

Wednesday, May 20
12 pm
Copley Formal Lounge

LUNCH: Celebrating Georgetown's Strong Teaching Tradition

Featured Award Winners:

Timothy Wickham-Crowley (Sociology)
Eric Langenbacher (SFS)
Frank Ambrosio (Philosophy)

Timothy Wickham-Crowley: It is very important to “listen with serious intent.” There is something valuable in all student comments and we must be enthusiastic about the joint journey we are on with our students. Your enthusiasm will be contagious.

Advice from Wickham-Crowley:

- 10-15 page syllabus
- Select readings “with a scalpel, not a bulldozer”
- Select short readings from a variety of perspectives
- In exam-driven courses, take the time to think through the questions so that students are asked to apply concepts / theories, or synthesize a variety of ideas, rather than regurgitate course material
- In other languages, “to be acquainted with” is actually a different verb than “to know”; information is NOT the same as knowledge and students need knowledge in order to filter information

Eric Langenbacher: “Teaching is like acting – they are both performative professions.”

Advice from Langenbacher:

- Choose anecdotes that engage students and illuminate your message
- Teaching a seminar is very different from teaching a lecture course. In a seminar, you can take student interest for granted. Lecture courses require more time to teach well.
- “Be as critical of yourself and your lecture as you would be when grading a student paper.”
- If a lecture didn't go well, assess why: is the material stale in your own mind? If the answer is yes, consider changing the readings or getting rid of the topic.
- Devote a small part of in-class time to “hot topics,” but remember to keep them up-to-date. For example, have students nominate and vote on current topics, and use the vote counting process to teach electoral systems in comparative politics class.
- Don't be afraid to bring in guest speakers! It is much more difficult to try to become an expert overnight on an area that's not your specialty

On Technology:

- Blackboard is great for disseminating readings.
- Using blackboard outside of class means less time is spent in class on communicating straightforward information
- Be wary of the distractions laptops can pose in a large class
- Often it will be beneficial to spend class time instructing students on how to assess the quality of online sources

Frank Ambrosio: The basic fact of life is that we must do something different from time to time for a whole variety of reasons.

I grew up in NYC, and I saw the change in Yankee stadium from the house that Ruth built to the house that George Steinbrenner built poses a problem – because it is a MYSTERY, and “I mean that seriously.”

Anything, that seems to me, that is ultimately worth people’s time and attention, anything that ultimately serves as the focus of a pedagogy, some attempt to engage with other people in a learning process, if it’s to be taken seriously, it has to be somehow or another envisioned or imagined against the horizon of mystery, because life is mysterious, isn’t it?

Usually this comes up in the very beginning of the basic introductory philosophy course that I teach. We have to agree on something. I’m going to talk to you, I say to the students, throughout this whole semester, as if life were mysterious. Now, if that statement is true, I cannot present it to you as a truth, can I? No I cannot. So my concern is not whether or not you agree with that proposition life is mysterious, but the way that it makes everything that happens in life a question rather than an answer. Once we’ve established that as our common ground, then we can proceed to participate in a question, participate in a question that is relevant, and participate in a question that is relevant in a way that is responsible.

Mystery, relevance, responsibility: Mystery is something that is larger than we are as human beings. It’s the whole of which we are a part. Whatever you think it is to be human, it’s obvious that we are part of something much larger. And because we are only a part of it we can never get our arms around it. So we have a very strange kind of relationship to it. It’s a relationship that must be participatory. We are part, we are nothing apart from it. Any possibilities we have we have by engagement with it, and yet, we don’t know what we are doing. We don’t know what it is we are a part of. That means that those things which will be most relevant to us will be those things that are most mysterious to us. The implication of that is that all of those things that are most important for us to learn, to grow into, all of those things which are most relevant for education, are going to be things, in the midst of which, we fundamentally know that we don’t know what we’re doing. *Education, it seems to me, intrinsically involves, learning how to get on in life, in the full and present knowledge that you don’t know what you’re doing.* And therefore you will constantly be changing and changing in response to dynamics which are ultimately mysterious. So get used to that. Get used to that, and get

used to taking responsibility. There is very little, it seems to me, that human beings can be really blamed for or held responsible for in life precisely because of the situation that we fundamentally don't know what we're doing. And you can't hold somebody responsible when they're in that situation. But, you can hold people responsible for knowing that they don't know what they're doing. And the more responsibility a person has, the more they should be held responsible for acting as if they understand that they don't know what they are doing. Because one of the extraordinary things that one learns as one moves through life is that there's an awful lot that you can understand, that you can specify, that you can clarify and that you can use constructively from knowing that you don't know what you're doing. A whole set of procedures follow upon that. So it seems to me that a University education, in many ways the whole educational process of becoming human, which is what education ultimately, is, should be based on the premise that one needs to make oneself progressively more responsible for knowing that we don't know what we're doing individually, collectively as an institution, and even more significantly, as a university.

Our goal as we move forward is trying to do whatever we can knowing full well that we don't know what we're doing, but trying to do whatever we can, making sure that students leave here with the clear and present knowledge that they are responsible for the world in which we all live together. And that their education has no purpose, ultimately, unless it is to make them more capable of accepting that responsibility and executing it in some significant way.