This means that we have to take into consideration WHAT we do, WHEN we do it, and HOW (efficiently and effectively).
- A well-crafted syllabus is a roadmap to success in the class.
  - Clearly identify what's expected, when, and why.
  - Weave assignments into the class throughout the semester.
  - Even if you have one end-of-semester major project, you can build in check-points to help them stay/get on track.
- Well-designed assignments are clear and concise and leave little room for confusion, compression, or neglect. This is called “[transparency](#)”, and CETL has expertise that can help you design good, transparent assignments that increase the likelihood of student success AND grading efficiency.

# When?

- Well designed assignments are mindful of time
- This pertains not only to realistic assignment deadlines –enough time for students to successfully complete work– but to deadlines that are important to students: *early warning grade reporting periods and midterm grade reporting*.
- When we talk about the timely reporting of grades, this assumes we have something to base it on.
- It also assumes that we build in time for feedback –to grade, to give feedback, to give the students an opportunity to respond to feedback.

# How? Here are some strategies

- [CATS: Classroom Assessment Techniques](#)—easy, often ungraded activities to keep your students engaged and allow you to assess their knowledge, performance, progress, understanding.
- [LATS: Learning Assessment Techniques](#)—a bit more formal, often graded, still pretty easy to integrate early and often.
- [Jose Bowens' Cognitive Wrappers Template](#)—use this! Adapt key parts of it to your class to help your students understand and regulate their own learning AND build feedback into the learning/graded experience!
- We always focus on “the grade” as the last word.
  - Yes, I know: “grades are not negotiable”, but if you build in opportunities for students to do something WITH your feedback—as part of their grade—then you are helping them learn.

# Reminders

- Set reasonable expectations:
  - Just as you have reasonable expectations of when they should turn in their work and the quality of it, they have reasonable expectations of when you will have it graded and the quality of your feedback.
    - So, what does good feedback look like, and how can we give it?
- Use BbLearn
  - Recall that it is a learning management system, and CETL has experts who can help you understand all of its tools and how to use it as a great learning environment.
    - Key in on
      - A good syllabus
      - Good assignments
      - Effective use of announcements
      - Rubrics
      - Grade Center